

# **REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT UNDER THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION: UNTANGLING THE U.S. REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL**

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## **Author's Note**

The United States Refugee Resettlement Program has seen many changes over the last twenty years. However, the election of President Trump and the subsequent policy distortions to the program have caused the most dramatic changes. The almost weekly pronouncements coming out of the White House related to immigration, refugees, and international politics have left the program in disarray. Refugee arrivals to the United States have almost come to a standstill and the entire program has begun to unravel (Amos, 2018). The State Department's bureau responsible for the US refugee resettlement program, Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), released its annual report to Congress on October 4, 2017, announcing the Presidential Determination of 45,000 total refugee arrivals for federal fiscal year (FY) 2018. This is the lowest number of arrivals coming to the U.S. since 2001, and less than half of the two previous fiscal years: 110,000 in 2017, and 85,000 in 2016.<sup>1</sup>

The following paper focuses on this earlier time period under the Obama Administration, and specifically the summer of 2016 when I spent ten weeks completing a graduate student internship with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in PRM. This experience combined with my eight plus years working directly with refugees in Greensboro, NC, has helped me bring a variety of perspectives to the topic of refugee resettlement. A lot can and should be written on the Trump administration's response to the global refugee crisis and his policies toward resettlement. However, refugee resettlement advocates need to look at both the strengths and weaknesses of the program at its height of arrivals, FY 2016, in order to push for a stronger program when the opportunity comes.<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

The planet faces the highest levels of human displacement on record (UHNCR, 2018). Refugee resettlement, one of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) identified durable solutions, is a defining moral, political, and

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<sup>1</sup> The federal fiscal year runs October 1, to September 30 of the following calendar year.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the numbers and information are reflective of the USRAP during the months of June, July, August, and September 2016.

ideological issue of our time. The United States model of refugee resettlement is considered an exemplar model internationally (Bartlett, 2015). Under the Obama Administration, from FY 2009 to FY 2016 over 611,000 refugees were resettled in the U.S. (Migration Policy Institute, 2017). In the last full fiscal year under President Obama, 85,000 refugees were resettled in different parts of the country. This is the most since 1996, and the largest number of refugees resettled in any country via UNHCR's formal resettlement mechanism. Under the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is a public/private partnership working with multiple federal agencies, state and local governments, as well as national non-profits. In FY 2016, refugees were resettled in 49 of the 50 states, including Alaska and Hawaii. Despite the broad successes of the USRAP over the last eight years, opportunities to strengthen and improve outcomes for refugees *do* exist. Exploring the relationships between the multiple systems and agencies involved reveals opportunities for growth and improvement.

The Peace and Conflict Studies practice of conflict mapping (Wehr, 1979) provides a first step to manage a particular conflict and provides a roadmap to understanding the origins, nature, dynamics, and possibilities for interventions. The basic notion of conflict mapping provides a useful tool for *untangling* the program, *understanding* the dynamics between agencies, and *identifying* points of intervention. Also from the social science field, an asset-based approach builds on the strengths and capabilities of individuals, associations, and institutions that exist within a given system (Kretzmann, 1993). Asset-based approaches are people-centered. It is important to identify what is working well in the USRAP, to build on those strengths, and put refugees at the center. This paper will explain USRAP's structure and relationships with specific partners from PRM's perspective, build a USRAP "conflict map," identify recent, successful changes, and put forward additional recommendations.

Beginning with an overview, the first section will describe program fundamentals. The following section examines the cooperative agreement, a contractual arrangement between PRM and the resettlement agencies. Developing our USRAP "conflict map," the next six sections explore the dynamics between the stakeholders critical to the success of the overall program including: the resettlement agencies, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the White House, Congress, State Governments, and local receiving communities. The following section identifies recent successful PRM-initiated program improvements. Using the conflict map

diagrams found in Figure I, the last section puts forward additional recommendations to strengthen and improve the program to give agency back to refugees and put them at the center of the program.

