

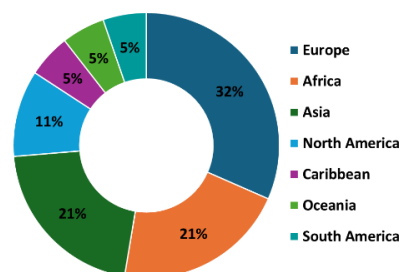
## Foreign-Born and Second-Generation Born Immigrant Athletes Round Out Team USA

By: Marissa Kiss, PhD, Institute for Immigration Research at George Mason University

The 2024 Summer Olympics which will take place in Paris, France in July, includes approximately [10,500](#) athletes who represent 206 National Olympic Committees countries or territories as well the [IOC Refugee Olympic Team](#). These athletes will compete in 45 sports ranging from track and field to gymnastics, swimming, tennis, badminton, judo, volleyball, wrestling, as well as a new sport, breaking or breakdancing. The United States is sending a delegation of over 500 athletes who will compete in nearly every sport. Team USA is a diverse group of athletes who were born in the United States as well as athletes born abroad and athletes who are children of immigrant parents. Approximately 3.7% of athletes competing on Team USA are foreign-born from 16 different countries and will compete in 11 different sports.

Nearly one-third of foreign-born Olympic athletes on Team USA were born in European countries such as Italy, Serbia, England, Germany, or Belarus. Athletes born in countries in Africa such as Cameroon, Eritrea, Kenya, and Somalia comprise one-fifth of foreign-born Olympic athletes on Team USA. Similarly, approximately, one out of five foreign-born Olympic athletes on Team USA were born in countries in Asia (e.g. China, Hong Kong, and South Korea).

World Region of Birth Among Foreign-Born Athletes on Team USA

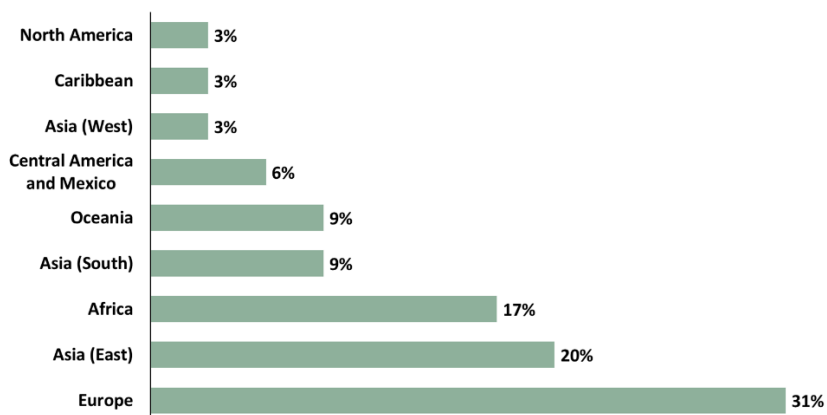


The pathway for competing and representing Team USA in the Olympics for foreign-born athletes varied. Some of the foreign-born Olympic athletes who are competing on Team USA have **dual citizenship**. These athletes include [Ruby Remati](#) (Australia), [Jaime Czarkowski](#) (Canada), [Colin Heathcock](#) (China), [John Jayne](#) (England and Bulgaria), and [Luca Cupido](#) (Italy). Other athletes such as [Steffen Peters](#) (Germany), [Beiwen Zhang](#) (China), [Grant Fisher](#) (Canada), [Margherita Guzzi Vincenti](#) (Italy), [Maria Laborde](#) (Cuba), [Lucas Lacamp](#) (Hong Kong), [Catarina Macario](#) (Brazil), NBA player, [Joel Embiid](#) (Cameroon), and [Abdihamid Nur](#) (Somalia) **became naturalized U.S. citizens**. Additionally, other athletes like track and field runner, [Leonard Korir](#), who was born in Kenya, came to the United States for college and then **joined the U.S. Army**, which led to Korir obtaining U.S. citizenship in 2016. Lastly, long distance runner, [Weini Kelati](#), who was born in Eritrea, **claimed asylum** in the United States in 2014 and became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2021.

