

refugeecouncilusa

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World Refugee Day Advocacy Toolkit 2015

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Refugee Advocacy in Your Community: Needs and First Steps

Why is advocacy needed?

In 2015, the number of forcibly displaced persons around the world exceeds 51 million, including some 13 million refugees who lack access to the most basic necessities of life, including food, clean water, safe shelter, health care, education, and protection from conflict, war, and violence. Domestically, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been drastically underfunded for decades, to the detriment of refugees and the communities that serve them. The ongoing economic downturn has made the need for additional government support more evident, as the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) continues to serve increasing and diverse populations while refugees already here struggle to secure affordable housing, transportation and employment.

The power of advocacy

Each refugee resettlement office represents hundreds, if not thousands, of refugees, staff, and supportive community members who are constituents of members of Congress who regularly make policy decisions that impact refugees and funding for refugee assistance and resettlement. When policy makers know that their constituents care about refugees, they will vote for policies that benefit refugees, and vote against anti-refugee proposals. Advocacy is a great awareness-raising tool to educate your policy makers and members about the benefits refugees bring to our communities. Reform of the refugee program, protection for specific populations and increased funding globally and domestically will only happen if refugees, resettlement offices and supportive community members educate and urge their elected officials to champion these reforms.

Anyone can be an advocate, at any time!

Advocacy begins with telling your story. Your story as a refugee, staff member, or supporter of refugee resettlement is your most important qualification as an advocate! Tell your senators and representatives about your personal connection to the issue. Talk about the way your community welcomes refugees, the reasons refugees need more assistance, and the positive contributions refugees make to your community.

1. Create an advocacy team: An ideal team consists of refugees, case workers, faith leaders, business leaders, and community leaders who can all share in the planning, outreach, and coordination of advocacy actions, and speak to the diversity of support for refugee resettlement. Teams identify which policy makers need to learn more about refugees, which policies need to be changed, and how to embrace advocacy opportunities throughout the year to build relationships with policy makers. To grow your team, have participants at events sign up for advocacy alerts with their name, email address, and zip code.

2. Invite your senators, representatives, local policymakers and stakeholders to community events:

Invite your elected officials and law enforcement officials to events where they will be able to speak with supporters of resettlement, including business owners who employ refugees, local government officials, volunteers, and refugees. If the [representative](#) or [senator](#) cannot attend the event, extend the invitation to their staff. You can also invite your local elected officials such as mayors, city council members, police chiefs, and governors to further educate them about refugees in your community. Officials especially like to attend events that are 'photo opportunities,' involve swearing in new citizens, or show support for community efforts. Asking officials to provide remarks during a ceremony can also help solidify them as champions of your cause.

3. Organize group calls and letters to Members of Congress: Members of Congress respond to constituents. Ask your community members to call and write their Members of Congress asking them to support refugees and refugee resettlement. Provide numbers for both of your senators, your representative, or simply the Capitol switchboard number (202-224-3121) so people can easily connect to all three of their members. Have a flyer with a sample script available. You can write and deliver letters in bulk to your members' local offices, or send them to your DC advocate who will deliver them in DC.

4. Empower refugees to raise their voices: By ensuring the voices of refugees are heard by elected officials, we are empowering people who policy changes will affect directly. Not every refugee will want to be a public speaker, but it is important to encourage and help refugees develop their skills to speak out effectively. Behind every successful social movement is a network. When a community is effectively engaged, it can develop leaders and ensure advocacy continues and grows. Sharing these stories and photos with advocates in Washington, DC helps them amplify your work by sharing them in meetings with Members of Congress.

Refugee Community Advocacy Week: June 29- July 2

All Members of Congress will be in their states and local districts the week after World Refugee Day - June 29th - July 2nd. This is a great opportunity to meet with them and their staff. Establishing close relationships with your Members of Congress is crucial to enacting policies that support successful refugee resettlement, and can make the difference in votes regarding refugee funding or specific bills that impact refugees. At these meetings, resettlement staff and clients can discuss the challenges and triumphs that new arrivals face, and how important it is for those who have fled violence and persecution to find a safe home.

Purpose of In-District Advocacy Meetings on Refugee Issues:

1. To educate decision makers about the strengths and needs of refugees in your community.
2. To understand where they stand and where their interests align with refugee issues.
3. To get a commitment of support for refugee resettlement and current asks - see next page.
4. To build relationships with public officials and institutions influencing your community.

Because the process of change takes time, advocacy visits should be viewed as part of a continuing process of gathering information, building relationships and developing advocacy strategies. Even if you can't meet with their offices during the week of June 29th - July 2nd, set up a visit next time they're in town! Calendars of in-district time can be found at <http://majorityleader.gov/Calendar/> and www.senate.gov/legislative/resources/pdf/2015_calendar.pdf. Visit often!

Have a plan: Before you enter an advocacy visit, meet with your group beforehand to assign roles:

- *The Facilitator* will kick off the meeting by introducing your group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing time for each person attending to briefly introduce themselves. Make sure each participant introduces the organization they represent or their connection to refugee resettlement. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
- *The Personal Story* is key to every meeting. Someone should be present who is either a refugee themselves or has worked closely with and been impacted by refugees. Telling this story will show how peoples' lives and communities are enriched through refugee resettlement.
- *Specific Issue Points* -There will be specific points your group will want to make about the refugee resettlement program and your local resettlement landscape. It will be helpful to have one person take on each of these issues to show they are distinctly important.
- *The Ask* is the critical part when you ask "Will you be a champion for refugees and welcoming communities like ours by co-sponsoring *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act* [HR 1568](#), opposing legislation that would reduce protections for unaccompanied children, and ensuring the refugee program is robustly funded and reformed in positive ways through the *Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act*, [HR 1784](#) and S. 883 and the *Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act*, [HR 651](#), soon to be reintroduced from last Congress?" Listen carefully and ask for clarification if their response is vague.