### **Overview: The U.S. Refugee Assistance Program**

Over the last forty years, the United States has resettled over three million people, the largest number of refugees worldwide (Bartlett, 2015). As a public/private partnership, USRAP operates through a multi-layered, multi-agency, and often multi-year process to prioritize the most vulnerable families and individuals requiring resettlement, while ensuring U.S. security and foreign interests. Funding from Congress for USRAP traditionally goes to three federal agencies: (1) The Department of Homeland Security/U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); (2) The Department of State/Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM); and (3) The Department of Health and Human Services/Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Despite the involvement of other agencies, PRM manages the program including the overseas process of USRAP and the initial 90-day Reception and Placement (R&P) program of the refugee experience in the U.S. The overseas arm of USRAP works with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other non-governmental agencies, and host nations in eight countries to oversee and coordinate Refugee Support Centers (RSCs). Much of the overseas refugee security screening and approval process happens in, or is coordinated from, these centers. On the domestic side of USRAP, PRM contracts with nine U.S. based national non-profits to sponsor refugees for resettlement to the U.S. This paper will focus on the domestic side of the USRAP.

### **USRAP - Reception & Placement Program**

The Department of State annually signs cooperative agreements with nine domestic resettlement agencies (RA) outlining required services of the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017). Each of the nine resettlement agencies (RAs) has a different model. They all include a headquarters or central office, but have different relationships with their nationwide network of local or affiliate offices. There are a total of 309 affiliates in 180 locations across 48 states (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017). The largest RA in both number of refugees resettled and number of affiliate offices, The United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has a model where each office operates independently from the Council. USCCB maintains legal and fiscal relationships

through the R&P program, but has no oversight of other programs provided at those offices. In contrast, at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), each local office is an extension of their main branch. Differences in organizational models contribute to variation in service provision for refugees. However, PRM provides uniform expectations for the services that each refugee receives in the cooperative agreement (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017).

PRM staff view the cooperative agreement as a strong, valuable document providing critical guidance to resettlement agencies (PRM Staff member, personal communication, June, 2016). When adhered to by agencies and their staff, coupled with sufficient Office of Refugee Resettlement funding, refugees can be on a path toward self-sufficiency at the end of the 90-day R&P period (PRM Staff member, personal communication, June, 2016). However, rising costs of housing and other living expenses nationally, coupled with stagnant job wages in some regions of the country makes self-sufficiency for refugees even more challenging.

Expectations of initial and core services outlined in the cooperative agreement include: providing safe, sanitary, and affordable housing; essential furnishings, appropriate food, food allowances, other basic necessities such as household items; assistance obtaining health screenings and other necessary health and mental health services; assistance applying for social security cards; assistance obtaining applicable social service benefits; assistance enrolling in English language instruction; assistance enrolling in employment services; and assistance registering children in school (U.S Department of State Award Provisions, Reception & Placement Cooperative Agreement FY 2016). Agencies are expected to provide these services within thirty to ninety days after arrival.

PRM regularly monitors both HQs and local affiliates (U.S Department of State Award Provisions, Reception & Placement Cooperative Agreement FY 2016). During an on-site inspection PRM determines how well the agency is complying with the cooperative agreement. This includes examining client case files, talking with staff, and conducting home visits to speak with refugees (PRM Staff member, personal communication, June-July, 2016). In addition to PRM monitoring, headquarters are also required by the cooperative agreement to monitor their affiliates. As each resettlement agency has a different organizational structure, they also monitor differently. Often, HQs monitor to ensure receiving communities have interpreters in applicable languages, housing options remain safe and affordable, schools are equipped to work with large numbers of English language learning

students, and cities/towns can accommodate special medical, or other special needs (PRM Staff member, personal communication, June-July, 2016).

