

Toolkit for Local Congressional Visits: Increasing Resources for Refugee Protection & Resettlement November 2015

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The Need to Meet with Members of Congress about Refugee Funding

Global Context & The Need for Advocacy

60 million people are displaced globally, the highest numbers since World War II. The Syrian conflict alone has left nearly 8 million Syrians internally displaced and more than 4 million Syrian refugees seeking safety in the region and in Europe. While resettlement is not the solution to the conflict, it is critical that all countries welcome refugees and support Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and other countries that are hosting millions of refugees. Many policy makers do not understand the need for refugee protection, how the resettlement process works, or the contributions refugees bring to our communities.

Increased Funds are Needed to Protect Refugees Internationally and Resettle Refugees in the U.S.

President Obama recently announced that the United States will resettle 85,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2016 and 100,000 in Fiscal Year 2017, slight increases from the 70,000 refugees resettlement in Fiscal Year 2015. While an improvement, this is a proportionally small increase in the context of the global need, and so we continue to call for the United States to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to the 85,000 admissions number in 2016. In the meantime, it is critical that even this relatively small increase in refugee admissions is met with increased international assistance and adequate funds to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate as they rebuild their lives. The Office of Refugee Resettlement in particular has been drastically underfunded for years, and an infusion of resources is needed to meet both the increase in refugee admissions and the need for each refugee to be adequately welcomed and provided the opportunity to succeed in their new communities.

Window of Opportunity: Now until December 11th

Congress must pass an appropriations bill to fund all government agencies by December 11th, so now is a perfect time to let your Senators and Representatives know that you care about displaced people overseas and refugees resettled in the United States. Currently, government agencies are being funded at the same levels as last year, but this is not an option for refugee related accounts, as last year's budget only accounted for the admission of 70,000 refugees. President Obama's Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations request was announced in February 2015, calculated to admit 75,000 refugees. Now, as we prepare for 85,000 refugees to be resettled in the United States this fiscal year, it is critical that refugee related accounts are increased in order to assist, process and help resettle refugees. It is time to act with historic leadership and compassion and stand with those seeking safety and the opportunity to build a new life.

Anti-Refugee Sentiment

Utilizing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment, individuals who oppose refugee resettlement are making their voices heard louder and more frequently to policy makers. Groups like Refugee Resettlement Watch and similar groups are calling for an end to resettlement altogether, moratoriums on arrivals, and fostering unwelcoming atmospheres for newcomers. It is critical that policy makers learn about the importance of resettlement from both refugees themselves and from supportive community members, so they can support positive legislation and oppose proposals that would harm refugees or otherwise undo our strong heritage of providing welcome.

Positive Reforms to help Refugees and Communities

There are positive pieces of legislation that have been introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that would improve the U.S. refugee resettlement program. These bills are detailed on page 9 of this toolkit, and would help refugees reunite with family members, integrate and succeed in their new lives. Many of these bills have had bipartisan support, but can only pass if more Members of Congress are knowledgeable about resettlement and held accountable by constituents calling for change.

The power of advocacy

Your story as a refugee, staff member, or supporter of refugee resettlement is your most important qualification as an advocate! Talk about the way your community welcomes refugees, the reasons refugees need more assistance, and the positive contributions refugees make to your community. Each resettlement office represents thousands, of refugees, staff, and supportive community members who are constituents of Members of Congress who regularly make policy decisions that impact refugees. When policy makers know that their constituents care about refugees, they will vote for increased funding for refugee protection and resettlement and policies that help refugees.

Meet with your Senators and Representatives

Most Members of Congress will be in their states and local offices between November 9-13 and November 20-29. This is a great opportunity to meet with them and their staff to meet with them and encourage them to support increased funding for refugee protection and resettlement. Calendars of in-district time: majorityleader.gov/Calendar & www.senate.gov/legislative/resources/pdf/2015_calendar.pdf.