Suggested Leave-Behind Documents: Provide staff the information found in the Appendix of this toolkit, and a profile of refugees in your state, found at www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/RCUSA%20State%20Profiles%20-%20updated%205.30.14.pdf, as well as letters of support and news articles that show the positive impacts of refugees in your community. Contact your organization's advocacy staff for other timely materials.

Debrief: It's important to make debrief after the meeting. As a group, ask: what did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps?

Follow-up: Make sure to send a thank you email to the staffer after the meeting. Please also send any follow-up information the staffer asked for, or any other relevant information you think would be helpful. Inviting the staff and/or member to an upcoming event to meet with refugees is an excellent next step!

Background Information: Syrian Refugees, Unaccompanied Children & Funding for Refugee Assistance & Resettlement

See flyer on page 11 for more condensed talking points

Co-Sponsor Legislation to Help Syrian Refugees

The human rights violations that have been perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) have been widespread and have left more than 10 million people in need of humanitarian and protection assistance both within Syria and in surrounding countries. Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkoman Shiites, Coptic Christians, Druze, Mandaeans, Assyrians and others have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety and are in need of both international humanitarian support and expedited access to the United States Admission Program. This situation is detailed in the recent RCUSA report [At the Breaking Point: Refugees in Jordan and Egypt](#). *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015*, H.R. 1568, was recently introduced by Representatives Vargas (D-CA-51), Rooney (R-FL-17), Conyers (D-MI-13) and Hunter (R-CA-50) to make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program more accessible to persecuted groups in Iraq and Syria, including individuals facing gender-based violence and religious and ethnic minorities fleeing ISIS. The legislation would also open additional processing entities in the region, increase staff for processing refugee applications, and streamline the existing systems for conducting background and security checks. H.R. 1568 would also expand the use of video interviewing and improve accountability and transparency around denial decisions. We urge all members of Congress to co-sponsor and support this bipartisan legislation.

Support Protections for Unaccompanied Children & Families Fleeing Violence in Central America

Congress continues to consider legislation such as the H.R. 1149 the Protection of Children Act and H.R. 1153 the Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act, which would rollback the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPPRA) of 2008. The TVPPRA passed both chambers of Congress by unanimous consent and was signed into law by President Bush to address our international obligations of not returning vulnerable migrants to danger and to reduce the likelihood that the U.S. would deport children back into the hands of traffickers and others who would exploit them. Children fleeing violence from Central America are escaping gang violence, sexual and gender-based violence, forced recruitment, domestic violence, and are often victims of trafficking. Children fleeing for their lives will not be deterred by punitive legislation designed to persuade them not to come to the U.S. by eroding important human rights protections. The U.S. must show leadership by finding ways to reduce the violence these children face in their home countries, rather than immorally attempting to deport them more quickly. We urge Congress to oppose these bills, and any proposals that would rollback protections for unaccompanied children.

Increase Funding for Refugee Assistance Abroad & Resettlement in the U.S.

The Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account in the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) appropriations bill funds the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which helps states and local communities welcome and support refugees and other vulnerable migrants on their path to self-sufficiency and integration. In FY 2014 ORR reprogrammed \$94 million out of refugee resettlement services funding to meet the needs of the increased number of unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America. While ORR released the reprogrammed funds a few months later, many communities were impacted by the lack of school impact grant funds and by the firing of valuable case managers, many of whom are refugees themselves. In order to prevent any future reprogramming and to adequately serve refugees, asylees, SIV recipients, unaccompanied children, victims of torture and trafficking, and all of the populations within its mandate, we urge Congress to appropriate \$2.1 billion for ORR in FY 2016 and an additional \$100 million for an ORR contingency fund for unforeseen needs of the vulnerable populations that it serves.

The Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account in the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill funds the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), which provides overseas assistance to displaced refugees, supports refugee admissions, and funds lifesaving services in humanitarian emergencies. The crisis in Syria continues to escalate dramatically, adding additional strain to a program already addressing serious humanitarian needs in Iraq, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. We urge Congress to fund the MRA account at \$3.3 billion in FY 2016 to ensure that the U.S. can continue to serve currently displaced populations while responding to numerous emerging humanitarian crises.

In addition to supporting additional funds for refugee assistance and resettlement, we urge you to co-sponsor legislation that would improve the refugee resettlement program: The *Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act (H.R. 1784 and S. 883 in the 113th Congress)* will soon be re-introduced. This bipartisan bill is zero cost and would improve the lives of refugees and the communities that welcome them. The bill would elevate the Office of Refugee Resettlement within HHS to improve stability and coordination; require an annual report on secondary migration and its impact on states; improve data collection on the needs of refugees and their integration successes. Another bill, *The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act (HR 651 in the 113th Congress)* will also soon be re-introduced and would provide refugees with greencards upon arrival and increase resources for refugees, including Matching Grant slots.

Elevate the Dialogue about Refugees in the Media

Public education is critical to building welcome for refugees. Invite local media to your events and spread the word through social media. Write letters to the editor or opinion editorials about how refugees benefit your community.

Training to Tell the Story

As you prepare for World Refugee Day make sure to identify refugees who will to serve as spokespersons for World Refugee Day. Work towards a narrative of empowerment highlighting the ways in which refugees contribute to our economy and community. Find more resources below about how to tell the public story of self, us and now by Harvard Professor Marshall Ganz: www.wholecommunities.org/pdf/Public%20Story%20Worksheet07Ganz.pdf

Core Messaging

When developing your core message concentrate on your mission and values. For example:

- Highlight the experience of refugees and the importance of the U.S. as a historical world leadership in resettlement
- Discuss the challenges and successes of refugees and the path towards integration
- Highlight how refugees and immigrants make your community and economy stronger by giving specific examples
- Be aware of the local, state and national policy issues that impact immigrants and refugees and talk about your advocacy asks. Integrating the most current events into your event also makes it more newsworthy.
- Find a media hook- what makes this a story? Why will media want to come? Don't hide from local tension, but be willing to break down the stereotypes that have formed in your city about refugees.

