



March 9, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
Room 7226
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Norris Cochran
The U.S. Department of Health &
Human Services
Office of the Secretary
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Blinken and Acting Secretary Cochran:

On behalf of the undersigned advocacy organizations, higher education organizations, think tanks, refugee service providers, civil society groups, and institutions of higher learning, we write to you regarding President Biden's Executive Order 14013 issued on February 4, 2021, which instructs your agencies to submit a plan to welcome refugees by expanding refugee sponsorship programs.¹

Specifically, we encourage your agencies to incorporate college- and university-based sponsorship initiatives as a critical component of expanding opportunities for U.S. institutions to sponsor refugees formally. College and university-based sponsorship will improve refugee integration outcomes, expand access to higher education for refugee students, capitalize on the many resources available in and through campus communities, and reaffirm the United States' role as a leader in helping refugees reach safety.

The executive order states that to "meet the challenges of restoring and expanding USRAP (United States Refugee Admissions Program), the United States must innovate by . . . capitalizing on community and private sponsorship." We suggest two campus-based pilot programs: (1) a program for colleges and universities to directly sponsor refugee students in order to facilitate their continuing education and (2) a program for colleges and universities to partner with local resettlement agencies to sponsor refugee families on or near campus.

Harnessing campuses' immense potential is also a logical first step towards building successful refugee sponsorship pilot programs that can grow over time. University campuses have cultural, linguistic, healthcare, and professional resources to assist refugees during their transition to the United States. College campuses are also ideally located geographically: most colleges and universities are in mid-sized or large cities

¹ Exec. Order No. 14,013, 86 Fed. Reg. 8,839 (Feb. 4, 2021).
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/09/2021-02804/rebuilding-and-enhancing-programs-to-resettle-refugees-and-planning-for-the-impact-of-climate-change>

with adequate transportation and healthcare infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to local refugee resettlement agencies.²

An enthusiastic and dedicated volunteer base is equally as critical to a well-functioning refugee sponsorship program. Over a quarter of U.S. college students are volunteers, contributing \$6.7 billion of volunteer service work each year.³ Additionally, university sponsorship has a proven record of engaging students and educating the broader communities surrounding campuses.

UNHCR reports 79.5 million people are displaced worldwide, including 26 million refugees.⁴ Of these, only three percent of college-eligible refugees are able to access higher education. UNHCR has set a goal of fifteen percent of eligible refugees accessing higher education by 2030, and U.S. colleges and universities can and should help reach that goal.⁵ Piloting a university sponsorship program can serve as a crucial step toward expanding access to higher education for refugee students. Refugee students have long enriched college and university campuses with their resilience, talent, and diverse perspectives and backgrounds, despite facing steep barriers to higher education.

In Canada, over 100 universities currently finance admitted refugee students' academic fees and initial resettlement expenses, and there are a growing number of U.S. based university- and student-led initiatives to fund scholarships for refugee students.⁶ Creating an alternative humanitarian pathway for universities to welcome refugee students addresses the academic interruptions refugee students face when forced to flee due to persecution.

In addition to refugee students, we encourage the adoption of a university sponsorship model that resettles refugee families in or near campuses. For example, Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR), a non-profit based at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, has already hosted 60 refugees on campus since January of 2016.⁷ ECAR has hosted refugees of all ages and backgrounds, and its success demonstrates the tremendous potential for campuses to welcome and support displaced individuals from across the world.

² L.J. Wolfgang Keppley, *Learning Together: Creating a Refugee Sponsorship Program Through U.S. Universities*, Niskanen Ctr. (Nov. 18, 2020), <https://www.niskanencenter.org/learning-together-creating-a-refugee-sponsorship-program-through-u-s-universities/>. U.S. scholarship initiatives include [Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students](#), [One Refugee](#), [Jusoor Syria Scholarship Program](#), [EdSeed](#), and [Blue Rose Compass](#).

³ *College Students*, AmeriCorps, <https://www.nationalservice.gov/vcla/demographic/college-students> (last visited Feb. 19, 2021).

⁴ Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Comm'r for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019* (2019), available at <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/>.

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations, *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis 37* (2019), available at <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

⁶ *What We Do*, World Univ. Serv. of Canada, <https://wusc.ca/what-we-do/> (last visited Feb. 19, 2021).

⁷ Diya Abdo & Krista Craven, *Every Campus A Refuge: A Small College's Engagement with Refugee Resettlement*, 1 *Migr. & Soc'y* 135, 137 (2018); *Who We Are*, Every Campus a Refuge, <https://everycampusarefugee.net/who-we-are/> (last visited Feb. 19, 2021).

A preliminary study on ECAR finds that refugees hosted through the program had overall positive experiences, increased material support, and significant social support, which eased their transition into their new lives in the United States.⁸ In recent years, several other universities and colleges, including Wake Forest and Lafayette, have stood up ECAR chapters on campus, with more to come. This scalable ECAR model shows how colleges and universities can embrace a whole-of-campus approach to welcome refugees, and any effort to expand refugee sponsorship should learn from the ECAR model to engage more institutions of higher learning.

At a time when global leadership is needed more than ever to address growing worldwide refugee concerns, the U.S. has the opportunity to rebuild and enhance its humanitarian roots. Indeed, in a February 2021 poll commissioned by the nonpartisan organization, More in Common, the opportunity to be engaged in refugee sponsorship increases public support and reduces opposition to rebuilding the U.S. refugee resettlement system.⁹ Diversifying and pursuing innovative solutions like university sponsorship can help leverage the compassion and support of our communities.

We stand ready and eager to work with your agencies to improve refugees' integration outcomes, increase refugee student access to higher education, and engage more Americans in refugee resettlement through university sponsorship. Please reach out to Matthew La Corte (mlacorte@niskanencenter.org) or Miriam Feldblum (miriam@presidentsalliance.org) with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Diya Abdo
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Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR)



Miriam Feldblum
Executive Director
Presidents' Alliance on Higher
Education and Immigration



Matthew La Corte
Government Affairs Manager,
Immigration Policy
Niskanen Center

⁸ Abdo & Craven, *supra* note 6, at 145.

⁹ Research Release, More in Common, Strong Public Support for Rebuilding America's Refugee Program (Feb. 17, 2021), available at <https://www.moreincommon.com/media/sb3h125v/more-in-common-usrap-02-17-21.pdf>.

Americans for Prosperity
Amnesty International USA
Breakthrough Central Texas
Center for Refugee, Migrant and Displacement Studies, Virginia Tech
Church World Service
Columbia Global Centers
Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
CWS Greensboro
Duolingo, Inc.
Eastern Michigan University
Every Campus a Refuge, Wake Forest University
Fellowship Southwest
Freedom to Believe
Guilford College
HIAS
International Refugee Assistance Project
IRIS - Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services
KenSAP (Kenya Scholar Access Program)
Knox College
LUCHA Ministries, Inc.
Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NaTakallam
National Immigration Forum
New American Economy
New Arrivals Institute
Next100
No Lost Generation at The George Washington University
One Refugee
Refugee Advocacy Lab
Refugee Congress
Refugee Council USA
RefugePoint

Rutgers University-Newark
Salve Regina University
St. Cloud State University
Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice
Student Voices for Refugees (SVR) Network
The LIBRE Initiative
The Shapiro Foundation
TSOS REFUGEES- Their Story is Our Story
University Alliance for Refugees and at-Risk Migrants
University of California, Riverside
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Western Union Foundation