Steps to Prepare and Organize Your Meeting:

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. Meet to discuss current relationships with policy makers, goals and ideas, and to plan for a successful meeting.

2. Learn about your Members of Congress: Is your Member of Congress on the Senate or House Appropriations Committees? Check at appropriations.senate.gov and appropriations.house.gov. These committees make decisions about funding levels for refugee accounts, specifically the subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services; State Department / Foreign Operations; and Homeland Security. If your Members of Congress don't sit on an appropriations committee, they can still write letters and urge appropriators to increase funding for refugee protection and resettlement.

3. 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 issues. 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* - It will be helpful to bring the refugee funding handouts found on pages 5 and 7 to the meeting, and to have one person cover funding for ORR and one person cover funding for PRM. Someone else may want to cover the positive legislation as well.
- *The Ask* is the critical part when you ask "Will you be a champion for refugees funding as congress works to pass an appropriations bill by December 11th?" Listen carefully and ask for clarification if their response is vague.

Suggested Leave-Behind Documents: It will be helpful to bring the refugee funding handouts found on pages 5 and 7. Additional handouts with information on refugees by state can be found at www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/RCUSA%20State%20Profiles%20-%20updated%205.30.14.pdf. Contact your organization's advocacy staff (see last page) for other timely materials.

4. Debrief: It's important to 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? Share your reflections with your organization's advocacy staff (see last page).

5. Follow-up: Make sure to send a thank you email to the staff after the meeting with any information they asked for and 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!

Call Congress: Urge Them to Help & Welcome Refugees

Background: As we grapple with increasingly heartbreaking reports of Syrian refugees seeking safety in the region and in Europe, coupled with the over 60 million people displaced worldwide, it is clear that the United States must respond with leadership. President Obama recently announced that the United States will resettle 85,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2016 and 100,000 in Fiscal Year 2017, slight increases from the 70,000 refugees resettlement in Fiscal Year 2015. It is critical that even this relatively small increase in refugee admissions is met with increased international assistance and adequate funds to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate as they rebuild their lives.

Congress must pass an appropriations bill to fund all government agencies by December 11th, so now is a perfect time to let your Senators and Representatives know that you care about displaced people overseas and refugees resettled in the United States. It is time to act with historic leadership and compassion and stand with those seeking safety and the opportunity to build a new life.

Take Action TODAY: Call 1-866-940-2439 to be connected with your Senators' and Representative's offices.

Call your Senators & Representative TODAY and every day until Congress passes a bill.

- Urge your Senators to co-sponsor S. 2145, *The Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act* introduced by Senators Graham (R-SC) and Leahy (D-VT).
- Urge your Representatives to sign onto a Dear Colleague Letter on refugee funding led by Representative Vargas (CA-) and Representative (-).

Here's a sample of what to tell your Senator's staff when you call:

- Senate: *"I'm a constituent from [City/State] and I urge the Senator to CO-SPONSOR S.2145, the Graham-Leahy supplemental to provide vital help for Syrian refugees abroad and ensure that refugees resettled in the U.S. have initial assistance to rebuild their lives."*
- House: *"I'm a constituent from [City/State] and I urge the Representative to SIGN the Dear Colleague letter led by Representatives Vargas and () calling for increased funding for refugee assistance, processing and resettlement."*

You can also tweet your [Members of Congress](#) and your network by clicking the button below.

“@SENATOR, show that #AmericaWelcomes and support funding for #refugees! Our community is ready to welcome. #RefugeesWelcome”

“@REPRESENTATIVE, show that #AmericaWelcomes and support funding to help & resettle #refugees! Our district is ready to welcome. #RefugeesWelcome”

Follow [@RCUSA_DC](#) on Twitter and “like” [Refugee Council USA](#) on Facebook for up-to-date alerts.