Invite Media to Your Event

World Refugee Day is a perfect time to get more extensive coverage of refugees' contributions to American society

- Coordinate with communications point people at your organization or local coalitions
- Develop your list of press contacts – even those who you have not reached out to until now
- Identify your 2-3 media spokespeople for the event so they will be prepared to talk to the media
- Develop a messaging frame that empowers refugees in your talking points, media advisory and press release
- Send media contacts a media advisory with event information (time, place, etc.) about 10 days before the event. Follow-up with a phone call a day or two after you've sent your media advisory, to see if they plan to attend.
- Assign one person to identify, sign-in, and help media contacts speak to the right people during the event
- Gather quotes from your spokespeople to be sent in your press release - a one page document with highlights from your event - after the event to your media contacts. Follow up the next day to see if they plan to write about the event.
- If you would like help gaining media attention please contact your advocacy staff.

Social Media

Social media is a great way to spread the word about your organization and World Refugee Day.

- Create a Facebook event and have staff, refugees and supports share information on their walls and twitter accounts
- Share photos and quotes from refugees participating in WRD via Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.
- Identify the local, state and national policy makers you want to influence. Find their accounts on Facebook and Twitter so you can tag them when you post positive articles about refugees, photos from your event, etc.
- Utilize appropriate hashtags to amplify your message such as #WRD, #WRD2015 and #Refugee
- Sample Tweet: Today at (city) #Refugees move from persecuted to empowered as (Name) tells his/her story @senator___ @Rep___ #WRD2015 (attach a picture)

Letters to the Editor and Opinion Editorials

Writing Letters to the Editor (LTE) and Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds) to your local newspaper are effective ways to lift up refugee voices. Policy makers and candidates carefully monitor these sections to gauge local opinions.

- Local papers are more likely to publish your piece (including neighborhood, ethnic, and religious papers)
- Make sure to integrate the broader themes of refugee empowerment and welcoming communities
- Tie in the values of WRD to local or state issues or with a general call for people to support refugee resettlement, mentioning key decision makers by name so that the piece will be included in the media clips that their staff collect
- Keep it short (less than 200 words). State your most important point in the first paragraph.
 - *Paragraph 1* – your main point, why the issue is important to you, your personal story
 - *Paragraph 2* – facts, quotes, numbers, your 'ask' of all candidates
 - *Paragraph 3* – restate your point and declare your recommendation

Media Outlet Contact Maps by State at <http://capwiz.com/fconl/dbq/media/>

Call The Offices of Your Senators and Representatives

Calling the offices of your members of Congress could make a critical difference in their support for refugee-related proposals. Refugees, resettlement staff and community supporters can discuss issues that face new arrivals and weigh in on discussions Congress is having about refugees. Ask the member to help welcome refugees in your community by supporting increased funding and legislation that would help them succeed in building their new lives.

Before you call Congress:

- Contact your organization's advocacy staff (see page 12) and they can help you find out if your representative sits on the Judiciary Committee, Foreign Affairs Committee, Homeland Security Committee, or the Appropriations Committee.. Your advocacy staff can also provide information about your Members of Congress, including if they have supported refugee or immigrant related issues before, co-sponsored legislation related to refugees or made positive statements about refugees. You can use congress.gov to search for refugee related bills in the current or previous sessions of Congress. Statements made publicly can also be found by searching for the member's name of the word "refugee" on Google. You can also go to the member's webpage and find out additional information by looking at his/her biography. All Members' websites are linked at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov
- Be prepared to give your mailing address or zip code, so they can ensure you are a constituent. If your office is not in the district of the member you are calling, you may want to explain you serve refugee clients in or near their district. Also, be prepared to share specific facts and figures about your office, services your agency provides, as well as a brief and compelling story about a refugee you have assisted.
- Review the supporting background documents from RCUSA and your national resettlement agency to familiarize yourself with current advocacy issues. And have a pen and paper ready to write down the name of the staffer with whom you speak, his/her contact information and any relevant notes from the call.

Calling Congress: Once you are fully prepared, you can use the sample script below to guide your phone call. Remember to be yourself! It is easy to sound rehearsed if you merely read this document aloud. By preparing to discuss your agency, community, and the concerns you want to share, you can really show your passion for refugee-related issues and establish a warm connection with staffers over the phone. (Sometimes it helps to role-play!)

Sample Script:

You: Hello, my name is [name] and I'm calling from [name of town]. May I please speak to the staffer who handles refugee issues for [Representative/Senator] [Member of Congress]?

Receptionist: Sure, his/her name is [staffer's name]. I'll connect you. (*Write down the name.*) If they do not have staff who handle these issues, ask for someone who handles appropriations, immigration, or international issues.

You: I'm calling from [name of town] to urge the Senator/Representative to do three things to support refugees:

- Help Syrian refugees by Co-sponsoring H.R. 1568, *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act*
- Oppose legislation that would reduce protections for children fleeing violence in Central America, including H.R. 1149, the "Protection of Children Act" and H.R. 1153 the "Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act"
- Support increases in refugee funding and legislation that will improve the lives of refugees

When do you think you will be able to speak with your boss about this? When can I follow up with you? (*Note response and make plans to follow up.*) Thank you for your time. Could I get your email address to send you a follow up email? Please feel free to contact me with any questions about refugee resettlement program in our area. (*provide contact info*)

Sample Voicemail Message:

Hello, my name is [your name] from [name of town]. I am calling to ask for [Representative/Senator] [last name of member of Congress] to do three things to support refugees:

- Help Syrian refugees by Co-sponsoring H.R. 1568, *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act*
- Oppose legislation that would reduce protections for children fleeing violence in Central America, including H.R. 1149, the "Protection of Children Act" and H.R. 1153 the "Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act"
- Support increases in refugee funding and legislation that will improve the lives of refugees

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me at [your phone number] if you have any questions. I look forward to your boss's leadership on these important issues.