### **Challenges with the Cooperative Agreement**

In practice, there are difficulties in reaching the goals of the cooperative agreement. Adhering to the strict timelines outlined in the agreement can be challenging for a variety of reasons. Large numbers of refugee arrivals in a short amount of time makes it increasingly difficult for affiliate staff to meet the deadlines. In the last few years, up until January 2017, the last quarter of each fiscal year brought large numbers of arrivals. Sometimes between 50% and 75% of the total number for the year would arrive in those last couple of months (M. Mayers, NC State Refugee Advisor Meeting, September, 2016 & 2015). This can overwhelm small or even larger communities. Finding adequate housing in a timely manner is extremely difficult and keeping up with multiple family appointment schedules adds strain for resettlement staff. Lastly, this “surge” as it’s known in the resettlement community, can put enormous pressure on local resources such as the county health departments that conduct all initial refugee health screenings, delaying critical follow-up doctor visits for two, three or four months after arrival (NC State Refugee Advisor Meeting, September, 2016 & 2015).

Doubly challenging is that other entities of federal, state, and local governments manage many of the required programs and benefits in which refugees need to be enrolled (Greensboro, NC resettlement agency affiliate staff, quarterly community consultation, September 2016). PRM’s financial support for refugees ends after 90 days. Throughout the initial ninety days and after, the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR) provides support to eligible refugees through time-limited assistance programs (up to eight months from arrival) and social and employment service programs (up to five years) (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017). Funding comes from the federal level through ORR, but the state Health and Human Service Departments administer some benefits and services. For example, refugees are eligible for a unique Medicaid program during their initial eight months. However, sometimes the cards arrive two to three months after the client has been enrolled making it challenging to access both initial and specialty medical care. Children need to go through immunizations prior to school enrollment, but do not have access if local health departments are backed up or Medicaid cards have not arrived (Greensboro, NC resettlement agency affiliate staff, quarterly community consultation, September 2016).

## **PRM's Relationship with Resettlement Agencies: Headquarters and local affiliates**

PRM has built strong relationships with each of the nine-resettlement agencies. Under the Admissions Director, three program officers divide oversight responsibility of the nine-resettlement cooperative agreements and one technical assistance program. In the summer of 2016, the program officers were in almost daily communication with each resettlement agency under their purview: answering staff questions, soliciting information, and managing arrivals. In addition to these day-to-day workings, the Admissions office seeks input into the program and provides support to resettlement agencies throughout the year via several topic-specific working-groups, an annual Admissions workshop, and quarterly R&P meetings in DC, where staff from each resettlement agency can provide input to the program. PRM staff also discuss more complex processes such as the national refugee allocation system with resettlement agencies in order to strengthen them (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016). The almost daily contacts, working groups, and the topic-specific workshops create a collaborative atmosphere in administering resettlement.

However, USRAP is built on a funder/recipient dynamic between PRM and each resettlement agency. PRM is ultimately accountable to Congress, the White House, and to being a good steward of public dollars, a position sometimes in conflict with the interests of the resettlement agencies or even refugees. This tension is clear through PRM's conversations and ultimately what they decide to fund (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016). Throughout the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) process for the 2017 R&P Program year, PRM staff prioritized applications in which the applicant provided well-thought out, detailed responses connecting the budget with the proposed programming and staff to ensure each dollar was well spent (Admissions staff, NOFA 2017 application process, June-July 2016).

Additionally, the funder/recipient model can create inherent competition between the agencies as they seek to secure limited federal dollars. At the end of the three-month long application review process, PRM ranks the agency applications by score. The final score for each is combined from staff scores, an external panel's score, and compiled data from the last couple monitoring visits completed by both the HQ and PRM (Admissions staff, NOFA 2017 application process, June-August 2016). The resettlement agencies that earn the highest ratings receive proportionately more funding and more slots for refugees. Those with the lowest ratings receive a potential

decrease in funds and in slots for refugees. The applicants receive their score, are told the top and bottom scores, excluding the name of the agencies in order to see the full range of scores (Admissions staff, NOFA 2017 application process, June-July 2016). While PRM does appreciate collaborative efforts, ultimately, one agency's success in their application means more funding for them and less for others.

