

# SOMALIA

## **Geography and Weather:**

Somalia covers 246,201 square miles, making it slightly smaller than Texas. It is located in East Africa and borders the Gulf of Aden to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south. It also borders Kenya and Ethiopia. Somalia is mostly desert but has winter and summer monsoons with moderate temperatures in the south and hotter weather in the north.

## **Language:**

The official languages are Somali and Arabic. There is some Italian and English spoken as well, due to their previous colonization.

## **Religion:**

Sunni Islam is the main religion in Somalia

## **About:**

Due to a deadly civil war that broke out in Somalia in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of people have fled the country. Today over 750,000 Somali refugees remain in neighboring countries like Kenya and Ethiopia. Because Somalis have been displaced for generations, many Somali children have never seen their home country and grew up mostly in refugee camps. Alaska has welcomed hundreds of Somalis, and including another single Somali male in May.



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# BURMA

(MYANMAR)

## Geography and Weather:

Burma borders Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. It covers 261,000 square miles, making it a little smaller than Texas. Burma's central territory is fertile rice land. Teak forests cover high mountains in the west, north, and east. The long coastline in the south and southwest meets the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.

## Languages:

Burma's official language is Burmese, but many Burmese refugees speak Karen, Chin, or Kachin, depending on their home region.

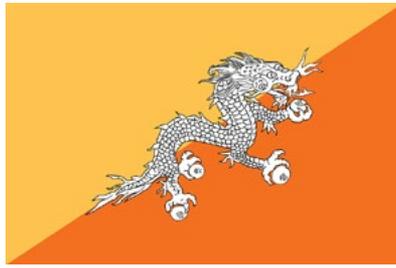
## Religion:

Burma is primarily Buddhist, but there is a substantial Christian population composed almost entirely of ethnic minority groups.

## About:

After decades of authoritarian rule, the Burmese people held a nationwide uprising in August 1988, calling for a new democratic government (the auspicious date, 8/8/88, is known in Burmese as shiq ley lone, or the "four eights"). The military regime responded brutally, killing an estimated 3,000 demonstrators in the following weeks. The conflict in Burma has lasted for decades, and the military remains in power. Over 100,000 Burmese have fled for their lives. Alaska expects a large population of Burmese refugees in the next few years, especially Rohingya Muslims, who face severe religious persecution.





# BHUTAN

## **Geography and Weather:**

The Kingdom of Bhutan covers 14,824 square miles, about half the size of South Carolina. Bhutan is bordered by China to the north and India to the south. The climate varies, with tropical weather in the southern plains, mild winters and hot summers in central valleys, and severe winters in the Himalayas.

## **Language:**

Dzongkha is the official language of Bhutan, but the Lhotshampas, who became refugees, speak Nepali.

## **Religion:**

Of the Bhutanese refugee population, 60% are Hindu, 27% are Buddhists, and about 10% are Kirat. The percentage of Christians in each refugee camp varies from 1% to 7%.

## **About:**

In the late 1800s, many Lhotshampas from Nepal immigrated to the lowlands of Bhutan. In the 1980s, the king and the ruling Druk party grew worried about the growing population of Lhotshampas in the south. Under the "One Nation, One People" policy, they forced the Lhotshampas to dress, speak, and worship like Drukpas. Since 1991, Lhotshampas have been stripped of their citizenship and forced out of their country, fleeing violence and persecution. Alaska welcomed hundreds of Bhutanese refugees between 2007 and 2015.



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# UKRAINE

## **Geography and Weather:**

With an area of about 233,062 square miles, Ukraine is 1.5 times the size of California. Ukraine borders the Black Sea and sits between Poland, Romania, and Moldova in the west and Russia in the east. Its climate is Mediterranean on the southern Crimean coast; winters vary from cool along the Black sea to cold further inland with warm summers.

## **Language:**

More than two thirds of Ukraine speaks Ukrainian, and a little less than a third speaks Russian. Many older Ukrainians can speak both Ukrainian and Russian due to the education system of the Former Soviet Union. 2.9% of the population speaks other languages.

## **Religion:**

Christianity is the dominant religion in Ukraine, with the majority of Christians identifying as Orthodox. Additional faith groups include Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish.

## **About:**

All the arrivals from the Ukraine to Alaska are family tie cases through the Lautenberg Amendment enacted on November 21, 1989. This law provides refugee status for nationals from the former Soviet Union that are persecuted as religious minorities. RAIS currently serves 99 refugees from Ukraine.





# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## **Geography and Weather:**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) covers 905,400 square miles, making it 1.5 times the size of Alaska. It is a tropical environment; hot and humid in the equatorial river basin, cool and dry in the southern highlands, and cool and wet in the eastern highlands.

## **Languages:**

The DRC's official language is French, but many Congolese ethnic groups have their own native language. Among Congolese refugees in Alaska, Kinyarwanda and Kiswahili are most common.

## **Religion:**

The Congolese refugee population is overwhelmingly Christian. About 80% of them are Pentecostals or Seventh Day Adventists.

## **About:**

Unrest and deadly conflict has forced more than 500,000 Congolese refugees to flee their country since 1996. The conflict is complex and constantly developing, and has involved militaries from nine countries and dozens of other armed groups. Sexual violence is so prevalent in the eastern DRC that human rights groups have called the area "the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman." Alaska currently serves 59 refugees from the DRC and expects more arrivals in the next 12 months.





# IRAQ

## **Geography and Weather:**

With an area covering 172,960 square miles, Iraq is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Texas. Located in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq is in the warmer part of the Northern Temperate Zone.

## **Language:**

77% of people in Iraq speak Arabic.

## **Religion:**

Around 99% of Iraqis are Muslim. Iraq's Muslims follow two distinct traditions: Shia and Sunni. An estimated 1% of the population is Christian or another faith.

## **About:**

Many Iraqis have arrived to the U.S. under the Special Immigrant Visa program. This is a special category for eligible Iraqi citizens who were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government for at least one year between March 20, 2003 and September 30, 2013, and who have experienced or are experiencing an ongoing serious threat due to that employment. Many Iraqis are also resettled as refugees, some of them in Alaska.