In addition to foreign-born athletes on Team USA, more than seven percent of athletes on Team USA are children of immigrant parent(s) or second-generation immigrants.

While these athletes were born in the United States, their parent(s) were born abroad and emigrated to the United States. More than two-thirds of athletes' parents were born in countries in Europe (e.g. Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Poland), East Asia (e.g. China, Japan, South Korea), or Africa (e.g. Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia). For example, break dancing athlete, [Sunny Choi's](#) parents both immigrated from South

World Region of Birth Among Immigrant Parents of Athletes on Team USA



Korea to the United States in the 1970s to earn a doctorate degree. Fencers [Nick Itkin](#), [Elizabeth Tartakovsky](#), [Tatiana Nazlymov](#), [Alexander Massialas](#), and [Magda Skarbonkiewicz](#) mother or father were born abroad in Ukraine, Russia, Taiwan, or Poland. Gymnasts, [Evita Griskenas](#) parents are both immigrants from Lithuania while [Suní Lee's](#) mother and partner immigrated to the United States as refugees from Laos during the Vietnam War. Track and field athletes Annette Echikunwoke, Keturah Orji, Rai Benjamin Salif Mane, and Yared Nuguse parent(s) all have immigrant roots. [Echikunwoke](#) and [Orji](#) parent(s) were both born in Nigeria and [Benjamin's](#) father is a professional cricket player from Antigua. [Mane's](#) parents immigrated to the United States in the 1990s from Senegal while [Nuguse](#) parents who were both born in Ethiopia, came to the United States in the 1980s as political refugees and were granted asylum. Similar to Lee, Nuguse, and Kelati's parents, athletes and non-athletes around the globe have been displaced due to ongoing war, violence, or political persecution and seek refuge in neighboring or distant countries. For athletes who are in this position and do not have a country to call home, many will compete in the Olympics under the Refugee Olympic Team.