### **PRM's Relationship with the Office of Refugee Resettlement**

As the two main federal agencies administering USRAP, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and PRM have a complex relationship. While their work is intertwined, their program goals and desired outcomes for refugees differ. PRM administers the overseas processing and the first 90-day R&P program. ORR administers employment, social services, health access, and additional technical assistance programs. The distinction between the agencies is often confusing for anyone not deep in the resettlement world, including refugees. Staff between the two connect on a monthly call, and leadership connect as often as needed in order to be on the same page (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016). However, dynamics and tension exists. When both directors are in the same meeting, the PRM Director speaks first, chairs and ultimately makes final decisions (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016). In the monthly call coordinated by PRM, PRM sets the agenda and leads the call (PRM & ORR conference call, July 28, 2016). During the NOFA process for FY17, the RAs were encouraged to submit proposals for new R&P sites. New resettlement sites directly affect ORR's funding. In August, PRM shared the list of potential new sites; however, ORR had minimal to no input regarding which sites would be approved (PRM & ORR conference call, July 28, 2016).

### **PRM's Relationship with The White House**

PRM's relationship with the White House depends on a variety of factors, including who is in office. PRM staff shared that under the Obama administration, much to their surprise, the White House was more involved with the nuts and bolts of USRAP than previous administrations, even before refugee resettlement became part of the national discourse (PRM staff member, personal communication, July 15, 2016). PRM regularly submits reports and recommendations to the White House to influence policy. However, at high-level meetings in which critical policy decisions are made, such as the numbers of arrivals in the coming FY, the State Department representatives are often far removed from the day-to-day workings of USRAP and

those who know the program best provide only a one-to-two-page policy brief (PRM staff member, personal communication, August 15, 2016).

A major tension between the political needs of the White House and the practical needs of PRM Admission staff during the summer of 2016 was the rapid increase of refugee arrivals (PRM staff member, personal communication, August 15, 2016). Staff at PRM with years of expertise support modest, intentional increases to the number of arrivals. Before the Presidential Determination for FY17 was announced in September, PRM staff were concerned that the White House would push for 120,000 or 130,000, a significant jump from 85,000 in FY 17, putting additional stress on the program (PRM staff member, personal communication, July 15, 2016). The goal of the final 110,000 (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017) was still ambitious for its time.

### **PRM's Relationship with Congress**

PRM has a different relationship with Congress. PRM frequently participates in briefing calls and in person visits with Congressional members and their staffers, to share updates regarding programs and answer Congress members' questions (PRM staff member, personal communications, August 3, 2016). One PRM staff member serves as the main Congressional Liaison for the Bureau. It is her job to track pieces of legislation and elected officials' public statements that impact PRM's work, while also fielding individual requests for information from congressional offices (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016). Each Fall, the State Department submits a report to Congress outlining the current global refugee situation and plans for the coming FY. Through this process of accountability and consultation, Congress approves the State Department's budget (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017). In the fall of 2016, there was a stark gap between the admissions ceiling of 110,000 for refugees for FY17 and both PRM and ORR's budget (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017). This divergence between funds and arrival numbers impacts refugees, agencies, and receiving communities alike (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016).

### **PRM's Relationship with State Governments**

State governments have a unique intersection with PRM. Under the Refugee Act of 1980, the Federal government is required to, "consult regularly with States, localities and private nonprofit voluntary agencies concerning the sponsorship process and the intended distribution of refugees" (Title III Sec. 301(c)(1) of the

Refugee Act of 1980). States that receive refugees may have a governor-appointed State Refugee Coordinator (SRC), if not a non-profit operates the State Refugee Office (SRO) through an alternative mechanism known as a Wilson-Fish program. The SRO administers ORR funded resettlement programs including cash assistance (cash & medical) and Social Security to refugees. As of January 2017, there were thirteen Wilson-Fish programs operating in twelve states (“Office of Refugee Resettlement,” 2017). During the annual R&P proposal process, the SRC makes recommendations to PRM regarding location and number of refugees coming to their state, often in consultation with the resettlement agencies in their state and the state governor.

