

## Refugees from Sudan in Buffalo



*Please note that this is a rough-and-ready guide, and that these facts will not be applicable to all Sudanese refugees that you meet.*

### **Background: Refugees from Sudan and Darfur**

Sudan is ethnically diverse and physically vast. It has endured many years of violent civil war between the Arab/Muslim North and the Black/Christian South. In 2011, South Sudan gained its independence from the North so that two governments now rule; however, the conflict has continued. There are at least 10 different ethnic groups among the refugees from Sudan that have resettled in the United States.

*Darfur* is a geographical designation for the ethnically diverse region of West Sudan. It is home to more than 80 ethnic groups. Since 2003, when rebel groups began fighting the government, war has raged in Darfur, with government forces and militia enacting a campaign of ethnic cleansing against non-Arabs. This ongoing genocide has caused an estimated 400,000 deaths and displaced over 2.5 million people, causing a humanitarian crisis as these refugees were forced

into camps or across the border, with eastern Chad and northwest Kenya hosting the two largest concentrations of refugees.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2003, New York State has resettled 897 Sudanese refugees, with 164 in the 2013 fiscal year. Many of these refugees have settled in Buffalo.

## Cultural Attributes

### Religious Traditions and Belief Systems

The Islamic tradition prohibits the consumption of alcohol, although it is not uncommon for individuals to partake. Specific rituals for meat preparation are prescribed in the Koran. Many individuals prefer to purchase meat from halal butchers who understand and follow these traditions.<sup>2</sup> Ramadan, a month-long Islamic holiday, is a time for fasting from daybreak to sunset. It oftentimes involves prayer and meditation and is considered the holiest month of the Islamic year.

#### *Sudan*

About 70% of Sudanese are Sunni Muslim. About a quarter of these Sunni Muslims have indigenous beliefs as well. The remaining 30% is Christian. Though small, the Christian minority tends to be the most educated and the most represented in resettled groups in the US.

#### *Darfur*

The primary religion of the Darfuri is Islam. They do not follow *sharia* (the laws based on the Quran and implemented as a legal system in an Islamic state). Men and women are often segregated for prayers and festivities. Traditional animist beliefs are frequently incorporated.

### Social and Familial Values

#### *Sudan*

Marriage is typically viewed as a contract between families, though the final approval lies with the female's side. The groom's family is required to provide a dowry. Great emphasis is placed on women's ability to bear and raise children.

#### *Darfur*

Darfuri society is patriarchal, with strictly defined gender roles. There is little interaction between males and females. Males have the exclusive right to make key

#### **The Five Pillars of Islam**

Shahadah: profession of faith in God

Salah: prayer towards Makkah, Islam's holiest city

Zakat: almsgiving, service to God

Sawm: fasting during the holy month of Ramadan

Hajj: the pilgrimage to Makkah

Darfuri sometimes call extended family members "son," "daughter," "sister," or "brother." This may pose problems for processing and establishing legal relationships in the United States.

decisions regarding women and children. There are some female heads of household, but they are often widows or women previously in polygamous relationships. Polygamy is commonly practiced, with multiple wives considered a part of a single family.

Marriage for women is usually at 18 years old, and for men it is at 20. It is shameful to have a child born out of wedlock; therefore, a family member may step up and claim the child as their own. A polygamous man will only be considered married to his first wife by the U.S. government, though other wives will oftentimes be resettled in the same geographical region.

## **Language, Literacy and Education**

### *Sudan*

Sudan is very linguistically diverse, due to the many ethnic groups there. Because Arabic is the language of commerce and used between tribes, nearly everyone can speak rudimentary Arabic. Although school is free and required for students ages 6-13, civil war has disrupted access to school for many, and literacy rates in Arabic and English are low. English is spoken by a minority of educated Sudanese in the south.

Darfuri men may speak Sudanese Arabic in addition to their native ethnic language. However, communication remains a challenge outside of Sudan, due to the difference between Arabic and Sudanese Arabic. It is rare for women to know Arabic. Some speak Swahili if they have settled in Kenyan refugee camps.