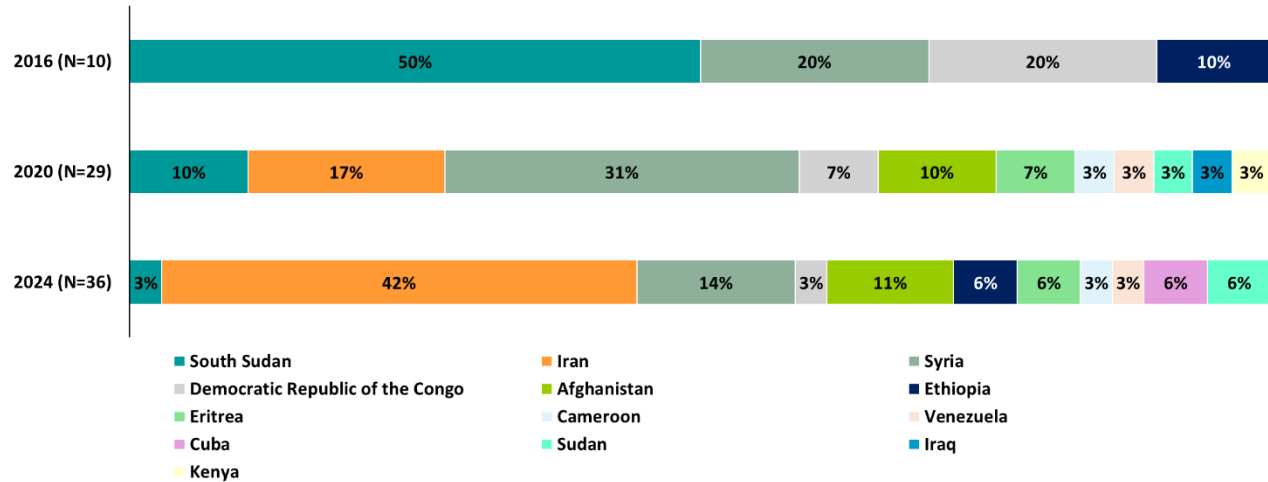
## 2024 Refugee Olympic Team

The Refugee Olympic Team, which was formed in 2015 and debuted at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, gives refugee athletes who face war or political persecution a place to compete. In 2016, the Refugee Olympic Team consisted of 10 athletes across three sports (e.g. Track and field, Judo, and Swimming). Half of the athletes were born in South Sudan while the remaining half were born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, or Ethiopia. During the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the number of athletes on the Refugee Olympic team nearly tripled to 29 athletes. These athletes competed across 12 sports and hailed originally from eleven countries. Athletes from Syria (31%) comprised the largest share of athletes on the 2020 Refugee Olympic Team followed by Iran (17%), Afghanistan (10%), South Sudan (10%), and seven other countries (e.g. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Cameroon, Iraq, Kenya, Sudan, and Venezuela).

This year, 36 athletes will join the Refugee Olympic team. Slightly less than two-thirds of refugee athletes are men and the remainder are women who are participating in 14 sports and represent 11 countries from around the globe. More than two-fifths (42%) of refugee Olympic athletes were born in Iran followed by Syria (14%), Afghanistan (11%), Cuba (6%), Eritrea (6%), Ethiopia (6%), Sudan (6%) and four other countries (i.e., Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Venezuela). Additionally, approximately one-third of athletes on the Refugee Olympic team are returning Olympians including track and field athletes [Dorian Keletela](#) (Democratic Republic of the Congo), [Jamal Abdelmaji](#) (Sudan), and [Tachlowini Gabriyesos](#) (Eritrea), judo athletes [Nigara Shaheen](#) (Afghanistan) and [Muna Dahouk](#) (Syria), Taekwondo athlete [Dina Pouryounes](#) [Langeroudi](#) (Iran), shooting athlete [Luna Solomon](#) (Eritrea), and swimmer [Alaa Maso](#) (Syria). Additionally, there are three athletes who competed in the 2020 Olympics for their home country but since sought asylum and are now competing under the Refugee Olympic Team. These athletes include [Fernando Dayan Jorge Enriquez](#) who was born in Cuba and competes in the Canoe sprint, Taekwondo athlete [Farzad Mansouri](#) (Afghanistan), and swimmer [Matin Balsini](#) (Iran).

