

# Ways Municipalities Can Prepare for Refugees

May 2022

## 1. Recognize the important role local government plays in immigrant and refugee integration.

As the level of government closest to the people, local government has an important role in matters concerning refugees and immigration. Municipal leaders are public symbols of the values and aspirations of their community. Through their leadership roles, Mayors, First Selectmen, and Town Managers can demonstrate their support for refugees by publicly stating their support for immigration, build broad political consensus and multi-partisan cooperation among elected representatives, and supporting non-political city staff in their immigrant integration efforts.

## 2. Plan and prepare for refugees and immigrants.

Municipalities can plan for refugees in many ways such as:

- Being prepared to register refugees, collecting their personal information, knowing where they settle in the community, and maintaining consistent communication with them. This database should be regularly updated to best assess their current and growing needs.
- Being prepared to plan ahead for certain factors and events that will result in increased needs and services such as seasonal changes, such as winter kits, clothing and food vouchers, etc.
- Recruiting volunteers to help with the municipality's response and services.

### 3. Embed the principles of diversity and equality in all city policies and activities.

To better assist the integration of a diverse group of refugees in your community, consider the ways that your municipality can create and promote policies that reflect diversity, equity, and inclusion of all people. In the [CCM Racial Equity Toolkit](#), you can find examples of these types of policies such as:

- Providing city services in many languages
- Using procurement power to facilitate opportunities for immigrant business owners and immigrant-friendly businesses
- Promoting immigrant entrepreneurship as a route to economic integration and to prosperity for all city residents.

### 4. Replicate or adapt approaches that have proven successful in other municipalities.

Many municipalities across the country have taken steps to prepare for and include refugees in their communities. Take time to research what strategies and policies your neighboring municipalities are implementing. Consider researching what strategies and policies long-standing immigrant gateway cities have developed and adapt them to suit the needs of your community. For example:

- The City of Binghamton, NY passed a Welcoming Cities resolution that demonstrates their commitment to welcoming refugees and details the ways in which refugees have already made positive impact on the City.
- The City of Alexandria, VA created a Resources, Programs and Services for Immigrants and Refugees webpage on their municipal website. The page details a wide array of information about local organizations and other resources that newly settled immigrants and refugees may need to utilize.
- The City of Cleveland, OH has taken several measures to welcome refugees and immigrants. The City declared the month of June as Immigrant Heritage Month. The City has planned and held “Coffee with Cops” events to support the relationship between local law enforcement and immigrants and refugees.

#### 5. Collaborate with public and private organizations.

There are several public and private organizations that have a mission to help refugee and immigrant communities. These organizations have a wealth of knowledge about the people they serve and can be a good source of information to municipalities about incoming and existing refugees. Municipalities and outside organizations can work together to coordinate efforts such as community inclusion events and food drives. Collaborating with these organizations is just one more way your municipality can ensure that the needs of everyone in the community are being met.

#### 6. Use public and municipal spaces as facilitators of integration.

Public spaces that are typically governed by local governments such as parks, streets, libraries, and community centers to facilitate integration activities. Offering municipal spaces such as the Town Hall for coordination efforts, aid distributions, group discussions and more can help build and strengthen the relationship between community organizations and municipalities. Additionally, allowing organizations to carry out their work in municipal spaces allow refugees to see the active role that municipalities play in responding to the refugee crisis.

### Local Organizations

#### 1. Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI):

CIRI provides the following services for immigrants, refugees, survivors of human trafficking and torture, and unaccompanied minors:

- Workforce readiness
- Job placement
- Case Management
- School coordination
- Community mentorship
- Legal services
- Psychosocial services

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## 2. Connecticut Department of Social Services

DSS disburses federal refugee assistance program funds, administers refugee cash and medical assistance programs and monitors resettlement activity for individuals who qualify as refugees under international law. DSS regional offices administer the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) programs for refugees for up to twelve months from their date of entry to the U.S. DSS also provides refugees with temporary family assistance/cash assistance, medical coverage and food stamp assistance under those public assistance programs since refugees qualify as legal non-citizens.

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## 3. Integrated Refugee Immigrant Services (IRIS)

IRIS provides the following wrap-around services for refugees and asylum seekers:

- Housing
- Job Placement
- Food Pantry
- Case Management
- In-school Tutoring
- Healthcare Coordination
- Legal Representation
- Youth Mentoring
- Academic Advisement
- Community Integration

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## References

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