After you call Congress: Email the congressional staffer to provide materials, repeat your asks for support and answer any questions asked during the call. Then email your DC advocate so they can follow up to echo the message.

Sample letter to invite Policy Makers to your World Refugee Day event

[Date]

The Honorable [full name of Policy Maker]
[Address]

Dear Senator/Representative XXXX:

I write to invite you to invite you to a celebration of World Refugee Day [Name of the Event]. Our celebration of refugees will take place [date, time and location]. World Refugee Day, observed June 20 each year, is dedicated to raising awareness of the situation of refugees throughout the world. We want to invite you to celebrate with us the contributions of refugees in [city]. [Describe the event].

Every year, the United States welcomes refugees who are fleeing persecution due to their ethnicity, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. They cannot return to their home country and do not enjoy basic rights in the country where they initially sought refuge. Our organization, [agency name] helps refugees who are resettlement in [state] integrate quickly into our community by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, clothing, medical attention, education, English-language classes and community orientation.

Our office in [city/state] has helped resettle [X number of] refugees in the past year alone. Since the office opened in [date], over [X number of] refugees from [X number of] countries have embarked on a path to reach their full potential and enjoy safety, security, and a second chance in life.

Nearly three million people have found safety and begun new lives as a result of the United States' work to welcome refugees. The USRAP was established by an Act of Congress in 1980 and is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy that is rooted in communities. The program is a highly successful example of public-private partnership, where federal assistance is augmented by funds raised by communities across the country. Refugees have opened businesses, revitalized towns, and become productive members of communities that welcomed them. Many become American citizens and see their children graduate from U.S. schools.

We would be honored if you attend our event to celebrate and share time with refugees resettled in our community, including many who are now U.S. citizens. Refugees are a testament to the United States' long, proud history as a sanctuary for those who seek lives free from violence and oppression. Join us celebrating this great tradition!

Regards,

[your name]
[title, affiliation]
[contact information]

Sample advocacy letter to send to your Members of Congress

[Date]

The Honorable [full name of Senator/Representative]
[U.S. Senate/U.S. House of Representatives]
[room number] [name of congressional office building]
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

On behalf of [agency name] and the refugees we welcome to our community, I am writing to urge you to support policies that would better protect and welcome newcomers. Refugees are of special humanitarian concern to the United States and are a testament to our nation's long, proud history as a sanctuary for those who seek lives free from violence and oppression. To be admitted to the United States, refugees must demonstrate that they fear persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

My agency, [agency name] helps these refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, clothing, medical attention, education, English-language classes and community orientation. We help refugees integrate quickly into our community. [Describe positive impact refugees have on your community.] The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy that is rooted in communities. I encourage you to stand with our community as we welcome refugees, by:

Co-Sponsoring H.R. 1568 *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act*

The human rights violations perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) have left more than 10 million people in need of humanitarian and protection assistance both within Syria and in surrounding countries. H.R. 1568 was recently introduced by Representatives Vargas (D-CA-51), Rooney (R-FL-17), Conyers (D-MI-13) and Hunter (R-CA-50) to make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program more accessible to persecuted groups in Iraq and Syria, including individuals facing gender-based violence and religious and ethnic minorities fleeing ISIS. The legislation would also open additional processing entities in the region, increase staff for processing refugee applications, and streamline the existing systems for conducting background and security checks. I urge you to co-sponsor and support this legislation.

Supporting Protections for Unaccompanied Children & Families Fleeing Violence in Central America

Legislation such as the H.R. 1149, the "Protection of Children Act" and H.R. 1153, the "Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act" would rollback the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA). The TVPRA passed both chambers of Congress by unanimous consent and was signed into law by President Bush to address our international obligations of not returning vulnerable migrants to danger and to reduce the likelihood that the U.S. would deport children back into the hands of traffickers and others who would exploit them. These children are escaping gang violence, sexual and gender-based violence, forced recruitment, domestic violence, and are often victims of trafficking. I urge you to oppose these bills, and any proposals that would rollback protections for unaccompanied children.

Increasing refugee funding and supporting legislation that will improve the lives of refugees

Refugee resettlement is a highly successful public-private partnership in which federal assistance is augmented by funds raised by communities across the country. Please help increase the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account in the Labor, Health and Human Services bill that funds the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to help refugees integrate in their new communities, as well as the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account in the State Department / Foreign Operations bill that funds the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) to help displaced persons internationally and provide initial assistance for refugees resettled in the United States. In addition, I urge you to co-sponsor and support *The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act*, [HR 1784](#) and *S. 883* and *The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act*, [HR 651](#), soon to be reintroduced from last Congress, which would strengthen the Office of Refugee Resettlement's ability to serve refugees and prepare for new arrivals.

Thank you for your public service and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Regards,
[your signature, affiliation, contact information]

Civic Engagement on World Refugee Day 2015

World Refugee Day is a great time to take one further step towards building welcoming communities that are inclusive and open to refugees, while also strengthening the ties within refugee communities. Integration is a key principle in our work and this special day is an excellent opportunity to support refugees in being further engaged in local and national decisions that impact their lives. Civic Engagement through voter registration and voter education is a critical part of the integration trajectory, and World Refugee Day is a perfect opportunity to register refugees who have recently become naturalized citizens and sign up already registered voters on the early voting list.