Call-in recording reads: *Thank you for urging Congress to support increased assistance for refugee assistance internationally and resettlement in the U.S. Both the Graham-Leahy supplemental in the Senate, and a Dear Colleague letter in the House of Representatives, would help increase funds for refugee assistance, processing and resettlement. Congress must pass an appropriations bill to fund all government agencies by December 11th, so now is a perfect time to make your voice heard. When you call, tell the receptionist your City and State, and that as a constituent you support an increase in funding for refugee assistance and resettlement. You will now be connected to your Member of Congress's office. Please call this line 3 times to be connected with your Representative and two Senators. Please call every day until Congress passes an appropriations bill. For resources on these issues, go to www.rcusa.org. Thank you again!*

Sample Letter to Send to your Members of Congress

[Date]

The Honorable [full name of Senator/Representative] (find the following information on their website)
[room number] [name of congressional office building]
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

As your constituent, I urge you to support increased funding for refugee protection internationally and refugee resettlement in the United States. Sixty million people are displaced globally, the highest number since World War II. The Syrian conflict alone has left nearly 8 million Syrians internally displaced and more than 4 million Syrian refugees seeking safety in the region and in Europe. As Congress works to pass an appropriations bill before December 11th, it is critical that the United States demonstrate leadership by increasing international humanitarian assistance and ensuring that refugees resettled in the United States receive the welcome they need to thrive in their new communities.

Refugees are of special humanitarian concern to the United States and are a testament to our nation's long, proud history as a beacon of hope. 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, and must undergo rigorous security screenings, including biometric checks and interviews with specialized and well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a private / public partnership that is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy.

[Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community.]

President Obama recently announced that the United States will resettle 85,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2016 and 100,000 in Fiscal Year 2017, slight increases from the 70,000 refugees resettlement in Fiscal Year 2015. It is critical that this increase in refugee admissions is met with adequate funds to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate as they rebuild their lives. I urge you to stand with our community as we welcome refugees, by increasing funds for the following accounts:

Labor / Health and Human Services

Refugee and Entrant Assistance: \$2.44 billion to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate and thrive as they rebuild their lives.

State Department / Foreign Operations

Migration and Refugee Assistance: \$3.6 billion to assist refugees abroad and identify, process and provide initial integration assistance to refugees resettled in the United States.

Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance: \$250 million to enhance the United States' ability to respond quickly and effectively to unanticipated crises, such as those in and around Syria.

International Disaster Assistance: \$2.3 billion to respond to the growing numbers of persons internally displaced, particularly in Syria and Iraq.

Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: In addition to fees, \$49.6 million is needed for the Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate to screen refugees for resettlement to the United States.

I urge you to support increased funding for these accounts, and to meet with refugees next time you are in your home office. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me if you have any questions.

With Appreciation,
[your signature and contact information]

Change the dialogue and push for change through social media

Social media is a great way to spread the word about these issues and to get your friends, family, and other community members involved. Using popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we encourage you to post information and pictures of events utilizing the signs found at americawelcomes.us and using #RefugeesWelcome.

You can find your Senators' and Representatives' Twitter handles on their websites, or at twitter.com/cspan/lists/members-of-congress/members. See below for sample posts.

Sample posts:

“.@REPNAME stand with #refugee communities - up funds for refugee protection & resettlement!”

“#Refugees bring unique experiences, talents, and skills to our communities. @REPNAME, help protect & resettle #refugees! #WelcomeWorld”

“The US can do more to resettle & protect #refugees. Tell your Representative/Senator to increase funds for #refugee protection & resettlement! #WelcomeWorld (link to action alert)”

“#Refugees are some of the most resilient people in our community. @REPNAME, increase funds to help #refugees integrate in our communities!”

“.@REPNAME - help protect Syrian and Iraqi #refugees facing persecution. Cosponsor H.R. 1568!”

