

Somali Refugees

New Somali refugees were originally resettled in other states in the US before they moved to Minnesota. The states that they initially resided in include Texas, Kentucky, Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, California, and Idaho. One wonders why these families chose to migrate to Minnesota.

The Multilingual Department spoke to many Somali families, who stated our schools should expect the number of new refugees to accelerate dramatically in coming months as a result of inter-state immigration. As of 2012, **the total number of primary refugees in Minnesota is 2264; the largest group is Somalis, who comprise 34% of the primary refugees, according to MDH.**

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I. History

As a result of drought, conflict, and famine, Somalis became the second-largest source of refugees in the world in 2012. Along with Afghans and Palestinians, Somali refugees have continued to experience one of the worst humanitarian crises on the planet for more than

two decades. As of 2012, approximately 1.3 million Somali people are displaced internally and more than one million refugees live in neighboring countries – including Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen.

II. Who is a refugee?

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

A refugee is “a person who has fled his/her country of nationality (or habitual residence) and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a “well-founded” fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group”

Difference between Refugees and Immigrants:

Refugees: don't choose to leave their country but, they are forced to flee their home countries because of persecution, war, or violence. They cannot return unless the situation that forced them to leave improves.

Immigrants: Someone who relocates in a new country voluntarily for two reasons; one they are joining family members who already live in the new country. Two they are “economic immigrants” seeking work and a better life for themselves and their family.

III. Refugee Camps

Dadaab in Northern Kenya is the world's largest refugee camp, and home to an estimated population of 500,000 refugees. This refugee camp was opened in Kenya near the border of Somalia in 1991, as a consequence of the civil war in Somalia. There is also another refugee camp in Kenya called **Kakuma** which hosts approximately 101,000 people.

The **Kebribeyah** refugee camp in Ethiopia was established in 1991 during the civil war in Somalia. New arrivals to Minnesota mainly came from this camp. The newly arrived students to Minneapolis Public Schools have no memories of Somalia, because they were either born in the refugee camp or they arrived there as very young children.¹

IV. Refugee families' experiences

Refugee families may have experience with the one or more of the following list:

- Civil war
- Family member or relative loss
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Interrupted/no previous formal schooling

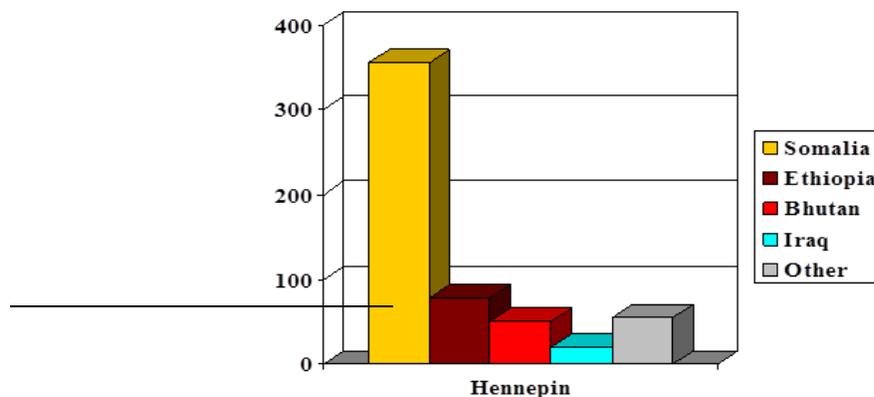
Refugee students may deal with:

- Culture shock
- Emotional Issues and distress
- Psychological distress
- Behavioral problems
- Confusion
- Trauma
- Drawbacks
- Social isolation/alienation and discrimination

V. New Refugees

The Somali refugees are the largest group of secondary refugees in the state of Minnesota. The new refugees were originally resettled in other states in the US before they moved to Minnesota. The states that they initially resided include Texas, Kentucky, Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, California, and Idaho.

This graph shows number of arrivals in Hennepin County in 2012. As you can see, Hennepin has the largest number of the new arrivals. This is the last update date as of November 2013 according to Refugee Health Program, Minnesota Department of Health.²

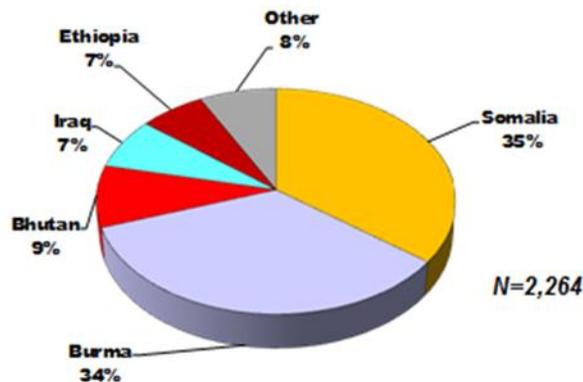


One wonders why these families chose to migrate to Hennepin County, especially Minneapolis. The answer is simply that Minnesota is home to the United States' largest population of Somali residents. Therefore, the newcomers want to join those who came here before them for support and security. Minneapolis has become the de facto "capital" of Somalis in North America, with a thriving Somali community, and a population estimated at tens of thousands.

Minneapolis Public Schools has welcomed newcomer students to their schools each month, and most of these students have been in the country for one year or less. The newly arrived refugees – most of whom are women and children stay at Mary's Place, a temporary shelter to homeless women and their children. According to the families, our schools should expect the number of new refugees to accelerate dramatically in coming months. As of 2012, the total number of primary refugees in Minnesota is 2264; the largest group is Somalis, who comprise 34% of the primary refugees, according to MDH.