What is Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement refers to the ways in which individuals participate in the life of their communities. Many refugees and immigrants are very active in the civic life of their own community, but there is greater need for participation in broader civic institutions, voting, and the process of policy making. This includes voting, understanding policy issues that impact their lives, educating and encouraging other individuals to vote and make their voices heard, and even running for office. Civic engagement helps lift up the voices and power of refugees and immigrants in our communities, thus educating policy makers and building champions across party lines at local, state, and national levels.

Civic engagement is a key component of integration: Voting and participating in civil society are key to the integration process. When immigrants and refugees become naturalized U.S. citizens and exercise their right to vote, they engage in an active process that goes beyond passive citizenship, thus empowering themselves to be full members of their new communities. Even immigrants and refugees who are not yet naturalized, and therefore cannot yet vote, can contribute meaningfully to issues important to their communities. They can do so by educating the public about the benefits that newcomers bring to their communities and helping with voter registration and get-out-the-vote activities.

Civic engagement is part of our mission to build welcoming communities: Refugees, resettlement offices and supportive community members know first-hand the impact that policies have on the lives of refugees and entire communities. It is critical for policy makers to meet refugees and understand both their struggles and the positive contributions that they make in communities. Civic engagement work can also energize volunteers and develop new leaders, as it brings communities together to engage with policy makers to build stronger communities.

Civic engagement work is non-partisan, and does not endorse any candidate or political party: RCUSA members are 501(c)3 organizations that promote non-partisan civic engagement as part of our joint mission to lift up the voices of refugees and build stronger, more welcoming communities. Neither RCUSA nor its member organizations endorse any party or candidate. You should never mention a political party or candidate while registering people to vote.

Voter Registration at Community Events for World Refugee Day

World Refugee Day events are great opportunities to register naturalized citizens to vote. Have volunteers register new voters or distribute voter registration information or early voting cards. World Refugee Day events are also great opportunities for sharing stories about individuals who have not been able to vote in the past, or who are voting for the first time, which is a great way to motivate everyone to register to vote and show up on election day.

Voter Registration Table Checklist

- ✓ Voter registration cards, absentee and early voting ballots, with relevant information on each
- ✓ Clip boards, a visual flow chart on voter registration and sample scripts for volunteers (see next page)
- ✓ [Commitment cards](#) asking people to promise to vote on election day and a volunteer sign-up sheet
- ✓ State voter information from your Election Office, including a map of jurisdictions & polling places
- ✓ Signs: "Register to Vote Here!" & "Voter registration available without regard for the voter's political preference."
- ✓ Tally sheet for reporting your activity at the end of the day

Know Your State Voting Laws: The best resource on your state's voting laws will be your local county election board. There are Voter ID laws in 32 states, which can limit people's access to voting. Each state also has their own early voting policies. It is important to know the laws in your state and communicate them in conversations with new voters. If your State has a voting ID law, make sure you inform people so they can prepare to have the necessary identification when they vote. Use these links to customize information based on your state's requirements:

Voting ID laws by state: www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx

Early & absentee voting by state: www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx

Collaborate locally: Registration forms and early voting applications can be picked up at your local board of elections office. Ask them if there are any rules about non-profits turning in registration cards or early ballot applications once they are filled out by new voters, as some election boards have deadlines or limits on the number of registration forms or applications turned in at once. Work with a local organization dedicated to voter registration so they can enter the information into the Voter Activation Network and follow up to ensure a successful voting experience for new voters.

Hello, I'm out registering people to vote today, my name is _____ with (Organization's name). Voting is one of the most important ways to add our voices to shape community and policy issues that impact our lives. Many refugees and immigrants first register at their naturalization ceremony.

Are you a U.S. citizen - have you had your ceremony yet?

Y
e
s

N
o

While you can't register to vote until you become a U.S. citizen, you can still be engaged. Would you like to sign up to volunteer on and leading up to election day?

Did you register to vote?

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It's simple to register to vote today, you just have to fill out this basic information with your name and address.

(They fill out the form)

Thanks! I will turn this to the Election Board and they will mail you more information.

Would you also like to sign up to volunteer to help get people to the polls on election day? (If so have them sign up on the volunteer sign up sheet)

Have you moved since you last voted? If so, you will have to update your address if you did.

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Sometimes when people register they don't actually make it out to vote, which is why we're asking people to sign up on the early voting / vote by mail list. The percentage of voting is much higher because you can vote from home or go to the polls on the weekend, rather than a workday, since elections are on a Tuesday. Fo you want to sign up for early voting?

Lastly, I would ask you to commit to voting today. One way you can do that is by filling out this commitment card, so that we can follow up with you and remind you to vote as we get closer to the elections?

Have them fill out the registration form with their new address, then move to the last step to the right!

Appendix A: Sample Advocacy Flyer for World Refugee Day

WORLD REFUGEE DAY SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 2015

Today we celebrate refugees' courage in overcoming adversity and the many gifts they bring to our communities. As refugees and friends of refugees, we know the challenges newcomers face and the need for improved policies to help refugees rebuild their lives in the United States. We also stand in solidarity with refugees all over the world who are in dire need of assistance, including more than 10 million Syrians who are internally and externally displaced, and children and families fleeing violence in Central America.



WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE by letting our Members of Congress know that we support protections for refugees and improvements to the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Both Chambers of Congress are considering legislation that would impact the lives of refugees both in the United States and internationally. Please call your Senators and Representatives and urge them to co-sponsor legislation to help Syrian refugees, oppose legislation that would reduce protections for children and families fleeing violence in Central America, and support increases in refugees funding and legislation that will improve the lives of refugees.