There is also already an incredible awareness on social media around refugee issues. Starting in September 2015, many international campaigns were launched to urge communities around the world to welcome refugees. Building off of those existing campaigns will allow us to connect with an already engaged audience, also providing us with an established platform to issue new talking points, news clips, events, and social media graphics to further our message. Existing social media campaigns and hashtags include:

- #RefugeesWelcome
- #OpentoSyria
- #WelcomeWorld
- #refugeecrisis

In addition to utilizing existing social media campaigns and hashtags, creating a unique hashtag for our campaign will allow us to engage a new audience and track how many people are engaged online with our campaign specifically. Suggested unique hashtags for our campaign are:

- #United4Refugees
- #Together4Refugees/TogetherforRefugees
- #WorkingtoWelcome

Through the use of both unique and existing hashtags, our campaign can engage and mobilize both existing and new community partners. Additionally, providing a unique hashtag will provide members of the media to track our campaign's online presence.

Refugee Council USA

FY2016 Funding Needs for The Office of Refugee Resettlement, Pursuant to The Refugee and Entrant Assistance Account of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Programs

The REA Account is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), an office within the Department's Administration for Children and Families. While ORR was originally established to assist refugees resettled in the United States, 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 more difficult to predict. Today, the account has four major components: resettlement activities for refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian Entrants, Iraqi and Afghan recipients of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs); assistance to trafficking victims living in the United States; assistance to torture victims living in the United States; and care and placement of unaccompanied children (UCs).

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to protecting and assisting refugees and other forcibly displaced people, applauds the Obama Administration for increasing refugee admissions to 85,000 in FY2016 and 100,000 in FY2017, up from 70,000 last year. While this is a proportionally small increase in the context of the global need and the robust responses of other countries, it is critical that this increase is met with adequate funding to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate and thrive as they rebuild their lives.

To adequately fund services for all populations in ORR's care, FY16, RCUSA recommends that Congress appropriate \$2.44 billion. This includes supporting states by replenishing \$66.5 million in funding that was reprogrammed from ORR's resettlement activities in FY2012 and has had a continued destabilizing effect on state budget operations. RCUSA also supports \$100 million in funding for a contingency fund so that unforeseen needs can be met without having to reprogram funds in the future. RCUSA further recommends that the Administration admit 100,000 Syrian refugees in FY16, in addition to the current Presidential Determination, and that Congress support this increase by appropriating \$1.548 billion in addition to the \$2.44 billion, as enumerated in the chart below.

Program Areas / Lines	FY14 Enacted	FY15 Enacted	FY16 OMB (75,000 PD)	FY16 RCUSA Recommends (85,000 PD)	FY17 RCUSA Recommends (100,000 PD)
Transitional & Medical Services	\$391.48	\$383.27	\$426.75	\$843.45	\$992.30
Social Services	\$149.93	\$149.93	\$149.93	\$342.30	\$402.70
Preventive Health	\$4.60	\$4.60	\$4.60	\$11.31	\$13.30
Targeted Assistance	\$47.60	\$47.60	\$47.60	\$73.27	\$86.20
Replenishment of Reprogrammed Funds ¹				\$66.50	\$66.50
Subtotal – Resettlement Services	\$593.61	\$585.39	\$628.88	\$1,336.82	\$1,561.00
Foreign-Born Trafficking Victims	\$12.00	\$13.00	\$13.00	\$19.81	\$23.30
Domestic Trafficking Victims	\$1.76	\$2.76	\$9.00	\$9.00	\$9.00
Torture Victims	\$10.74	\$10.74	\$10.74	\$25.70	\$30.02
Unaccompanied Children (UC)	\$911.85	\$948.00	\$948.00	\$948.00	\$948.00
ORR Contingency Fund ²			\$19.00	\$100.00	\$100.00
Total –All REA Activities	\$1,529.94	\$1,559.88	\$1,628.61	\$2,439.33	\$2,671.32

