



Quick Facts About Arab Americans

Origins

Arab Americans constitute an ethnicity made up of several waves of immigrants from the Arabic-speaking countries of southwestern Asia and North Africa that have been settling in the United States since the 1880s. More than 80% are U.S. citizens. Descendants of earlier immigrants and more recent immigrants work in all sectors of society and are leaders in many professions and organizations. As a community, Arab Americans have a strong commitment to family, economic and educational achievements, and making contributions to all aspects of American life. Their Arab heritage reflects a culture that is thousands of years old and includes 22 Arab countries as diverse as Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia and Palestine.

Population

At least 1.7 million* Americans are of Arab descent. Arab Americans live in all 50 states, but two thirds reside in 10 states; one third of the total live in California, New York, and Michigan. About 94% live in metropolitan areas. Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Northeastern NJ are the top six metro areas of Arab American concentration.

Lebanese Americans constitute a greater part of the total number of Arab Americans residing in most states, except in Georgia, New Jersey, and Tennessee, where Egyptian Americans are the largest Arab group. Americans of Syrian descent make up the majority of Arab Americans in Rhode Island, while Arab Americans in Arizona are mostly Moroccan. The largest Palestinian population is in Illinois, and the Iraqi and Assyrian/Chaldean communities are concentrated in Illinois, Michigan, and California.

Education

Arab American adults with at least a high school diploma number 89%. 45% of Americans of Arab descent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 28% of Americans at large. 18% of Arab Americans have a post-graduate degree, which is nearly twice the American average of 10%. Of the school-age population, 12% are in preschool and kindergarten, 56% are in elementary or high school, and 32% are enrolled in college or undertaking graduate studies.

Occupation

Similar to the national average, about 60% of Arab American adults are in the labor force; with 5% unemployed. 73% of working Arab Americans are employed in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative fields. 14% of Americans of Arab descent are employed in service jobs compared to 17% for Americans overall. Most Arab Americans work in the private sector (88%), though 12% are government employees.

Income

Median income for Arab American households in 2008 was \$56,331 compared with \$51,369 for all households in the United States. Mean individual income is 27% higher than the national average of \$61,921. 13.7% of Arab Americans live below the poverty line, though the figure increases to over 28% for single mothers.

Statistical Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates (2007-2009) and AAI's research and surveys.

* The Census Bureau identifies only a portion of the Arab population through a question on "ancestry" on the census long form, causing an undercount by a factor of about 3. Reasons for the undercount include the placement of and limits of the ancestry question (as distinct from race and ethnicity); the effect of the sample methodology on small, unevenly distributed ethnic groups; high levels of out-marriage among the third and fourth generations; distrust/misunderstanding of government surveys among more recent immigrants, resulting in non-response by some; and the exclusion of certain sub-groups from Arabic speaking countries, such as the Somali and Sudanese, from the Arab category. It is estimated that the actual population, adjusting for underreporting, is around 5.1 million.