

# Archdiocese of Newark closer to resettling refugees

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NEWARK — The Archdiocese of Newark is closer to resettling its first refugees after being notified this week that it will receive five families in coming months from Syria, Afghanistan and Colombia.

“We are very excited and we have indicated that we are willing to accept them, so they may come in three months, five months, it’s kind of a waiting game,” said Maria Biancheri, senior grants specialist with the Catholic Charities organization of the archdiocese this week. “We are delighted.”

Ever since the archdiocese [announced late last year](#) that it would resettle refugees, donations of furniture, blankets, clothing, and food have poured in. The archdiocese had expected to resettle refugees in March, but Biancheri said since Catholic Charities just began their refugee resettlement program it had taken longer than expected to get assigned families. Biancheri got word this week from the United States Conference of Bishops of the pending arrivals.

“We were kind of at the bottom of the line to get some families,” she said. “We have been told that we could see 20 individuals between now and September, which would be great.”

The United States has admitted 40,671 refugees since October 2016, but there has been a drop in refugee admissions in recent months. Last month, 2,070 refugees were admitted into the country, a 54.8 percent decline from the 4,580 admitted in February, and a 69.4 percent drop from the 6,777 who entered the country in January, according to data on the State Department Refugee Processing Center. In October, the country welcomed 9,945 refugees.

The Rev. Seth Kaper-Dale, of the Reformed Church of Highland Park, who began to resettle refugees in New Jersey in January, attributed the decline to [President Trump’s immigration executive orders](#). One order he signed on January 27 called for the suspension of the refugee program for 120 days, reduced the maximum number of refugees that would be allowed to enter the country in fiscal year 2017 by more than half from 110,000 to 50,000, and banned people from entering the country from seven Muslim-majority countries. Days after he signed the executive order, protests and chaos erupted at airports, where travelers were being held and questioned.

The executive order, and a second revised one that followed, have been blocked from implementation by the courts, but it still has affected some of the work done by refugee resettlement agencies across the nation.

World Relief, a Christian humanitarian relief announced in February that as a result of the lower number of refugees being allowed to resettle in the country, it had to close five of its U.S. offices and layoff over 140 staff members. The Episcopal Migration Ministries announced earlier this month it planned to reduce the size of its 31-member affiliate network by six in 2018 because of the changing U.S. policy.

“Nationwide organizations are really in trouble, because numbers were super high in the first quarter, October, November and December,” said Kaper-Dale, a Green Party candidate for governor. “So when [Trump] did cut the numbers dramatically those who had received a lot of people the first quarter their numbers have slowed down, and that is painful for them.”

Kaper-Dale’s organization, Interfaith-RISE, a coalition of religious organizations and volunteers that work to resettle refugees, has received two Syrian families who arrived in January, and on Thursday night it received a family of six from Afghanistan.

He said he and community members are also preparing to welcome two families from The Republic of the Congo later this month, and they are on tap to welcome a family from Iraq and another from Syria sometime later, he said.

“We were only planning on resettling 50 people this year,” he said. “That is what we can handle.”

Since October, New Jersey has received 273 refugees, with more than half – 153 – from Syria. The others represent several nationalities: Afghanistan, China, Colombia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Eritrea, Honduras, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Russia, Sudan, Syria, and Uganda, and Ukraine.

At Catholic Charities in Newark, Biancheri said that volunteers from several churches have been preparing for the newcomers by donating money, and giving furniture, pots, pans, sheets and other items needed to set up an apartment for a family.

But she said finding housing has been a hurdle, since the refugees will have to sign their own lease.

“Refugees come in with no credit, and no work history,” she said. “We help them find a job, but it’s a risk so we are trying to find some landlords who are willing to work with us.”

She said in the meantime, volunteers are working on sprucing a guest house at a church in Essex County that will be used to temporarily house a family when they arrive. Other churches, she said, have also agreed to co-sponsor families.

On Friday afternoon, Kaper-Dale said the Afghani family was extremely happy to have arrived and were driven to their new home in Edison on Thursday night. Several community members, he said, have been assigned to help the family as they adjust to their new surroundings. “We have had an excellent time

recruiting Persian speakers, that would be Dari or Farsi speakers, and we also have gotten Arabic speakers and it has deepened our own relationships with our New Jersey neighbors who aren't newcomers but who represent multiple cultures," he said.

Kaper-Dale said it was ironic that his organization was welcoming a family from Afghanistan the same day that the United States military announced they had deployed a huge bomb in that country in its fight against the Islamic State there.

"We are trying to provide mothering nurturing community and our president is providing a mother of all bombs that shakes the ground," he said.

He said the Syrian couples who arrived in January and who are living in Highland Park recently received their New Jersey driver's licenses, and this week were able to get cars with the help of community members

"We are celebrating with a cup of coffee," he said Friday afternoon.

<http://www.northjersey.com/story/news/new-jersey/2017/04/15/archdiocese-newark-closer-resettling-refugees/100462902/>