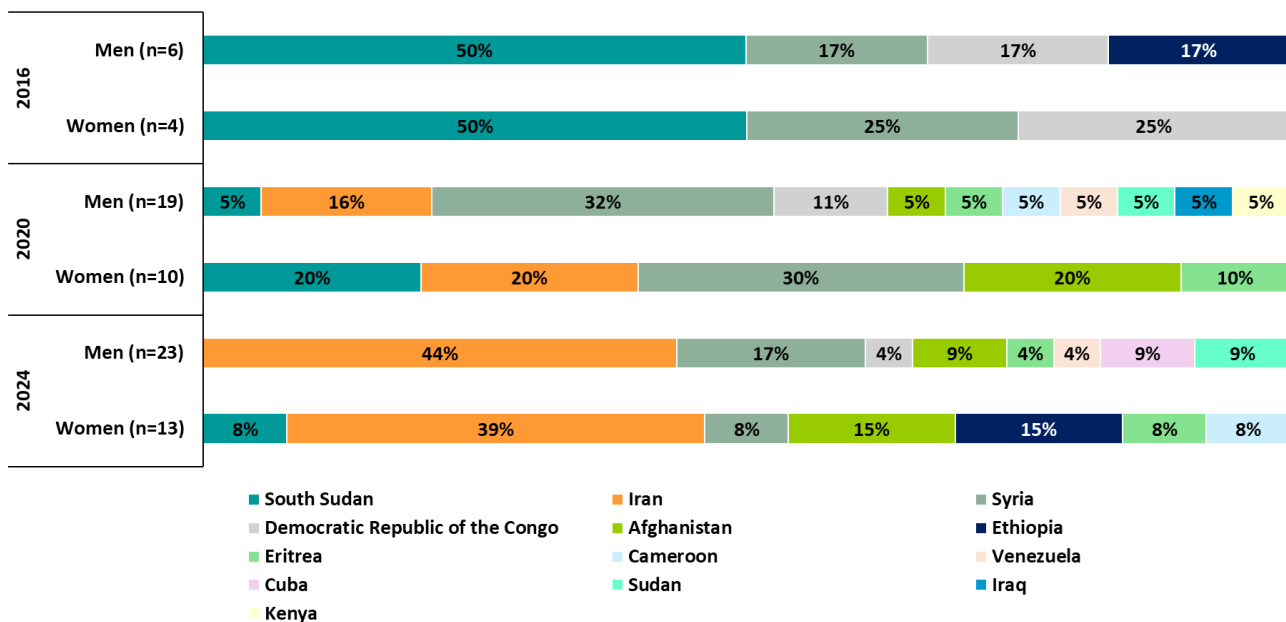
Over the past eight years, the demographic composition of athletes appearing on the Refugee Olympic Team roster has fluctuated as the [global refugee crisis has grown](#). In 2016, eighty percent of Refugee Olympians were born Africa. However, this percentage declines to approximately one-third (34%) in 2020 and further decreases to one-quarter for this year's Olympics. On the other hand, the percentage of refugee Olympians hailing from countries in central, southwestern, and western Asian countries has nearly tripled over time. In 2016, athletes from countries in this region comprised twenty percent of athletes on the Refugee Olympic Team. In 2020, this percentage triples to 62% and further increases to 67% for the 2024 Olympics.

Country of Origin Among Athletes on the Refugee Olympic Team, 2016-2024



It is also important to highlight the changing demographics of athletes on the Refugee Olympic Team by sex. Compared to prior years, there has been a decline in female and male athletes on the Refugee Olympic Team who were born in Syria and South Sudan. However, over time there was an increase in women from Iran, Ethiopia, and Cameroon competing on the Refugee Olympic Team. Similarly, among men on the Refugee Olympic Team, there was an increase in athletes born in Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan. More specifically, the number of male athletes on the 2024 Refugee Olympic Team who were born in Iran more than tripled compared to the 2020 Olympics. Similarly, the number of female athletes on the Refugee Olympic Team who were born in Iran more than doubled compared to the prior Olympics. Over the past ten years, 15 athletes who were born in Iran sought refuge and asylum in seven different countries (e.g. Austria, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom) with forty percent of athletes seeking refuge in Germany and nearly half of asylum seeking occurring within the past four years.