Numbers in Millions of Dollars

Populations Served: ORR served over 195,000 newly arrived vulnerable individuals in FY2014. This includes 69,987 resettled refugees; 10,239 Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrants; 57,496 unaccompanied children from Central America; 28,000 Cuban and Haitian entrants; 29,200 asylees; 749 trafficking victims; and 6,000 torture survivors. Services are provided for up to five years from the date of arrival for most of these groups so ORR also continues to serve vulnerable individuals who arrived in recent years. Unfortunately, ORR's budget has not kept pace with its growing mandate, nor the cost of living. From FY2006 to FY2015, the number of individuals receiving resettlement services increased by over 100% but funding for resettlement services increased by only 30%, not even taking into account cost of living adjustments. Additional federal funds are needed for this public private partnership to work for refugees and the communities that welcome them.

¹ 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.

² The Administration requested "trigger funds" for FY2016 in the event of high numbers of arrivals of unaccompanied children. The \$19 million contingency line item would function like an insurance "premium" for ORR that would allow ORR to draw down up to \$400 million from overall federal contingency funds, if needed, to meet the needs of unaccompanied children, thus preventing reprogramming from funds that serve other populations in ORR's care.

CRITICAL OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SERVICE AREAS IN FY2016

- **Matching Grant Program:** The Matching Grant Program within TAMS is successful in helping refugees achieve self-sufficiency. It enables refugees and other eligible individuals to become self-sufficient without resorting to federal or state assistance programs. The program leverages public funds with private donations at a 2:1 ratio, requiring nongovernmental agencies to match federal government contributions. A funding level of \$180 million for Matching Grant would increase the number of slots in the successful program to 60,000 and increase the per capita grant to \$3,000 per eligible person, thereby helping newcomers find and keep jobs in a difficult economy. RCUSA views the Administration's recommended 10,000-slot increase for the Matching Grant Program and \$43 million increase in TAMS as positive steps.
- **Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM):** The URM program serves resettled refugee children. Also about 1% of children who arrive on their own qualify for the URM program as asylees, survivors of human trafficking, or recipients of Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Increased referrals to the program from both sources have outpaced funded capacity, so ORR cannot place all eligible children. This trend will likely continue in FY16 as many unaccompanied Congolese, Eritrean, Burmese, Afghan, Syrian and Iraqi children are expected to be resettled and many Central American children are expected to arrive on their own. Given the growing need, RCUSA recommends \$137.5 million for URM for FY2016.
- **Unaccompanied Children (UC):** RCUSA encourages a funding level of \$948 million in FY2016 to help ensure holistic, child-centered care for unaccompanied children, including proper shelter and care in the best interest of the child while in ORR custody. As the time in ORR custody decreases, it will also be important to increase community-based post-release services to ensure safe care and placement. RCUSA notes with approval ORR's recent creation of the Legal Representation Program to help ensure children released from ORR custody and care are represented in immigration proceedings. We also support the Administration's \$400 million dollars in available "trigger" funding, if necessary, to respond to higher UC arrivals without reprogramming from services for other populations under ORR's care.
- **Intensive Case Management:** The U.S. refugee program resettles refugees who are in urgent need of protection due to vulnerabilities, such as, women heads of households, victims of torture, refugees with disabilities, and refugees from protracted refugee situations. Such refugees need further support toward integration and self-sufficiency. A funding increase of \$18.5 million for critical case management programs would build on the \$13 million now available for this purpose through the Preferred Communities Program in Social Services.
- **Preventive Health:** While needs for medical and mental health services have increased, funding for these services has been stagnant for more than a decade. \$11.31 million for Preventive Health will help victims of trauma and refugees with chronic illnesses or disabilities, as well as those who have had little or no access to medicine, receive needed services.
- **Employment Services:** By adding \$17.05 million to employment services within Targeted Assistance, educated and professional refugees could receive critical training, recertification and accreditation assistance, and job placement. These funds would benefit local businesses and communities, increase refugee employment rates.
- **Victims of Trafficking:** More funding is needed to increase education and prevention for at-risk groups, provide services to the increasing number of trafficking victims being identified, and extend service periods to allow victims time to recover and attain self-sufficiency. A funding level of \$19.81 million for foreign-born trafficking victims and \$9 million for domestic victims will enable vital education and prevention for at-risk communities and access to comprehensive and specialized services for victims.
- **Victims of Torture:** Funding for torture rehabilitation has remained static for many years, resulting in a demand for services that exceeds resources and is even leading to programs closing or scaling back services. The Torture Victims Relief Act (TVRA) authorizes up to \$25 million for domestic programs. A funding level of \$25.7 million in FY2016 would allow for the much needed expansion of services at current and new sites. Many already resettled or soon to arrive refugees are torture survivors, including many refugees from Burma and also Congolese, Iraqis, and Syrians.