### *Darfur*

The most common Darfuri languages are Fur, Massalit, and Zaghawa. The Darfuri typically have little or no formal education in English. West Darfur does not have a stable education system, with less than 40% of population having access to secondary school. Most male children have attended Quranic school at some point.

## **Employment Skills and Experiences**

### *Sudan*

Sudan has an unemployment rate of approximately 30%.<sup>3</sup> Many jobs are located in the capital city, Khartoum and many consist of teaching and/or administrative duties.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Khartoum does not provide quality drinking water, quality schools, or quality hospitals.

The majority of residents in Sudan live in small villages which farm cattle and grains, as well as seasonal fruits and vegetables. Often, goods, rather than money, are used as currency.<sup>5</sup> Although oil was discovered in Southern Sudan, it has not benefited the overall economy.

Experiences and exposure to Western amenities depends on which refugee camp the individuals were settled into. Few have had formal employment, though some may have worked informally, again depending on their refugee camp.

## *Darfur*

As in the case with the Sudanese, most Darfuri were farmers and kept goat, cattle, and camels.

## **Medical Information**

### *Sudan and Darfur*

Both Darfuri and Sudanese cultures have similar healthcare practices and lack of exposure to Western medicine.

Most Sudanese have not had quality Western health care before arriving in the U.S. The Sudanese culture uses multiple herbal and traditional remedies. Most cures, however, are not used by resettled refugees since most of the ingredients are difficult to come across in the U.S.

Prescription medicine and other Western interventions should be thoroughly explained. Sudanese routinely share or borrow over-the-counter and prescription medicines from others. Many also tend to discontinue use once symptoms disappear, rather than using until directed.

Birth control is frowned upon, since much emphasis is placed on a woman's ability to bear children. Female genital cutting is common in some parts of Sudan, though less so among the Darfuri.

## **Resettlement Experience**

**In working with refugees of any culture, it is important to bear in mind that symptoms of PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) are common, often due to experiences of torture, imprisonment, violence and interrogation. In addition, the loss or separation of families may add to the difficulties in adjusting to the new culture.**

### *Sudan and Darfur*<sup>6</sup>

Life in Sudan and in the refugee camps was very rural; many Sudanese and Darfuri refugees in America are encountering banking, money, driving automobiles, public transit, apartments, running water, electricity, indoor plumbing, and other indoor amenities for the first time.<sup>7</sup>

In Sudan, most villages have a strong sense of community, in which everyone knows one another and engages with their neighbors. Sometimes it is difficult to adjust to life in America, where it can be considered dangerous to talk to strangers.<sup>8</sup>

In general, it is important not to make assumptions about an individual's level of competency with Western amenities, but rather to assess them individually.

## **Local Resources**

### **WNY Muslim Association**

4011 Bailey Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14226

*WNYMuslims serves the Western New York community by creating awareness, encouraging diversity, and providing service. We empower Muslims and non-Muslims with the means to voice, connect, and contribute through creative media.*

### **United South Sudanese Community in Buffalo, NY**

*A community for Sudanese Youth engagement.*

### **Sudanese American Community of Buffalo**

170 14<sup>th</sup> Street, #2, Buffalo, NY 14213

(716) 697-6508

### **Western New York Center for Survivors of Torture**

*An initiative that addresses the “complex medical, psychological, immigration, legal and social service needs” of individuals who have endured torture before arriving to the US as immigrants and refugees.*

### **International Institute of Buffalo (IIB)**

864 Delaware Ave, Buffalo, NY 14209

iib@iibuff.org (716)883-1900

*“The IIB seeks to strengthen Western New York by assisting refugees and immigrants to become independent, informed and contributing members of the community, and by promoting and supporting cultural competence, multiculturalism and global connectedness throughout the region.” The IIB offers translation and interpretation services.*

### **Catholic Charities (CC)**

20 Herkimer St. Buffalo, NY 14213

(716) 842-0270

*“Our Resettlement clients arrive in the United States through the auspices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS). Pre- and post-arrival services such as assistance with housing, food, clothing and employment are provided.”*

