



# Kurdish Resettlement and Kurdish Communities in the United States

## ABSTRACT

Kurdish people have sought refuge in the United States since 1997 after severe repression under the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. In the two decades that have followed, Kurdish communities have popped up in large places such as Nashville, Tennessee and Detroit Michigan, and small places such as Harrisonburg Virginia, for varying reasons. While US forces continue to work in concert with Kurdish Peshmerga forces, the President Trump-initiated travel ban of 2018 has reduced Kurdish immigration to the US from a small but steady flow to a trickle.

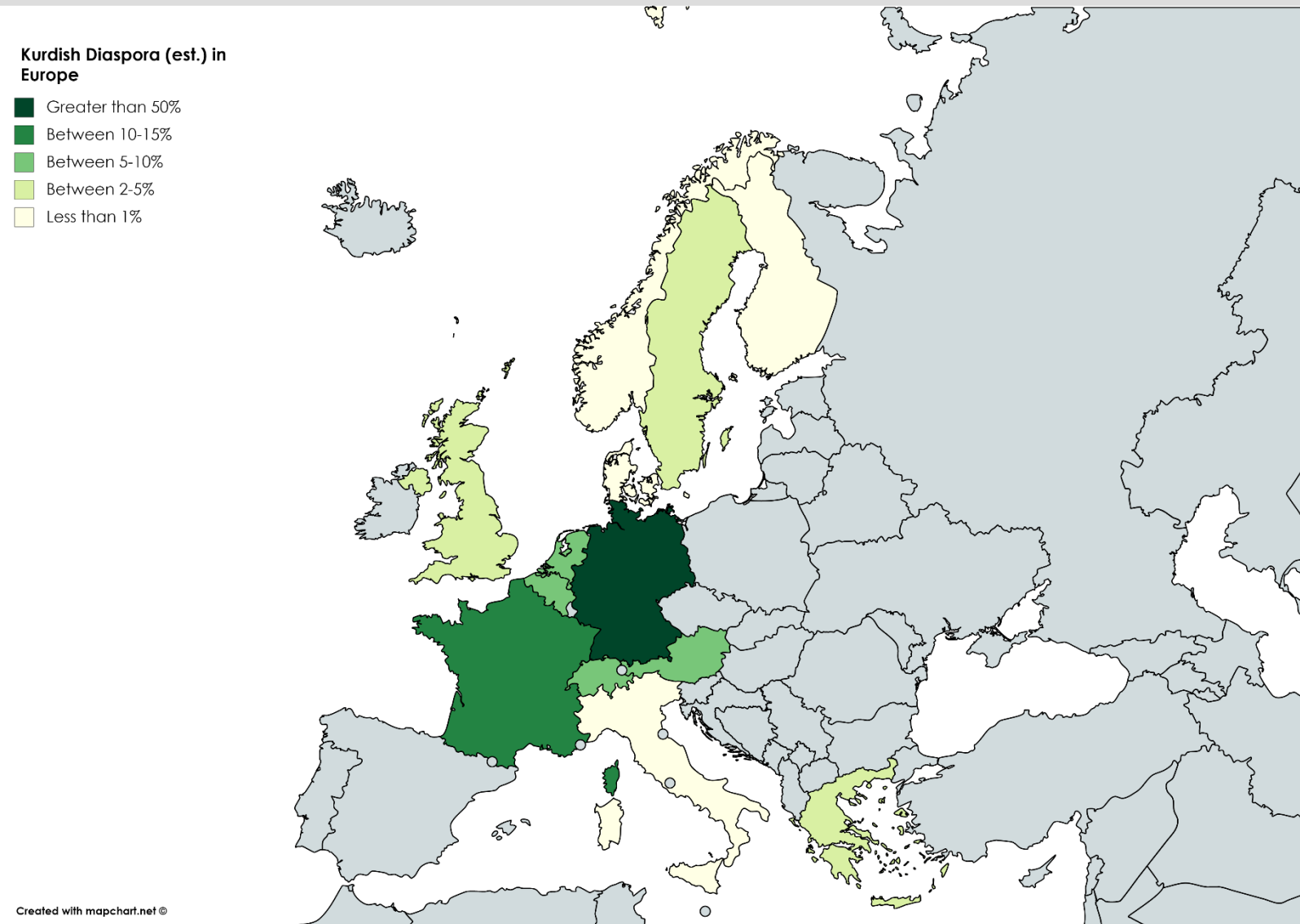
## Defining Kurdistan



The Kurdish people are spread over a vast territory recognized within the nation as Kurdistan. While the majority of Kurds live primarily in four states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, smaller numbers live in contemporary Armenia and Azerbaijan. In spite of the broad cultural diffusion, the locus has remained the city of Erbil in Northern Iraq.