After the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, public sentiments toward refugees shifted. In reaction to this, thirty-one sitting governors signed a letter asking the Federal Government to halt the resettlement of Syrian refugees until further security measures could be put in place (Fantz, 2015). Because USRAP is a federal program, state and local governments have neither the power nor authority to entirely stop refugees from being resettled in their state, however, states can choose to withdraw, often resulting in a Wilson-Fish program (Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017).

Another time SROs had a critical relationship with PRM occurred during the second half of FY 2016. PRM sets a total number of refugees resettled in each state at the beginning of the FY based on the Presidential Determination and previous capacity of the state. PRM cannot go 10% over that number without the SRO’s permission (PRM Staff member, personal communications, August, 2016). As previously mentioned, in the last several years, the final quarter of the fiscal year has meant large numbers of new arrivals. As more and more states get close to 110% of their total arrival number, it puts stress on the entire national allocation process (PRM Staff member, personal communications, August, 2016). Pressured from the Obama Administration at the end of FY17, PRM needed to reach a record setting refugee arrival goal. Once a SRO said “no, more,” PRM had to redirect refugees to other states, thus rebooking flights and in September potentially rebooking them to the new fiscal year, making it harder for PRM to reach its goal (PRM Staff member, personal communications, August, 2016).

### **PRM’s Relationship with Local Receiving Communities**

For many small U.S. cities with declining economies and aging populations, resettling able-bodied refugees has increased the overall workforce (Admissions staff, NOFA 2017 application process, June-August 2016). In some regions however, an

influx of refugees with differing cultural, linguistic, and religious practices from the local populace has brought friction. Established and prospective resettlement sites are required to conduct quarterly community consultations (Reception and Placement Program Cooperative Agreement, unsigned version). PRM emphasizes the importance of these consultations through monitoring visits, questions in the NOFA, and regular communication with resettlement agencies (E. Biddle, internship experience, June-September, 2016). Procedures and outcomes of community consultations vary widely across the U.S. Leading up to the summer of 2016, refugee resettlement, and resettlement of Syrians in particular, were being discussed publicly, locally, and nationally like never before. Resettlement agencies hoping to open sites from places like Burlington, Vermont, to Asheville, North Carolina meet unexpected resistance. The long-term mayor of Rutland, Vermont was defeated in re-election, he says, due to his support for bringing Syrian and Iraqi refugees to his city (Ring, 2017). The liberal city of Asheville, NC felt significant push back from its more conservative leaning county neighbor (Walton, 2016).

### **Recent Changes to the Program**

The preceding sections untangle the USRAP program to provide an account of the dynamics between the various stakeholders and to highlight opportunities to improve and strengthen it. The following section identifies some recent, successful changes to the program. Using an asset based approach (Kretzmann, 1993), identifying and building upon what works well will lead to further improvements and increased agency for refugees.

Since the 1980 Refugee Act passed, the fundamentals of USRAP have not shifted. The program continues to emphasize economic self-sufficiency within a time-limited window as the main priority. However, small changes in how program policies are interpreted have led to significant outcomes. Those at the federal level, who have worked with the program for a while, argue that small, steady changes have a larger impact (PRM Staff member, personal communication, July 2016). Attempting to make sweeping, rushed policy development or implementation can have unforeseen negative consequences for those the program serves (PRM Staff member, personal communication, July, 2016).

