

Refugee Council USA Recommendations to Help Shape the Focus of the New Federal Immigrant and Refugee Integration Strategy

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) is a coalition of 20 U.S.-based organizations, including the nine national resettlement agencies, dedicated to refugee protection and welcome. What follows is a summary of RCUSA's recommendations for consideration as the new federal immigration and refugee integration strategy is developed.

- Consistent communication with resettlement stakeholders, including but not limited to resettlement agencies, ethnic-community-based organizations, state refugee and state refugee health coordinators, and resettled refugee representatives should be upheld throughout the development and implementation of the new federal immigrant and refugee integration strategy. Quarterly meetings with these stakeholders should be convened.
- Planning for the development of refugee and immigrant integration strategies should be an inclusive process, including opportunities for refugee program and immigrant integration leaders to work in partnership, share best practices, and make strong community connections that can further refugee and immigrant integration initiatives around the country. Furthermore, federal refugee and immigrant integration strategy should be comprehensive in its reach, including the involvement of receiving communities.
- Resettled refugees make significant economic and cultural contributions to their new communities. Federal refugee integration strategy should focus on an assets based approach, and should highlight studies and programs that have facilitated the successful integration of refugees around the United States.
- There is no need to entirely reinvent the wheel. Other resettlement countries, including the Nordic resettlement countries, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, have undertaken significant efforts to analyze refugee integration factors in their respective countries. These efforts should be studied to determine what approaches other countries have taken could also be applicable to studying the long-term success and challenges of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).
- The strategy should include a plan to increase and stabilize the Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) budget to ensure it can provide the services needed by the increasingly diverse population of refugees, asylees, SIV recipients, unaccompanied children and others in its care. This should include congressional education and outreach from a variety of administration officials about ORR's budget needs and the benefit that a contingency account would bring ORR, as recommended in the President's budget.
- ORR should commission a report to conduct a complete examination of the domestic resettlement program and develop comprehensive data collection mechanisms on refugee program outcomes and the needs and contributions of refugee populations. This information should be distributed in a regular and timely manner. Furthermore, adequate funding should be available to support consistent analysis of the domestic resettlement program and refugee integration in the United States.
- A complete set of minimum standards (goals) for immigrant/refugee integration should be established as a result of the research identified above, and its objectives included in the cultural orientation conducted with refugees before arrival, and with immigrant and refugees upon arrival when they first receive services in the United States.
- A full-time USRAP Inter-Agency Coordinator office, based in the White House, should be developed. The Coordinator would lead the effort to improve information collecting and sharing

among USRAP stakeholders, including information directly related to refugee integration (e.g. demographic information, issues receiving communities should be aware of in preparation for new refugee arrivals, etc.).

- Increased and regular opportunities should be provided for refugees abroad who have been approved for resettlement to the United States to learn English and receive detailed cultural and employment training prior to arrival in the United States.
- Legislative and administrative policy changes should be explored that would admit refugees as lawful permanent residents, increase refugee admissions numbers, and prioritize and expedite family reunification.
- Ensure that efforts are pursued to encourage and equip refugees for naturalization. This could include making the citizenship application more economically feasible, as well as increasing the number of civic engagement programs.
- ORR should provide extended case management services for all refugees and establish a specialized long-term case management program for highly vulnerable refugees with special needs.
- The specific integration needs of refugee youth should be emphasized as part of the development of a refugee integration strategy.
- ORR should expand the Matching Grant program to increase the number of slots, the per-capita level, and the amount of time available for the provision of services.
- Employment services should be expanded for highly educated and professional refugees, including tailored job training, recertification and language acquisition opportunities.
- The refugee cash assistance period should be extended to at least 12 months.
- Culturally and contextually appropriate physical and behavioral health services should be expanded for refugees with histories of torture and/or severe trauma, using a systems-based approach that fully leverages community resources.
- Local service providers should have the resources and capacity to provide adequate health education opportunities for refugees.
- Ensure that discretionary funds are available in a rapid response fashion to states that experience unplanned, high levels of secondary migration. In addition, data on secondary migration should be incorporated into the formula to allocate funds to states.
- Instruments to encourage and track civic participation of New Americans should be established in order to better measure the levels of integration.
- ORR should mandate focus on refugee/immigrant population to all of its regional offices. ORR Regional staff should convene regular coordination meetings with stakeholders in their respective areas.