This chart shows the countries of origin of primary refugee arrivals to Minnesota during 2012.

Primary Refugee Arrivals, Minnesota 2012



Other includes Belarus, Cameroon, China, DR Congo, Cuba, Eritrea, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iran, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Laos/Hmong, Liberia, Mexico, Moldova, Nepal, Russia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Ukraine

Refugee Health Program, Minnesota Department of Health

VI. Values

Somalis value independence, justice, friendship and family. Somalis are extremely hospitable and they are always willing and eager to share meals because it is an important Somali custom. Somali families always share resources through community networks.

Family is deeply valued in Somali culture. Somali family roles may have changed over the years because of the new adopted countries and circumstances that they are dealing with. Traditionally, raising children is the mother's job and the father's job is to work outside of home and provide for the family.

VII. Parent Involvement in Children's Education

Somali parents may believe that teachers should teach children in school. Parents get involved in their children's school when an issue arises. Somalis tend to be vocal and always advocate for their children. Somali mothers tend to be more involved with their children as they are the primary caregivers. Parents always expect their children to obey them and adhere to traditions. Religion and culture may restrict some physical contact between members of the opposite sex (e. g. handshake, hugs, and casual touch). Somali youth who are raised and educated in the US tend to be more westernized compared to the older generation which then causes tensions and disagreements.

VIII. School Communication

From a cultural point of view, Somalis have a strong sense of kinship, and relationships always matter to them. However, they believe that any relationship should be two-way. The most effective way to reach out to families is a face to face meeting, where the teacher personally communicates with the parents, and discusses the child education and ways of improvements. Families are appreciative when teachers make an effort to include them in their child's education and it makes them feel valued and respected. Education is regarded highly in the Somali culture.

In the Somali culture, teachers are also seen an important factor of children lives and can even take up the same responsibility as parent. This means the teachers has the right to scold and discipline the child if he or she is acting out in school and not focusing on their education. It is understandable that parent involvement in children's education may have a different meaning for different cultures. For Somalis, informal communication and conversation may strengthen the relationship between teachers and Somali parents. Communication is highly valued as Somalis have a strong oral tradition. It is important to see others' expressions and different ways of communication. "It is not what you say; it's how you say it." This statement represents how Somali culture tends to regard communication.

IX. Tips: Things to remember

- ❖ **Language barrier:** families may not be able to express themselves and communicate so they may feel powerless and disadvantaged. Don't talk to parents as children even if they don't speak English because it's rude and disrespectful. Please use Language Line in the district if you don't have someone who speaks the language at the building.
- ❖ **Watch your body language:** Families may misunderstand your nonverbal behavior for something that you don't mean. It is important to see others' expressions and different ways of communicating.
- ❖ **Traditionally speaking,** no birthday celebration or party exists in the Somali culture. Only EID which is religious Celebration.
- ❖ Calling to people with your finger, Somalis consider that to be very rude and a disrespectful way of communicating. Please wave your hand or approach the person if you want to call.
- ❖ Nodding head is another of saying "YES" or I got it.
- ❖ Sharing a meal is showing of respect and it is part of the culture.

X. Teach newcomers about school rules and expectations

The purpose of these tips is to introduce our newly arrived students to school rules and expectations in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS). MPS recognizes that effective school discipline is critical to academic success and requires both high standards of behavior and a culture of acceptance as students are learning to meet them.

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) Multilingual Department.

Dress Code	School Bus Rules	Lunchroom Rules	Classroom Rules	Hallway Rules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress at school should be comfortable and appropriate • Clothing should be appropriate for the age and gender of the child • Children should wear suitable outer clothing when it is rainy or cold • Students have outside recess daily when weather permits • Some schools have a designated uniform, and some do not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay out of the “Danger Zones” outside the bus • Follow the driver’s instructions • Be on time • Always remain seated • Be respectful. No fighting, swearing or yelling • No eating or drinking • Do not damage the bus • Keep your head and arms inside the bus windows • No dangerous objects or pets • Windows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk in and out of the lunchroom • Keep food on the table or in your mouth • remain seated at all times • Chew and eat food politely • food may not be shared • Use nice words like "Please" and "Thank you" • Use a quiet voice • raise hand for help • Put your trash in the trash can when 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be quiet, unless it is your turn to speak • Have your eyes on the speaker • Speak clearly • Keep your hands and feet to yourself • Stay in your assigned place • follow directions of all adults in charge • Respect all classroom materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk in/out the halls • Stay to the right side when walking in the halls • No talking • Keep hands and feet to yourself • Keep the halls clean • Follow instructions and head directly to your destination.

	may not be open over halfway	finished <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line up quietly • Follow directions of all adults in charge 		
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XI. Festivities

Somalis celebrate two major religious holidays. The first one is Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the month of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting. Ramadan is the ninth month in the calendar of Islam. This is the month that Muslims believe their Holy Qur’an was first given to the prophet Muhammad.

The other festival, Id al-Adha, is the end of Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia which is undertaken by approximately 2 million Muslims annually. Another reason for the celebration is the willingness of the prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience to God.

Families in the USA may celebrate this festival for at least one day. The night before and the day after Eid al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, Muslims greet one another with congratulations saying “Eid Mubarak.” Many Muslims make a special effort to pray on these days. People wear the best clothes they have and visit family members and friends. Kids may receive a small amount of money from adults that they know, and some families exchange gifts with each other.

References:

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<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/refugee/stats/>

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