## Settlement of Kurdish outside of Kurdistan

Permanent settlement is most prominent in Europe with an estimated 700,000 – 800,000 living in Germany (Candan and Hunger, 2008) 120,000 in France, sizable populations in The Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium and Austria, and smaller populations in other European countries (www.thekurdishproject.org).



## CONTACT

Dr. Johnathan Walker  
James Madison University  
IDLS Program  
MSC 1105  
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807  
walkerjx@jmu.edu/540-568-1742

## Dr. Johnathan Walker, James Madison University

### Resettlement in the USA: The Role of VOLAGS

The Office of Refugee Resettlement, operating under the US Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, identifies Voluntary Resettlement Agencies (VOLAGS) that facilitate resettlement of refugees entering the USA:

- Church World Service (CWS)
- Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)
- Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
- World Relief Corporation (WR)

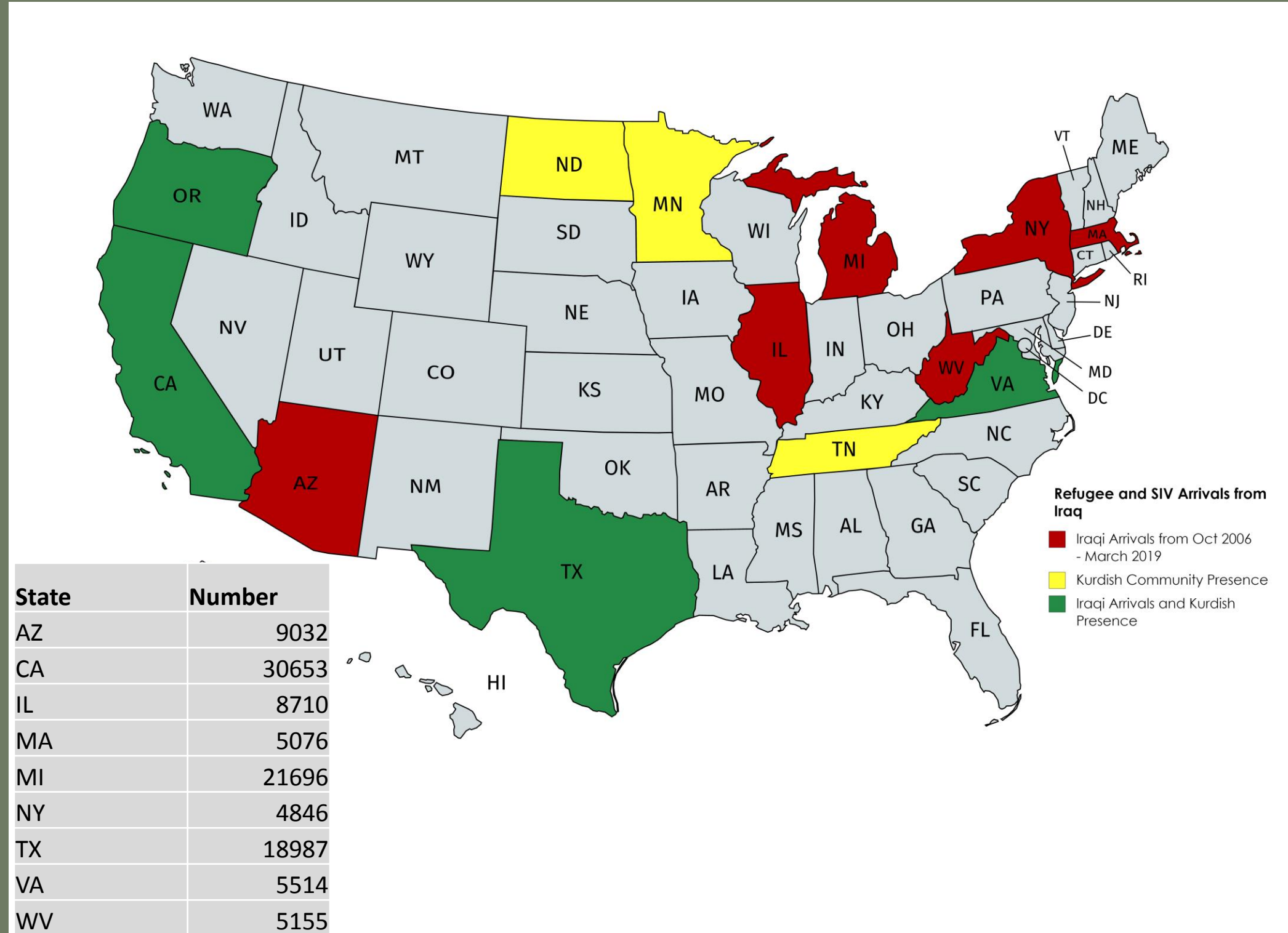
These organizations employ state and local affiliates to carry out the logistics of resettlement including such services as housing, translation, cash, medical assistance, and employment assistance.

