



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 percent 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 3.5 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 New Jersey, where Egyptian Americans are the largest Arab group. Americans of Syrian decent make up the majority of Arab Americans in Rhode Island, while the largest Palestinian population is in Illinois, and the Iraqi and Assyrian/Chaldean communities are concentrated in Illinois, Michigan, and California.

Education

Arab Americans with at least a high school diploma number 85 percent. More than four out of ten Americans of Arab decent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 24% of Americans at large. Seventeen percent of Arab Americans have a post-graduate degree, which is nearly twice the American average (9%).

Of the school-age population, 13% are in pre-school, 58% are in elementary or high school, 22% are enrolled in college, and 7% are undertaking graduate studies.

Occupation

Similar to the national average, about 64 percent of Arab American adults are in the labor force; with 5 percent unemployed. Seventy three percent of working Arab Americans are employed in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative fields. Twelve percent of Americans of Arab decent are employed in service jobs compared to Americans overall (27%). Most Arab Americans work in the private sector (88 %), while 12 percent are government employees.

Income

Median income for Arab American households in 1999 was \$47,000 compared with \$42,000 for all households in the United States. Close to 30% of persons of Arab heritage have an annual household income of more than \$75,000, while 22% of all Americans reported the same level of income. Mean income measured at 8% higher than that national average of \$56,644.

Statistical Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 4 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.