



MEMORANDUM

April 14, 2015

To: Senate Judiciary Committee, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED], Specialist in Immigration Policy, [REDACTED]

Subject: Refugee Benefit Usage

This memorandum responds to your request for specific information related to refugee benefit usage. Specifically you requested government data on refugee usage of the following benefits:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)¹ and other nutrition support programs;
- Housing assistance;²
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI);³
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);⁴ and
- Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and other public health coverage.⁵

¹ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly called the Food Stamp Program, is designed primarily to increase the food purchasing power of eligible low-income households to help them buy a nutritionally adequate low-cost diet. CRS Report R42505, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits*, by Randy Alison Aussenberg.

² Today's federal housing assistance programs fall into three main categories: rental housing assistance, assistance to state and local governments, and assistance for homeowners. Most of these programs are administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Current housing assistance programs include Section 8 vouchers and project-based rental assistance, public housing, housing for the elderly (Section 202), housing for persons with disabilities (Section 811), rural rental assistance (the United States Department of Agriculture's Section 521 program), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Block Grants, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), homeless assistance programs, Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans' Administration mortgage insurance, and the mortgage interest deduction in the tax code. CRS Report RL34591, *Overview of Federal Housing Assistance Programs and Policy*, by Maggie McCarty, Libby Perl, and Katie Jones.

³ The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, enacted in 1974, is a needs-based program that provides cash benefits designed to ensure a minimum income to aged, blind, or disabled persons with limited income and assets. CRS Report 94-486, *Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*, by William R. Morton.

⁴ The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant provides grants to states, Indian tribes, and territories for a wide range of benefits, services, and activities that address economic and social disadvantage for families with children. CRS Report R40946, *The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant: An Overview*, by Gene Falk.

⁵ Medicaid is a means-tested entitlement program that finances the delivery of primary and acute medical services as well as long-term services. The State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is a means-tested program that provides health (continued...)

Given the interest in noncitizen eligibility for benefits, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) is receiving similar requests for background and analysis on this topic. While the discussion and analysis below are tailored to your specific request, portions of it are taken from and may be used in CRS products available to other Members of Congress.⁶

Significant Data Limitations

After considerable research, CRS was unable to locate program statistics delineating refugee usage of housing assistance, TANF, Medicaid, or CHIP.

The Social Security Actuary's Office provided CRS with data on SSI, but the data do not differentiate between refugees, asylees, trafficking victims, and certain other humanitarian migrants. Likewise, SNAP administrative enrollment data on refugees includes asylees and "deportees."⁷

SNAP

In an average month in fiscal year 2013, SNAP provided benefits to 47.1 million people. In FY2013, approximately 353,000 refugees received SNAP benefits, comprising 0.7% of all SNAP recipients.⁸ (See discussion of "Significant Data Limitations" for caveats about these data.)

SSI

Of the 8.3 million federally-administered SSI recipients in current-payment status as of December 2014, 55,000 were refugees, asylees, and other related groups, comprising approximately 0.7% of the total SSI recipients in current-pay.⁹ (See discussion of "Significant Data Limitations" for caveats about these data.)

Statistics from the ORR Survey

The statistics shown in **Table 1** are from the ORR survey of refugees within five years of arrival. For the reasons discussed previously (see "Significant Data Limitations"), the data most likely are not representative of the entire refugee population residing in the United States.

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coverage to targeted low-income children and pregnant women in families that have annual income above Medicaid eligibility levels but have no health insurance. CRS Report R43357, *Medicaid: An Overview*, coordinated by Alison Mitchell; and CRS Report R43627, *State Children's Health Insurance Program: An Overview*, by Evelyne P. Baumrucker and Alison Mitchell.

⁶ See CRS Report R43561, *Treatment of Noncitizens Under the Affordable Care Act*, by Alison Siskin and Erika K. Lunder, and CRS Report R40772, *Noncitizen Health Insurance Coverage and Use of Select Safety-Net Providers*, by Alison Siskin.

⁷ "Deportees" is not an immigration category and it is not defined in the SNAP documentation.

⁸ Kelsey Farson Gray, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2013*, Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Report No. SNAP-14-CHAR, December 2014, p. 22.

⁹ Social Security Administration, Memorandum to Stephen C. Goss, Chief Actuary from Amir Levy, Actuary, *Number of Refugees, Asylees, and Related Groups with Time-Limited SSI Payments as a Percentage of Federally-Administered SSI Recipients in Current-Payment Status as of December 2014—INFORMATION*, April 2, 2015.

Table I. Insurance Coverage and Public Benefit Usage as a Proportion of All Refugees Who Arrived within the Past 5 Years by Survey Year

Year of Survey	Medical Coverage Through Employer	Medicaid or Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)	No Medical Coverage In Past 12 Months	Any Type of Cash Assistance	SNAP	Public Housing
2013	10.70%	56.0%	20.2%	47.1%	74.2%	22.8%
2012	9.2%	60.5%	22.1%	46.5%	73.3%	24.0%
2011	8.3%	48.4%	32.9%	37.8%	61.0%	24.2%
2010	10.3%	48.6%	29.8%	26.4%	62.6%	12.0%
2009	9.2%	57.7%	19.2%	28.3%	70.2%	31.6%
2008	20.2%	44.2%	22.9%	28.8%	50.4%	24.4%

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY2013*, Washington, DC, pp. 99-103.