Call 1-866-940-2439 or 202-224-3121 to connect with the offices of your Representatives and Senators. Tell the receptionist that you urge their boss to:

Help Syrian refugees: Co-sponsor H.R. 1568, *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act*

- Bipartisan: introduced by Representatives Vargas (D-CA-51), Rooney (R-FL-17), Conyers (D-MI-13), Hunter (R-CA-50)
- Would make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program more accessible to persecuted groups in Iraq and Syria, including individuals facing gender-based violence and religious and ethnic minorities fleeing ISIS.
- Would open additional processing entities in the region, increase staff to process applications, streamline existing systems for background and security checks, expand video interviewing and improve accountability and transparency.

Oppose legislation that would reduce protections for children fleeing violence in Central America

- Oppose bills like H.R.1149, the "Protection of Children Act" and H.R.1153 the "Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act" which would rollback the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPPRA) of 2008.
- The TVPPRA passed both chambers of Congress unanimously and was signed into law by President Bush to reduce the likelihood that the U.S. would deport children back into the hands of traffickers and others who would exploit them.
- These children and families are escaping gang violence, sexual and gender-based violence, forced recruitment, domestic abuse, and trafficking. Current process that allow them to seek protection should not be eroded.

Support increases in refugee funding and legislation that will improve the lives of refugees

- Increase the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account in the Labor, Health and Human Services bill that funds the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to help refugees integrate in their new communities.
- Increase the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account in the State Department / Foreign Operations bill that funds the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) to help displaced persons internationally and provide initial assistance for refugees resettled in the United States.
- Co-sponsor and support *The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act*, [HR 1784](#) and *S. 883* and *The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act*, [HR 651](#), soon to be reintroduced from last Congress, which would strengthen the Office of Refugee Resettlement's ability to serve refugees and prepare for new arrivals.

For questions and more information, contact [ORGANIZATION'S ADVOCACY STAFF]

Appendix B: Advocacy Representatives' Contact Information

Please feel free to contact the following advocacy staff who represent organizations working with refugees:

- Church World Service: Jen Smyers, jsmyers@cwsglobal.org
- Episcopal Migration Ministries: Katie Conway, kconway@episcopalchurch.org
- HIAS: Liza Lieberman, liza.lieberman@hias.org
- International Rescue Committee: Anna Greene, anna.greene@rescue.org
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: Brittney Nystrom, bnystrom@lirs.org
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: Matt Wilch, mwilch@usccb.org
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants: Esmeralda Lopez, elopez@uscrdc.org
- Ethiopian Community Development Council: Susan Kenney-Pfalzer, SKPfalzer@ecdcus.org
- World Relief: Jenny Yang, jgyang@worldrelief.org
- Jesuit Refugee Service/USA: Giulia McPherson, gmcpherson@jesuits.org
- Refugee Council USA: Shaina Ward, sward@rcusa.org

Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015

Sponsored by Representative Juan Vargas (CA -51)
Co-Sponsored by Representative Tom Rooney (FL- 17)

Issue

- The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a transnational Sunni insurgency whose ideological and organizational roots lie in both al Qaeda in Iraq and the Syria-based Jabhat al Nursa. Formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS), it has declared the establishment of a caliphate in areas under its control in both Iraq and Syria.
- On June 29, 2014, the caliphate was established and religious minorities in IS-held territories faced immediate persecution. These targeted acts included being forced from their homes, kidnapping civilians and seizing or demolishing churches and shrines, in a campaign of sectarian intimidation.
- Thousands of Christians fled Mosul and towns in the Nineveh Plains region for the safety of Kurdish-held areas. Yezidis, Shabaks, and Turkoman Shiites were also targeted and killed.
- In early August, the United States helped protect Yezidis who has been trapped on the Sinjar Mountain and were surrounded by armed Islamic State forces. This included dropping humanitarian aid and striking IS targets as they were advancing to the strategically important city of Erbil.

Solution

Establish a process to provide humanitarian relief to those facing persecuting or have a credible fear of being persecuted by ISIL.

Bill Summary

The *Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS* provides certain persecuted nationals or residents of Iraq or Syria Priority 2 processing to allow them to apply directly to the United States Admission Program. These persecuted groups will include religious and ethnic minorities and those facing gender-based violence. Priority 2 processing is for groups of special humanitarian concern identified by the U.S. refugee program, and the threshold for admission will be a well-founded fear of persecution and asserting a credible basis for that concern.

Important Facts

Since January 2014, with the urgent humanitarian crisis that has unfolded in Iraq, an estimated 5.2 million people are in need of humanitarian and protection assistance. Of these, over 2.1 million people are Internally Displaced Persons , more than 1.7 million are in communities that are taking in the displaced (host communities), 1.5 million are in areas under the control of armed groups or impacted by the conflict, and 0.2 million are Syrian refugees.

Contact Information

Rep Vargas: Aaron Allen: (202) 225-8045,
aaron.allen@mail.house.gov

or

Rep. Rooney: Jess Moore: (202) 225- 5792,
jessica.moore@mail.house.gov

Oppose Legislation That Would Roll Back Protections for Unaccompanied Children

Several recently-introduced proposals, such as H.R. 1149, the "Protection of Children Act" and H.R. 1153 the "Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act", would put vulnerable children in harm's way by removing critical protections in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 for children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. These proposals would subject these children instead to the lower, inadequate standard of protection currently used primarily on Mexican children and would dramatically expedite the process by which children are removed through accelerated hearings. These bills would have Customs and Border Protection (CBP) do a cursory screening for persecution and trafficking within 48 hours and then quickly repatriate the children. However, since CBP lacks the necessary training on how to effectively screen children, most children would be immediately sent back to their country of origin without being able to present their case to an immigration judge.