There has been a small but important change in how PRM describes and measures “self-sufficiency.” PRM considers many paths toward self-sufficiency. The focus has shifted from having case managers tell clients critical information such as how to take the bus or schedule doctors’ appointments, to requiring that refugees

demonstrate understanding of this knowledge, skill, and behavior. PRM has changed the monitoring forms from: “did case managers provide the information to refugees?” to “can refugees demonstrate they have acquired the skill set and knowledge to put them on the path of self-sufficiency?,” and “can refugees identify sources of household income and expenses after R&P assistance ends?” (Reception & Placement Program Period Report. PRM Internal document, September, 2016)” The official PRM funded cultural orientation, curriculum, and assessments has been revised to incorporate these changes (PRM Staff member, personal communications, July, 2016). PRM has seen shifts in affiliate, and case manager performance, and refugee outcomes improve from these changes (PRM Staff member, personal communications, July, 2016).

Another way PRM encourages case managers to think about the service they provide and the impact on refugees was reflected in the NOFA for the FY17 R&P Program. Agencies responded to a new question: “Analyze the risks and challenges posed by gender dynamics to R&P Program implementation” and “how [they] will manage these risks and ensure that R&P services are fully accessible to vulnerable individuals” (Notice of Funding Availability for the Reception and Placement Program FY 2017). PRM staff want responders to first acknowledge the need to examine their own implicit biases regarding gender, then explore how those biases effects service delivery and programs (PRM Staff member, NOFA external panel review, June 27th-July 1st, 2016). For example, when providing services to a couple, even if the husband speaks English, it is critical to ensure there is an interpreter for the wife.

While the structure of the R&P funding is set-up so those who perform well are rewarded proportionally, PRM strives to support and promote collaboration between the agencies (PRM Staff member, NOFA external panel review, June 27th-July 1st, 2016). In the NOFA cycle for FY 2017, two resettlement agencies’ proposals included developing new technical assistance programs focused on housing, and agency and client security. PRM approved their requests, as long as the programs had a national focus and benefited all resettlement agencies. Another example includes communications between the agencies regarding new resettlement sites. With the Obama Administration increasing the number of arrivals so quickly over a three-year period, the national network needed to expand. In one room at the PRM office, each agency stuck post-it-notes all over a U.S. map designating cities or parts of states they were considering for new sites. Resettlement agencies avoided duplications and PRM emphasized sites no one was considering. For the first attempt at something like this, PRM staff believe it was successful in encouraging cooperation (PRM Staff

member, NOFA external panel review, June 27th-July 1st, 2016). Lastly, PRM brought together staff from all the resettlement agencies, ORR, and other groups for a day-long workshop exploring how to improve refugee employment outcomes, led by the Stanford Immigration Policy Lab (PRM Research Day, August 30, 2016).

### **Recommendations to improve USRAP**

In addition to the above descriptions, Figure I, located in appendix I, is an organizational map of the current USRAP program. Exploring a visual model helps to complicate the program (and its many relationships) and provide more opportunities for interventions. Colored arrows indicate which direction accountability flows and the strength of the connection between the entities. The USRAP is like other traditional funding models where both funding and decisions stem from the top. While they are influenced by a variety of voices, ultimately accountability resides with the source of the funding, in this case, Congress. For a program that seeks to benefit refugees and ultimately changes their lives, there are currently minimal mechanisms to solicit feedback from refugee beneficiaries. As a requirement of cooperative agreement, PRM conducts home visits to refugees (Reception & Placement Program Cooperative Agreement). During this often-three-hour visit, monitors explore the individual or family's resettlement experience and ensure cooperative agreement compliance by agency staff. There are limitations, however, to refugees having input during this visit. The agency selects the family and provides the interpreter. This does not allow refugees to be key to the process of accountability.

The map and descriptions of relationships provides a big picture of USRAP, allowing individuals and agencies to get out of their institutional perspectives. In a 2005 Migration Policy Institute book examining USRAP, those interviewed for the book:

Revealed that even some persons deeply involved and expert in certain parts of the [USRAP] may have only a dim conception of other key elements. Occasionally, affirmative mis-understandings about what goes on in another part of the process have led to operational confusion, exaggerated expectations, or even anger or accusations of bad faith. A modest measure of operational improvement could be achieved simply by assuring that persons who play key roles in any part of the process are trained or briefed on the operations of the other actors and the constraints they face (p 5).

