

PDAS Simon Henshaw
International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) 2015
High-level Conference on Migrants and Cities
Session II: Successful integration of migrants: recognizing the key role of local authorities
26 October 2015

Remarks

- Thank you for the opportunity to speak today at the International Dialogue on Migration. The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is responsible for managing the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, so I would like to focus my brief remarks today on how the United States engages with local authorities in the context of refugee resettlement.
- Since 1975, the United States has provided a new start to more than 3 million vulnerable refugees. We admitted 70,000 refugees from 69 countries in FY 2015 and aim to admit 85,000 in FY 2016. The refugees who we welcome to the United States bring energy, dynamism, a desire to work hard, and a deep appreciation for the blessings of freedom and safety for their families. They renew the qualities that helped forge our national identity and make the United States strong.
- The U.S. resettlement program is, at its core, a grassroots endeavor. Federal money comes into a local community to fund services for refugees, but it is local community organizations, churches, and volunteers that determine how the funding will be balanced with private resources to serve arriving refugees.
- The success of the U.S. resettlement program is truly a testament to the generosity of local communities and charities in particular. So we have found that it is critical to engage with local host communities throughout the process, beginning at the early planning stages.
- Our ability to resettle refugees is directly informed by the ability of host communities to successfully receive and integrate refugees. Every year, resettlement agencies that wish to participate in the U.S. refugee resettlement program must consult with local authorities and relevant stakeholders to discuss the size and scope of the refugee caseload proposed for each local community.

- We find that robust consultations not only lead to more responsive and durable programs, they also help to develop and strengthen critical alliances within communities. Conversely, when relevant stakeholders are not consulted, we miss a valuable opportunity to build welcoming communities that are able to effectively receive and integrate refugees. When local stakeholders are not well-informed and engaged, they cannot respond to (let alone preempt) challenges posed by or to refugee resettlement in their community.
- For all the challenges that it may pose, there are also many good news stories that describe the impact of refugee resettlement, and migration writ large, on local host communities in advanced economies. We could talk about the many positive effects diversity brings to our communities. The cultural and social contributions made by refugees and immigrants are many and rich. But I'd like to end my remarks today by focusing on a very concrete subject that is on the minds of many of us, whether at the international, national, state, or local level – the economic impact of refugees and immigrants.
- The U.S. resettlement program is predicated on able-bodied adults obtaining jobs and supporting themselves and their families as soon as possible after arrival. And while it can be difficult for newly arrived refugees to find employment within a few short months after arrival, especially during times of general economic hardship, they tend to make it happen.
- In fact, a study conducted in Cleveland, Ohio in 2012 found that refugees placed in the Cleveland area typically found employment within five months of their arrival in the United States, despite the fact that most lacked English proficiency.
- The economists who conducted this study also conducted a review of the relevant literature regarding the local economic impact of refugees and immigrants. What they found is heartening, and may not be a surprise to many of you in this room: “Research provides evidence that refugees are highly motivated and wish to give back to their host country. Refugees are more likely to be entrepreneurial and enjoy higher rates of successful business ventures compared to natives. The literature also supports the argument that immigrants in general do not take jobs away from natives and that the diversity of skilled immigration can positively impact the income and productivity of welcoming nations. At the local level, refugees provide increased demand for goods and

services through their new purchasing power and can be particularly revitalizing in communities that otherwise have a declining population.”

- Cities around the United States have benefited from the presence of refugees and immigrants. For example, Buffalo, NY is seeing its first increase in population since the 1960s –thanks to refugees and immigrants settling there. Just a few weeks ago, I met with the mayor of Detroit who is asking to increase the number of refugees arriving to his city, as both he and the state governor recognize and value the revitalizing impact refugees and immigrants can have on a community. Local officials in Nashville - the quintessential American city that is the home of country music - acknowledge that the increasing arrivals of immigrants and refugees to that city have fueled a resurgence in economic and cultural activity in Nashville over the last decade. When Somali refugees first started arriving to the small town of Lewiston, ME years ago, there was significant, vocal pushback from many members of the predominantly white, Catholic community. Now, the population (and economy) that had been in decline since the 1970s is thriving, thanks to refugees and immigrants of many different nationalities choosing Lewiston as their new home.
- We know that the short-term, immediate costs of refugee resettlement are significant. But if refugees and other migrants are able to successfully integrate into their new communities, they can and do make substantial contributions to local workforces and economies.
- This is one reason – one powerful reason – why it is so critical to engage local authorities and other stakeholders in the community. When we allow refugees and immigrants the chance to truly participate in our local economies, we are the richer for doing so.