The Northern Triangle of Central America is one of the most violent regions in the world.

The 2014 U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime's Global Study on Homicide, concluded that Honduras is the murder capital of the world, with El Salvador and Guatemala ranked #4 and #5. The Central American children fleeing these countries are escaping sexual violence and forced gang recruitment. Deporting these children could very well mean returning them to further violence, abuse, and even death.

Children would be returned to dangerous situation without proper screening for trafficking.

Many will end up in the hands of traffickers or the gangs from which they fled. These proposals would subject Central American children to a flawed, unfair process that is currently used on Mexican children and has already proven inadequate. With the screening process currently in use for unaccompanied children from Mexico, CBP typically interviews children about persecution or trafficking within 12 hours of apprehension. That's not nearly enough time for a victimized child to be physically and psychologically ready to talk about sensitive traumatic events. Rape, sexual assault and child abuse victims often take weeks, months or longer before they can speak about such crimes. The screening process in place for Mexican unaccompanied children is wholly inadequate for all children, but especially for those children who face high likelihood of violence, exploitation, and even death upon return. These proposals would subject all children to this limited screening by CBP. Also, children cannot be expected to present a claim in mere days, even more so without guarantees of counsel, counseling, and adequate time to recover. Also the stakes are higher as the children have no opportunity to appeal and there remains a lack of appropriate repatriation programs to ensure children's safe return.

Children deserve to tell their story and need a safe space to talk about violence and abuse.

A jail-like Border Patrol station is no place for an interview to happen, especially while they are still recovering from a harrowing journey and are likely hungry, cold, and scared. Victims may be further traumatized when questioned by officials who lack training in sexual assault interviewing techniques and victims' memories of the violence that they suffered might be triggered by the overcrowded conditions that they are being housed in, which will cause additional anxiety, fear and anguish. Border Patrol agents lack the necessary training on child welfare, trauma, abuse, and sexual assault to conduct the appropriate screenings, putting children who may be eligible for relief at risk of falling through the cracks and being returned to dangerous situations. Border Patrol cannot even screen adults properly for fear of return. In 2005, the bipartisan United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) found that Border Patrol was not following proper procedures in screening and referring adults for "credible fear" interviews. DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties is investigating cases in which agents never asked about fear of return in the first place or ignored statements of fear.

Congress should not send children who are turning to us for protection back to danger,

The best interest of the child should be paramount in addressing this humanitarian crisis. Child safety should not be compromised for the sake of expediency. There is no valid reason for treating vulnerable unaccompanied children differently based on their country of origin. But we should ensure that Mexican children are better protected instead of watering down the protection afforded Central Americans.

Adapted from www.aila.org/infonet/proposals-to-roll-back-tvpra-protections-for-uacs

Refugee Council USA

Fiscal Year 2016 Funding Needs for the Refugee and Entrant Assistance Account of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Programs appropriations bill

Items of the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) Account	FY '14 Enacted	FY '15 Enacted	FY '16 OMB Requests	FY '16 RCUSA Recommends
Transitional & Medical Services	\$ 391.477	\$ 383.266	\$ 426.749	\$ 567.000
Social Services	\$ 149.927	\$ 149.927	\$ 149.927	\$ 301.000
Preventive Health	\$ 4.600	\$ 4.600	\$ 4.600	\$ 10.000
Targeted Assistance	\$ 47.601	\$ 47.601	\$ 47.601	\$ 65.300
Replenishment of Reprogrammed Funds				\$ 66.500
Subtotal – Resettlement Activities	\$ 593.605	\$ 585.388	\$ 628.877	\$1,009.800
Foreign-Born Trafficking Victims	\$ 12.000	\$ 13.000	\$ 13.000	\$ 17.500
Domestic Trafficking Victims	\$ 1.755	\$ 2.755	\$ 9.000	\$ 9.000
Torture Victims	\$ 10.735	\$ 10.735	\$ 10.735	\$ 16.000
Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC)				
Base UAC Funding	\$ 911.848	\$ 948.000	\$ 948.000	\$ 948.000
Contingency Fund			\$ 19.000	\$ 100.000
UAC Triggers (not included in the totals)			\$ 400.000	\$ 400.000
Total –All REA Activities	\$1,529.943	\$1,559.884	\$1,628.612	\$2,100.300

Millions of Dollars

The Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) Account is funded as part of the appropriations for Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Programs (LHHS). It is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which is an office within the Department's Administration for Children and Families (ACF). ORR was originally established to assist refugees resettled by the United States to obtain self-sufficiency. However, over the past three decades its mandate has grown and the populations it serves have become more varied, their needs more complex, and their numbers have become more difficult to predict. Today, the account has four major components: resettlement-related activities for refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian Entrants, Iraqi and Afghan recipients of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs); assistance to foreign-born trafficking victims living in the United States; assistance to torture victims living in the United States; and activities relating to the care and placement of unaccompanied alien children (UACs) who are encountered in the United States or apprehended at the U.S. border with Mexico.

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to protecting and assisting refugees, recommends that in order to fund the Administration's proposed level of refugee admissions for fiscal year 2016, Congress appropriate \$2.101 billion for the ORR in fiscal year 2016, including \$1.010 billion for its resettlement activities, \$17.5 million for assistance to foreign-born trafficking victims, \$16 million for torture survivor assistance, and \$948 million for the care and placement of unaccompanied alien children. RCUSA also supports \$100 million in funding for a contingency fund so that unanticipated needs can be met, including needs arising from sudden, unanticipated arrivals of unaccompanied alien children. And it supports replenishing \$66.5 million in funding that was reprogrammed from ORR's resettlement activities in fiscal year 2012, a reprogramming that has had a continuing destabilizing effect on the operations that ORR administers.

