



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on August 16, 2018

## Analyst: Refugees Go on Welfare, Cost More Than They Contribute

The Center for Immigration Studies [has stepped forward](#) with another analysis to prove what everyone intuitively knows: Importing largely English-illiterate foreigners with no job skills likely means they will land on the welfare rolls.

While pro-refugee lobbyists and some studies claim that refugees pay more in taxes than they consume in government subsidies, CIS's Jason Richwine crunched the government's numbers and found exactly the opposite.



So everything you hear about the mighty economic horsepower of refugees is, in a word, hooley.

### The Data

"Advocates for expanding the number of refugees," [Richwine wrote](#), "have lately portrayed their position as a win-win — not only is refugee resettlement a moral imperative, it is also in our nation's economic self-interest!"

Those claims are in two reports. One from the "Department of Health and Human Services [claim] that refugees pay more in taxes than they receive in services," while "a less comprehensive NBER working paper came to the same conclusion last summer." NBER is the National Bureau of Economic Research.

But Richwine mined [the 2016 data](#) from the Office of Refugee Resettlement about recent refugees, meaning those who arrived between 2011 and 2015. The numbers on educational achievements and welfare use, Richwine reported, were "sobering" and prove the opposite of what refugee advocates want you to believe: Refugees are a net drag on taxpayers because most are from the Third World. As he noted, "Both papers neglect substantial costs that invalidate their conclusions.... [B]oth implicitly assume that today's refugees are just like yesterday's. In the 20th century, the United States took in several groups of higher-skill refugees — for example, Cubans after Castro's takeover, South Vietnamese after the fall of Saigon, Soviet dissidents in the 1980s, Eastern Europeans in the 1990s, and so on. Today, refugees come mainly from less developed parts of the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia."

### No Book Learnin'

"Refugees age 25 or older averaged 8.7 years of education prior to arrival in the United States," and "29 percent of refugees age 25 or older listed their prior educational attainment as 'none,'" Richwine wrote. According to Richwine:

- About half of refugees age or 25 older did not have a high school diploma upon arrival.
- Just 16 percent of refugees age 18 and older were currently pursuing a degree of any kind, with the most commonly sought degree being high school equivalency.



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- Recent refugees in 1995 were more educated than recent refugees today, especially relative to natives. For example, a five percentage-point gap in the college graduation rate for refugees vs. natives in 1995 grew to a 21 percentage-point gap in 2015.

Only eight percent had a college degree.

As for speaking English, those numbers aren't much better, Richwine reported: "Among refugees age 18 or older who have lived in the United States between 4.5 and 6.5 years, 53 percent speak English 'not well' or 'not at all', based on self-assessments." He continued: "According to rough estimates generated by applying the ORR's self-assessments to English literacy data, more than half of refugees after five years are still 'below basic,' which is sometimes described as functional illiteracy."

And those figures on English, again, are *self-assessments*. That's how refugees evaluated their ability to learn and speak English.

## Welfare

So the United States is importing — largely at the behest of leftist church groups [collecting huge sums of money from the government](#) — thousands of people who are, in a word, illiterate. Understandably, they immediately join the welfare rolls, Richwine reported:

- 27 percent of refugee households received cash welfare of some kind, most often Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- 56 percent of refugee households received food stamps.
- 34 percent of refugees age 18 or older reported no health coverage. Among those with coverage, about half were on Medicaid or Refugee Medical Assistance.

Richwine did unearth at least one positive note: About 60 percent of refugees 16 to 64 years old had jobs, and employed refugees older than 18 earned about \$12 an hour.

The bottom line is, Richwine demolished the claim that illiterate, uneducated, non-English speaking refugees from the Third World pay more in taxes than they consume in welfare subsidies: "Under the U.S. government's progressive taxation and spending structure, high-earning Americans tend to receive less in public benefits and services than they pay in taxes, while lower earners receive benefits that exceed the taxes they contribute. Given their low education levels and high rates of welfare use, today's refugees cannot be net fiscal contributors by any plausible analysis."





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