Examples include: Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, Catholic Charities of Tennessee, and the Refugee Resettlement Coalition of Lane Co. Oregon.

### Data Collection and Challenges

Kurdish identification within the data is difficult. U.S. Dept. of State data for Kurds are consolidated within country data for Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, with most represented by Iraq.

- Data are compiled as Refugee and SIV (Special Immigration Visas) the later having worked for the US government abroad in some capacity.
- Few newspaper and news media reports on Kurdish communities
- Effective identification of Kurdish communities via Facebook affinity organizations (however, community size is difficult to grasp from “likes” and “followers”).
- YouTube video postings from 2019 Newroz (Kurdish New Year) celebrations indicate active communities.



Kurds attending annual International Day celebration, Harrisonburg, Virginia



Newroz and Kurdish New Year (Year 2719) celebration for Harrisonburg area Kurdish community: March 24, 2019.



### United States Kurdish Communities (est. ~40,000)

CALIFORNIA: California Kurdish Community Center (San Francisco); Kurdish Community of Southern California (Irvine), Kurdish Community Center of California (San Diego: ~3-5,000 pop.); Second Families (El Cajon).

MINNESOTA/NORTH DAKOTA: ~1,000 pop. Kurdish Community of America (Moorhead/Fargo)

OREGON: Kurdish Human Rights Watch (Portland), Lane Co./Eugene  
TENNESSEE: ~15,000 pop. The Tennessee Kurdish Community Council (Nashville):

TEXAS: ~4,000 pop. Texas Kurdish Community (Dallas-Arlington); Kurdish American Foundation of Houston.

VIRGINIA: Washington Metro Area Kurdish American Community (NoVa); Harrisonburg Kurdish Community: ~500 pop. (Harrisonburg).

### Virginia Refugee Data

Country	Resettlement Area	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019	Grand Total
Afghanistan		156	1029	890	1656	2797	1158	169	7855
Brutan		217	150	109	98	51	35		660
Burundi		2	10	44	10		5		71
China		8	4	6	3	2			23
Colombia		35	14	26	27	5	2		109
Cuba		91	65	52	105	183	28		524
Democratic Republic of Congo		68	83	226	323	133	228	72	1133
Egypt		27	22	14	10	18	5		96
El Salvador		5	2	4	36	147	71	3	268
Eritrea		79	62	60	63	59	27	2	352
Ethiopia		174	109	108	71	89	35	1	587
Iran		183	84	115	78	79	8		467
Iraq		626	680	511	433	294	37	6	2587
Israel		4	7						11
Ivory Coast		5	3	1	1				10
Jordan		7	2			13			24
Lebanon		1		2	13				16
Malaysia		6	2		3				11
Myanmar		139	51	74	26	9	9	2	310
Nepal		12	7	4	26	8	7		64
Other		31	27	17	31	32	16		154
Pakistan		23	14	15	66	43	28	10	199
Russia		8	1	1	11	11	4		36
Rwanda		4	7	2	16	7	2	7	45
Somalia		58	46	58	45	35	3		245
Sudan		80	83	43	26	29	5		266
Syria		5	22	17	187	93	6	2	332
Ukraine		3	3	19		31	4	1	58
Zimbabwe		1	12		3		1		17
Kenya			2		15	20	1		38
Turkey					10	17	4		31

### REFERENCES

1. Candan, M., and Hunger, U., 2008, "Nation Building Online: A Case Study of Kurdish Migrants in Germany," *German Policy Studies*, 4(4): 125-153.
2. Map: Areas with a Kurdish majority from Smith, Lee, "Deciphering confusion about the Kurds," *The Washington Times*, January 23, 2019.
3. Refugee and SIV arrivals from Iraq <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2000>
4. Fitzgerald, John, "In Moorhead, A Kurdish Community Thrives," *MinnPost*, October 26, 2018.
5. Sawyer, Ariana Maia, "Who are the Kurds and why are they in Nashville?," *The Tennessean*, June 22, 2017.
6. Morrissey, Kate, "Kurdish diaspora prepared to vote on independence," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 15, 2017.
7. Virginia Refugee Data, <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/>