IMPROVED FISCAL STABILITY: Over the last few years, reprogramming has had destabilizing impacts on vulnerable populations in ORR's care. RCUSA recommends that Congress improve ORR's fiscal stability by:

- **Replenishing Reprogrammed Funds:** In FY2012, ORR reprogrammed \$115 million from refugee resettlement services to serve unaccompanied children. While the Transitional & Medical Services account was replenished months later, the Social Services and Targeted Assistance programs were not, and the impact is still being felt. Grant cycles continue to be out of sync at the state level and program capacity within a given year remains uncertain. To correct this, RCUSA recommends restoring the \$66.5 million lost in FY2012 with \$38.3 million to Social Services and \$28.2 million to Targeted Assistance.
- **Creating a Contingency Fund:** ORR notified Congress on June 20, 2014, that it would reprogram \$94 million from resettlement services to serve unaccompanied children. While the funds were restored in late September 2014, this, combined with the FY2012 reprogramming demonstrates that ORR and the vulnerable populations that it serves need stronger financial footing. RCUSA urges Congress to appropriate \$100 million in FY2016 for a contingency fund that ORR can utilize to meet unforeseen needs. As envisioned by RCUSA, this contingency fund would operate in a manner similar to the Department of State's Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account, serving as a vital "safety valve" to allow ORR to maintain critical services for all within its care during unforeseen circumstances.

Refugee Council USA

FY2016 Funding Needs for Refugees and Displaced Persons Pursuant to Certain Accounts of Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPs)

More than 60 million people are displaced today, the largest number in recorded history. The plights of more than 4 million Syrian refugees and 8 million internally displaced Syrians have increased public attention to the global crisis. Additional funds are needed both to help refugees and displaced persons abroad, as well as to support increased resettlement of refugees in the United States.

Forcibly displaced people are at great risk since they lack access to even the most basic necessities of life, including food and nutrition, clean water, safe shelter, health care, education, and protection from conflict, war, and violence, including gender-based violence. Refugee hosting countries require support to meet these urgent needs and to relieve pressures that have the potential to destabilize regions and threaten global security. U.S. funding supports the pursuit of three durable solutions to refugee situations: voluntary repatriation back to their home countries if it can be done in safely and with dignity, integration in host countries of asylum, and third-country resettlement, when the first two solutions are not viable.

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to protecting and assisting refugees and other forcibly displaced people, applauds the Obama Administration for increasing refugee admissions to 85,000 in FY2016 and 100,000 in FY2017, up from 70,000 last fiscal year. While this is a proportionally small increase in the context of the global need and the robust responses of other countries, it is critical that this increase is met with adequate funding to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate and thrive.