When agencies and individuals have a bigger picture, it can lead to more effective communication, better understanding, and an overall common purpose (Lederach, 1996).

PRM can continue to cultivate and encourage resettlement agencies and their staff to identify their personal biases and how those biases affect service delivery. In addition to making changes in the NOFA, PRM can add in biases related questions in the monitoring evaluation. A Greensboro, North Carolina, Church World Service affiliate (one of the nine Ras), used data to examine their own biases and evaluate their service delivery. Staff compiled data on the number of interactions and points of contact they had with each client over the course of several months (S. Ivory, Refugee Service Provider Meeting, March, 2015). Staff saw trends in who they spent more time serving, revealing that certain population groups had higher rates of contact with staff than others due to perceived needs rather than actual needs, creating an inequity in service delivery. Staff adjusted service delivery practices and became more proactive when working with specific population groups.

In addition to identifying staff biases, data can be used to examine other refugee outcomes. The Stanford Immigration Policy Lab sought out the relationship between PRM and resettlement agencies to connect agency data with refugee outcomes. University partnerships such as this one can continue to improve the program. Research comparing models of resettlement would benefit the program nationally. Faculty and students can bring energy, much needed resources, and provide support over longitudinal periods to overworked resettlement agencies to have bigger impacts and develop evidenced based practices.

Bigger changes include increasing funding both for initial refugee support and refugee resettlement agencies. PRM has been able to annually increase the amount of monetary assistance to individual refugees via the cooperative agreement, however, PRM & ORR readily admit that funding for the programs has not kept pace with other economic conditions making it harder and harder for refugees to resettle to parts of the U.S. with high or even moderate costs of living (PRM Staff member, personal communications, June, 2016). Increasing funding to resettlement agencies as well would also strongly benefit the program.

Next, passing legislation that supports creative refugee integration models and allows for support for refugees over a longer timeline could have significant impacts. Such models could incorporate strengths from other resettlement countries including Canada and Australia that utilize public/private partnerships. For example, in 2016 the advocacy group, Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) advocated for a private

citizenship model of resettlement to complement the current agency-based model (RCUSA, personal communication, August, 2016).

Lastly, policy and culture shifts that address the entire U.S. welfare system need to happen. Making significant changes to the entire U.S. welfare system would not only impact refugees, many of whom begin in the U.S. receiving public benefits, but would benefit other low-income Americans. A significant number of refugees end up in situations similar to other low-income Americans, fighting off poverty. Refugees enter a workforce with stagnant wages, are resettled into shoddy housing, and face challenges navigating a complex and ever-changing U.S. healthcare system. Putting recipients at the front of the programs and making it easier to access benefits would be good places to start.

## **Conclusion**

The United States model of refugee resettlement is considered an exemplary model internationally (Bartlett, 2015). Over one million people have been resettled in the U.S. since the Refugee Law of 1980 passed, providing an escape valve for the ongoing global migration crisis. Currently, 1 in 113 people worldwide have been forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2018). Forced migration can cause further violence and destabilization in their regions (UNHCR, 2018). This crisis is not going away. Almost 40 years after the USRAP program began, we *still* have a moral and pragmatic obligation not only to continue to resettle refugees but to strengthen and reshape the model. In a recent speech Filippo Grandi the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees highlighted the growing trends of people being violently forced from their homes and into refugee situations. He pushed for increasing resettlement numbers: “[a]nd we should not forget that refugee resettlement is an important solution. Close to 1.2 million refugees need resettling globally. It is therefore an issue of major concern that fewer than 100,000 resettlement places [worldwide] are expected to be available this year - a drop of 43 percent from 2016.” The U.S. *can* continue to be a guiding model of refugee resettlement. Refugees continue to integrate into our communities and strengthen the entire U.S. fabric. The U.S. can lead the way in demonstrating a resettlement model that puts the voices of refugees at the center.

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