**Journey's End Refugee Services, Inc. (JERS)**

2495 Main St #317, Buffalo, NY 14214  
(716) 882-4963

*JERS "provides refugees with the resources and support they need to become successful, active and contributing members of the Western New York Community."*

**Jewish Family Services (JFS)**

70 Barker St, Buffalo, NY 14209  
(716) 883-1914

*Jewish Family Service assists families new to the US during the difficult transition to the American way of life. JFS provides employment services, ESL training, assistance in acquiring health care and social support services as well as public school enrollment and mental health support.*

**Jericho Road Community Health Center**

184 Barton St., Buffalo, NY 14213  
(716)-348-3000

*Jericho Road offers a variety of health services to low-income and refugee families. The services range from healthcare for new mothers, to general case management, support in filling out forms, ESL education or educational support for a range of ages.*

**Coordinated Refugee/Asylee Legal Services (The CRLS Project)**

237 Main Street, Suite 1015, Buffalo, NY 14203  
(716)853-3087

*A collaboration of legal service providers to support immigrants and refugees with civil and immigration legal services.*

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<sup>1</sup> "Genocide in Darfur." United Human Rights Council. Accessed June 22, 2015.

<http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide-in-sudan.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ranard, Donald, ed. "Refugees from Iraq: Their History, Cultures, and Background Experiences." *Cultural Orientation Resource Center*, 2008. Accessed February 25, 2015. [www.culturalorientation.org](http://www.culturalorientation.org)

<sup>3</sup> "Sudanese Stories: Life in Southern Sudan." NSW Migration Heritage Centre. January 1, 2011. Accessed February 26, 2015. <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/sudanestories/life-in-southern-sudan/>.

<sup>4</sup> "In Focus." UNICEF Sudan. Accessed February 26, 2015. [http://www.unicef.org/sudan/about\\_5473.html](http://www.unicef.org/sudan/about_5473.html).

<sup>5</sup> "Sudanese Stories: Life in Southern Sudan." NSW Migration Heritage Centre. January 1, 2011. Accessed February 26, 2015. <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/sudanestories/life-in-southern-sudan/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ranard, Donald. "Refugees from Darfur: Their Background and Resettlement Needs" *Cultural Orientation Resource Center* 2011. [www.culturalorientation.org](http://www.culturalorientation.org)

<sup>7</sup> "When Sudanese Refugees Come To America." PBH2. April 6, 2011. Accessed February 26, 2015.

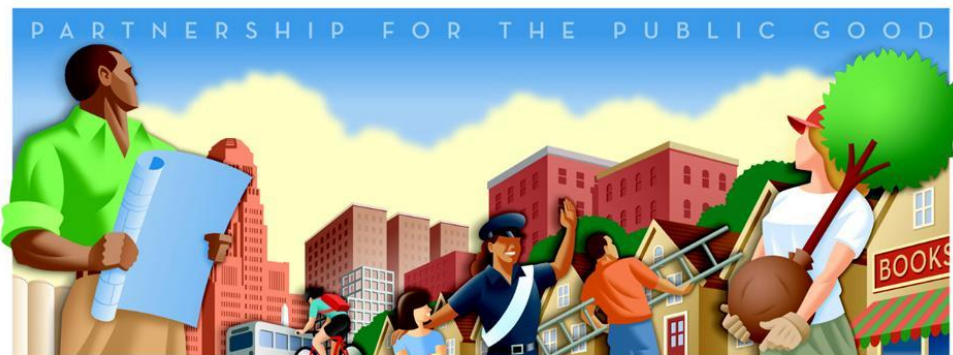
<http://www.pbh2.com/astounding/around-the-world/when-sudanese-refugees-come-America>

<sup>8</sup> Id.

This fact sheet is one in a series of “snap shots” of Buffalo’s immigrant and refugee populations, made possible by a grant from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. They are free of charge at [www.ppgbuffalo.org/publications](http://www.ppgbuffalo.org/publications).

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