Account	FY2014 Enacted (70,000 PD)	FY2015 Enacted (70,000 PD)	FY2016 OMB (75,000 PD)	FY2016 RCUSA (85,000 PD)	FY2017 RCUSA (100,000 PD)
Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA)	\$ 3,059	\$ 3,059	\$ 2,455 <i>Including \$819 OCO</i>	\$ 3,603	\$ 3,724
Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA)	\$ 50	\$ 50	\$ 50	\$ 250	\$ 250
International Disaster Account (IDA)	\$ 1,801	\$ 1,895	\$ 1,741 <i>Including \$810 OCO</i>	\$ 2,418	\$ 2,700

Numbers in Millions of Dollars

RCUSA recommends that in FY2016, Congress appropriate \$3.603 billion for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account and \$2.42 billion for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We also recommend that Congress increase ERMA's authorization and funding from \$100 million to \$250 million and authorize the Secretary of State to be able to approve the draw-down of ERMA funds.

RCUSA further recommends that the Administration admit 100,000 Syrian refugees in FY16, in addition to the Presidential Determination, and that Congress support this increase by appropriating \$806 million for the MRA account in addition to the \$3.603 billion.

MIGRATION AND REFUGEE ASSISTANCE (MRA): The MRA account is administered by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (DOS/PRM) and 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 and the initial reception and placement of refugees in the United States.

Overseas Refugee Assistance: U.S. Overseas Refugee Assistance helps maintain humane, stable conditions for refugees and for host communities during the interim period until a refugee crisis can be resolved. It also covers some costs related to refugees' pursuit of durable, permanent solutions to their displacement. Increased support is needed to help the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other U.N. bodies, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations provide essential aid and services. Worldwide, host countries are straining to respond to this dramatic growth of forced displacement, making U.S. leadership more crucial than ever. The Syrian crisis alone has produced over 4 million Syrian refugees and 8 million internally displaced persons, with more than 5.5 million children affected. The Syrian conflict has further expanded into Iraq where there are some 3.2 million internally displaced Iraqis.

Meanwhile, a refugee and child protection emergency persists in the Northern Triangle of Central America. RCUSA urges that increased U.S. funding to Central America in FY2017 address the protection needs of at-risk children and families, address the root causes for their forced migration, and strengthen international protection in the region. In addition, there are continuing, complex humanitarian emergencies in several countries including South Sudan, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burma. Longstanding humanitarian crises also persist in Afghanistan, Somalia and Colombia that continue to cause internal displacement and greatly impact neighboring refugee host countries.

Refugee Admissions: Resettlement is the last resort for refugees who cannot return home and for whom integration in their country of asylum is not possible. Less than one percent of refugees will have the opportunity to be resettled. The United States is one of 28 resettlement countries, and implements resettlement through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). This includes overseas refugee processing and initial reception and placement assistance in local U.S. communities. The United States admits refugees, unaccompanied refugee minors, and Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients through the USRAP, with initial resettlement services partly provided by MRA and partly by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The United States must demonstrate leadership by increasing refugee admissions, reducing lengthy processing times, and expanding capacity to ensure vulnerable populations are provided the critical services they need to rebuild their lives. Among the most vulnerable refugees are unaccompanied refugee minors, survivors of torture, and victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence. Resettlement is an important part of U.S. foreign policy, as the United States encourages other countries to strengthen their commitments to refugee protection.

EMERGENCY REFUGEE AND MIGRATION ASSISTANCE (ERMA): Escalating violence and instability in many parts of the world have placed increasing demands on ERMA, an emergency draw-down account that provides an important "safety valve" during emergencies and allows the U.S. to meet rapidly-occurring, unforeseen needs. The ERMA ceiling, now \$100 million, has not been increased since the mid-1990s. RCUSA recommends increasing the ceiling to \$250 million, a request previously made by the Administration. Funding ERMA at this level will enhance our country's ability to respond quickly and effectively to unanticipated crises. In addition, the Secretary of State should have authority to certify ERMA draw-downs, rather than the current, cumbersome process that requires presidential certification.

INTERNATIONAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE (IDA): In addition to assistance to help the internally displaced and those impacted by natural disasters, the IDA account funds cash-based emergency food assistance for critical voucher programs, local and regional purchase of food, and related cash-based emergency assistance efforts that assist internally displaced persons. Increased funding is required to respond to the growing numbers of persons internally displaced by conflict and natural disasters, particularly in Syria and Iraq. RCUSA's \$2.42 billion recommendation, would amount to a stronger commitment to funding for education in emergencies, prevention of violence against women and girls, and emergency food assistance.