Country of Origin Among Athletes on the Refugee Olympic Team by Sex, 2016-2024

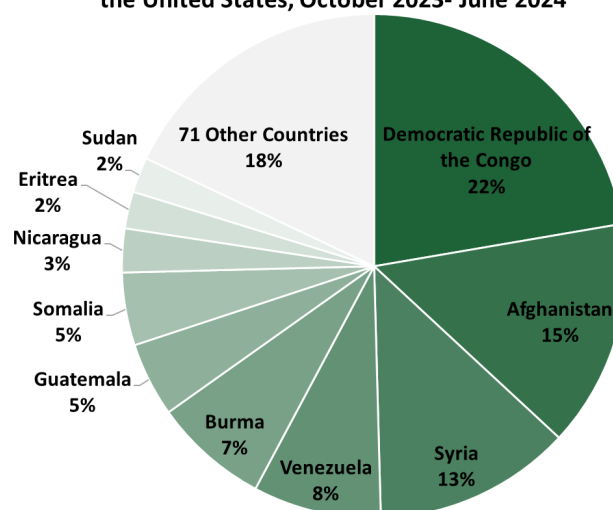


## Conclusion

Similar to athletes competing on the 2024 Refugee Olympic Team, across the globe millions of individuals have been forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, humanitarian issues, or persecution. According to UN Refugee Agency, the [UNHCR](#), in May 2024, over 120 million people have been forcibly displaced, with more than half identified as internally displaced people, 43.4 million categorized as refugees, 6.9 million asylum-seekers, and 5.8 million who need international protection. Nearly three-fourths of refugees originate from Afghanistan followed by Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine, or South Sudan. Countries such as Iran, Turkey, Colombia, Germany, and Pakistan are the top five countries with the largest shares of welcoming and providing protection to refugees.

Between October 2023 and June 2024, [68,291](#) refugees were admitted to the United States. This number comprises slightly more than half (55%) of the maximum number of refugees who could be admitted in that year. Of refugees admitted to the United States during this time period, 37% were born in countries in Africa followed by South Asia (31%), the Caribbean (20%), Asia (8%), and Central Asia (4%). More specifically, 22% of admitted refugees' nationalities were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo after that Afghanistan (15%), Syria (13%), Venezuela (8%), Burma (7%), and 76 other countries (35%). Admitted refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were more likely to be resettled in Texas, Kentucky, and Arizona. Among Afghani refugees, California, Texas, Virginia had higher shares of resettling refugees from Afghanistan. New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania were the top three states where Syrian refugees were resettled. Venezuelan refugees were more likely to be resettled in Florida, Texas, and Illinois and refugees from Burma were resettled in Texas, Illinois, New York at higher rates. Overall, the top 10 states with largest shares of resettling refugees include Texas (9%), California (7%), New York (6%), Pennsylvania (5%), Florida (4%), Arizona (4%), Washington (4%), North Carolina (4%), and Illinois (4%).

**Top Ten Nationalities Among Refugee Arrivals in the United States, October 2023- June 2024**



The welcoming spirit of immigrants and refugees to the United States and other countries around the world has been instrumental in providing a sanctuary to thousands and millions of displaced individuals. Many of these immigrants and refugees come to their host counties, work hard, contribute and give back to their local community, become naturalized citizens, and sometimes represent their new nation on a global scale, including as Olympians. As we tune into the Olympics, it is important to celebrate the diverse immigrant, non-immigrant, children of immigrant parents, and refugee athletes who have crossed borders or spent years training to continue their passion for winning an Olympic medal whether by representing the country they were born into or the country that welcomed them.

[Marissa Kiss](#) is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Immigration Research at George Mason University. Dr. Kiss earned her doctorate in sociology at George Mason University in 2020.

Please note that the terms "immigrant" and "foreign born" are used interchangeably throughout this document. Foreign born refers to individuals who are not a U.S. citizen at birth or who were born outside the U.S., Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and whose parents are not U.S. citizens. The foreign born may include naturalized U.S. citizens, Legal Permanent Residents, temporary residents, refugees and asylees, and others. Additionally, native born includes those who are U.S. citizens at birth, those born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories, and those born abroad to a parent who is a U.S. citizen.



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This initiative aims to study immigration and inclusion in sports through original, data-driven research on the contributions of immigrants in professional and collegiate sports. We examine inclusion in two ways: 1) the degree to which immigrant athletes are represented in sports; and 2) how highlighting the stories and contributions of immigrant athletes can lead to greater understanding and inclusion of immigrants generally.

## **The Institute for Immigration Research (IIR)**

The IIR's mission is to generate and amplify relevant research on immigrants and immigration to the United States through engaging with and educating the public, policymakers, and next generation of migration researchers.

The IIR contributes to a society where attitudes, policies, and rhetoric about immigrants and immigration are based on data, reason, and global contexts.

The Institute for Immigration Research is a joint venture between George Mason University and the Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC) of Malden, MA.

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**4400 University Drive, MSN 1D7**

**Fairfax, VA 22030**

**703.993.5833**