RCUSA believes that in order to accommodate the Administration's recommended admission level of 75,000 refugees as well as other entrants who now receive ORR's resettlement services, Congress should appropriate \$1.010 billion for such ORR activities. Such robust funding in fiscal year 2016 would allow refugees to be prepared for life in the United States and would help prepare communities to welcome them. It would increase the United States' national resettlement capacity and maintain its standing as the world leader in refugee resettlement. It would also allow ORR to assure vital services and protections for the other vulnerable populations under its care.

While separately listing replenishment for explanation purposes, RCUSA recommends achieving replenishment in FY2016 by adding the lost amounts back to the impacted line items, that is, \$38.2 million to Social Services and \$28.2 million to Targeted Assistance.

¹The Administration requested "trigger funds" for FY2016 in the event of higher numbers of arrivals of unaccompanied children.

Refugee Council USA

Fiscal Year 2016 Funding Needs for Refugees and Displaced Persons Pursuant to Certain Accounts of Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPs)

Account	FY14 Enacted	FY15 Enacted	FY16 OMB	FY16 RCUSA
MRA	\$ 3,059	\$3,059	\$2,454	\$3,300
ERMA	\$ 50	\$ 50	\$ 50	\$ 100
IDA	\$ 1,801	\$ 1,895	\$1,741	\$2,500

Millions of Dollars

In 2015, the number of forcibly displaced persons around the world exceeds 51 million, including some 13 million refugees who lack access to the most basic necessities of life, including food, clean water, safe shelter, health care, education, and protection from conflict, war, and violence. U.S. funding ensures that their basic human needs are met while they are displaced, supports permanent solutions to their displacement, and supports the countries hosting them. The United States thereby helps to relieve pressures that not only have the potential to destabilize regions but that also threaten global stability and security. For refugees, U.S. funding also supports the pursuit of the three durable solutions to refugee situations: voluntary repatriation back to their home countries, integration in host countries of asylum, and third-country resettlement, when the first two solutions are not viable.

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) is a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to protecting and assisting refugees and other forcibly displaced people. RCUSA recommends that Congress ensures that the United States does its part to protect these at-risk persons and relieve geopolitical tensions resulting from their flight and displacement in fiscal year 2016 by appropriating \$3.3 billion for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account, \$100 million for the Department's Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account, and \$2.5 billion for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). RCUSA further recommends that Congress support the admission of 100,000 refugees into the United States in fiscal year 2016, including at least 25,000 Syrian refugees and 1,440 unaccompanied refugee children.

Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA): The MRA Account is administered by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (DOS/PRM). The account has two major components: Overseas Refugee Assistance, which provides life-sustaining assistance to refugees and displaced persons, many of whom are residing in countries of asylum; and Refugee Admissions, which funds activities that result in the admission of refugees to the United States. As of January 2015, the Syria crisis alone has produced over 3.8 million Syrian refugees and 7.6 million internally displaced persons. In addition, there continue to be multiple, complex humanitarian emergencies in several countries including Iraq, South Sudan, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, Afghanistan, Somalia and Colombia. Meanwhile, a refugee and child protection emergency persists for many children and families in the Northern Triangle of Central America. Domestically, MRA funding also helps to cover the third durable solution, resettlement to the United States. Providing safe haven and welcoming communities for refugees who cannot return home and for whom integration in their country of asylum is not possible have been important features of U.S. humanitarian policy to which other governments look for leadership. The United States admits refugees (including unaccompanied refugee minors), asylum seekers, and Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients through the U.S. Resettlement Program. President Obama set the refugee admissions goal for fiscal year 2015 at 70,000.

Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA): ERMA provides an important "safety valve" during emergencies, allowing the U.S. Government to meet rapidly-occurring, unforeseen needs. RCUSA recommends \$100 million in ERMA funding for fiscal year 2016.

International Disaster Assistance (IDA): The IDA account funds humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons. Significantly greater funding is required to respond to the growing needs of the growing numbers of persons internally displaced by conflict and natural disasters, particularly the growing numbers inside Syria and Iraq. RCUSA recommends \$2.5 billion for IDA for fiscal year 2016 to meet these needs.

RCUSA's recommended MRA, ERMA, and IDA figures, and its requests regarding the PD, ERMA cap increase, and new ERMA draw-down authority match InterAction's.

Syria Regional Response, UNHCR, updated January 25, 2015; <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [accessed January 25, 2015].

THE DOMESTIC REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT REFORM AND MODERNIZATION ACT H.R. 1784 AND S. 883

INTRODUCED IN THE 113TH CONGRESS BY
REPRESENTATIVES GARY C. PETERS (MI-14-R) AND STEVE STIVERS (OH-15-R)
SENATORS DEBBIE STABENOW (D-MI), SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME) AND ANGUS KING (I-ME)

Section 1: Short title

Section 2: Findings

Section 3: Definitions

Section 4: Effective Date - this Act shall take effect on the date that is 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

Section 5: Directs GAO to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the domestic refugee resettlement program operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The study will analyze issues pertaining to the definition of self sufficiency, the effectiveness of ORR in helping refugees to attain self-sufficiency, the unmet needs of the program, the role of community-based organizations, and statutory recommendations.

Section 6: Elevates the Office of Refugee Resettlement within HHS. The position of Director of ORR will elevate the position Assistant Secretary for Refugee and Asylee Resettlement. The Assistant Secretary shall be appointed by the President.

Section 7: Revises the formula for social services funding allocated to states to include projections of future refugee arrivals, as well as refugee data from prior years. Requires an annual report on secondary migration and its impact on states.

Section 8: Expands and improves data collection and reporting within ORR with regards to the mental health needs of refugees, housing needs, and long term employment and self-sufficiency data.