Current Legislation That Would Impact Refugees

SUPPORT The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act, [H.R. 1568](#)

This legislation, sponsored by Representatives Vargas (D-CA-51) and Rooney (R-FL-17), would make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program more accessible to persecuted individuals in Iraq and Syria, including those facing gender-based violence and religious and ethnic minorities fleeing ISIS. The bill would also open additional processing entities in the region, increase staff for processing refugee applications, expand the use of video interviewing, and streamline the existing systems for conducting security checks.

SUPPORT The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform & Modernization Act, [S.1615](#) & [H.R. 2839](#)

This bill, introduced by Senator Stabenow (D-MI) and Representative Pascrell (NJ- 9) would help both refugees and the U.S. communities that welcome them. This legislation would increase data collection on secondary migration as a first step to address these issues. The bill would also revise the formula for social services funding so that each state would receive funds based on the number of refugees who have already arrived as well as those projected to arrive the upcoming year. It would elevate the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services to empower the office to direct resources more effectively and increase inter-agency communication. The bill would also improve ORR's data collection regarding refugees' housing, mental health and employment needs.

SUPPORT The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act, [H.R. 2798](#)

This legislation, introduced by Representative Ellison (MN-5) would allow refugees resettled in the United States to arrive with a green card instead of having to wait a year to even apply, thus expediting integration. The bill would also extend refugees' access to assistance from eight to twelve months and extend case management services for refugees who are particularly vulnerable. The bill would expand access to pre-arrival English classes, which have been shown to expedite integration, and would reunite separated families and expedite refugee security checks. It would also assist refugees with housing, employment training and recertification, transportation, child care and mental health services. H.R.2798 would establish an emergency fund to help communities meet the needs of refugees in unforeseen circumstances. The bill would also help children who are victims of serious crimes and would prevent the elderly and disabled from having their vital assistance expire.

OPPOSE The Resettlement Accountability National Security Act, [H.R. 3314](#)

This anti-refugee bill sponsored by Representative Babin (TX-36) would completely stop the U.S. refugee resettlement program until both the House and Senate pass a joint resolution to re-establish it. It also calls for a study on how many refugees use various federal benefits and for what duration of time, how many refugees pay taxes during their first year in the United States, and various costs associated with programs utilized by refugees.

OPPOSE The Refugee Resettlement Oversight and Security Act, [H.R. 3573](#)

This anti-refugee bill, sponsored by Representative McCaul (TX-10), would place the entire USRAP on hold, or stop it altogether, if the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives could not pass a joint resolution on refugee resettlement every year. Congressional inaction or delay would literally have life or death consequences: the intensive and time-sensitive screening process would be stopped in its tracks, sending refugees who had been approved for travel into a domino-effect of expiring validity periods, re-interviews and duplicate screenings. Family separation would be perpetuated and people in harm's way would continue to languish in camps and unsafe urban situations. The legislation would also set us back generations and weaken the U.S. role as a leader in refugee protection: the bill's language about prioritizing Iraqi and Syrian refugees who are members of a religious minority aims to prevent the resettlement of Muslim refugees. While many religious minorities face persecution in the Middle East, millions of Muslims do as well. We encourage Congress to reject this bill and to support access to resettlement for vulnerable refugees of all religious backgrounds.

* note: It may not be helpful to draw more attention to these negative bills, but it is important to be aware of them so you can answer questions and affirm the importance of the resettlement program and the positive contributions refugees make to their communities.

Advocacy Staff 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: Lacy Broemel, lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org
- HIAS: Liz Mandelman: elizabeth.mandelman@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@uscridc.org
- Ethiopian Community Development Council: Lucy Negash - lnegash@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