



Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Access to Safe, Stable, Affordable Housing and to Affirm Housing as an Essential Resource for Newcomers

May-June 2023

Background: Safe, stable, healthy, and affordable housing for all people builds stronger communities. However, the United States is facing a housing affordability crisis; at present, excessive rent burdens, and the ultimate consequences of these burdens, such as financial hardship, eviction, and even homelessness are daily realities for more than ten million households - U.S. citizens and new Americans alike - across the country. The refugee community affirms the need to work alongside efforts to house individuals who are currently houseless and experiencing housing challenges.

The United States Refugee Admission Program (USRAP) is a historically bipartisan, cost-effective, public-private partnership to support refugees and certain other newcomers with case management and integration services designed to attain rapid economic self-sufficiency. Among the core services that the national refugee resettlement agencies provide, securing safe, stable, and affordable housing is one of most important; yet housing has become one of the most significant challenges in ensuring refugees can integrate and thrive in their new communities.

Resettlement agencies - and their affiliates and offices - have reported ongoing and significant housing challenges for arriving refugees, particularly as housing prices rise and affordable, safe, and stable housing availability decreases. Research completed by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) produced staggering data that identified a shortage of [over 7 million affordable homes](#) for low-income renters. The figures will only continue to grow and endanger more individuals in their ability to secure and stabilize housing for their families.

National, state, and local policies can - together - correct long-standing racial inequities and economic injustices by ensuring quality housing. We call on Congress to recognize refugees' acute needs, particularly as the United States faces a substantial housing crisis. We offer the following recommendations to strengthen our nation's response to strengthening access to housing and upholding our commitment to welcome displaced populations with confidence.

Ensure Robust Funding for Affordable Housing and Refugee Resettlement in Fiscal Year 2024

We urge Congress to protect and expand funding for programs that support affordable housing and homelessness in Fiscal Year 2024. While the United States is over 7 million houses short of national need, the desire for housing growth runs far across our country. Our federal resources must meet these needs and create positive solutions for the shortfalls the population is experiencing. More information about housing programs is available [here](#). Affordable housing must remain at the forefront of congressional initiatives by providing:

- \$32.7 billion for the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) program to renew existing vouchers and to expand the program to an additional 200,000 households.
- \$5.4 billion for public housing operations and \$5 billion for public housing repairs.
- \$3.8 billion for HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants program.
- \$100 million for legal assistance to prevent evictions.
- \$3 billion for a permanent Emergency Rental Assistance program.
- \$300 million for the competitive tribal housing grants, targeted to tribes with the greatest needs.

Robust funding is crucial to adequately support the displaced and refugee populations globally and in the United States, especially as the administration continues to rebuild the U.S. resettlement program. With arrival numbers growing, the need for robust funding is clear not only for [emergency and overseas response](#), [efficient processing](#), and [refugee integration](#), but also crucial housing programming that establishes and protects housing for newcomers to begin their new lives in the United States. We call on Congress to consider these requests, as well as [oversight and accountability language](#) in FY24 to ensure refugees have the chance to find a safe place to call home.

Conduct Oversight Over the Administration's Implementation of Access to Housing Programs and the Operations of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

We urge Congress to hold the administration accountable to strengthen access to affordable, safe, and stable housing for U.S.-born and immigrant and refugee populations alike, as well as address the acute needs that refugees and newcomers face when the United States first welcomes them. We further urge Congress to ensure the administration is doing everything in its power to rebuild and strengthen the U.S. resettlement program and restore access to permanent asylum protections.

A core tenant to the U.S. resettlement program is swift economic self-sufficiency. As a result, [resettlement sites across the country](#) provide job training, English language classes, cash and medical assistance, and other case management services. Resettlement agencies are required to secure and set up housing before refugees arrive in the United States, with limited resources. At times, refugees are placed in temporary housing before a permanent rental unit becomes available. This is particularly challenging for populations with large families, such as the recent Afghan evacuees.

We look to congressional leaders to ensure federal - and state - agencies demonstrate bold leadership to strengthen access to housing, particularly for new refugee and immigrant arrivals. Oversight recommendations on housing programs are available [here](#) (March 2023) and [here](#) (March 2022).

Support Inclusive and Refugee-Focused Legislation to Strengthen Access to Housing

Legislative Authorization for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to Provide Housing Assistance: The Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022 (ASA) [authorized](#) ORR to provide Refugee Support Services (RSS) base awards to states and communities that needed additional resources to adequately meet resettlement housing needs (as well as appropriating supplemental funds for that purpose). To ensure that [all ORR-eligible populations](#), such as refugees resettled through USRAP, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders who assist U.S. missions overseas, and others, Congress should provide ORR with the authorization to fund housing assistance for all populations ORR serves. This should be done as part of any must-pass legislation, such as the FY 2024 appropriations bills.

Newcomer Housing Voucher: We request that Congress establishes a Newcomer Housing Voucher program that directly assists the refugee and immigrant newcomer populations. In consideration of the current housing voucher program that exists for the wider population, a housing voucher specified for newcomers could greatly assist in securing housing all while market rental rates dramatically increase, availability dwindles. Public housing waitlists stretch up to years and the need for housing is growing in urgency. Immediate action to assist the refugee and newcomer community in the housing search is imperative, and the creation of a dedicated housing voucher would have extensive benefits in overcoming current housing obstacles.

Anti-Discrimination: Any effort to help protect refugees and newcomers should also consider integrating anti-discrimination language. Harmful, anti-refugee, anti-newcomer sentiment has influenced property managers' willingness to rent to all populations. At times, landlords justify refusals to rent to refugees and other new arrivals based on their source of income (e.g., federal cash assistance), lack of credit history, before refugees earn a pay stub through employment, lack of fluency in English, before refugees receive a Social Security card, etc. While resettlement agencies work tirelessly to advocate for newcomers, such criteria continue to deter landlords from committing rentals to refugees and other newcomers. Future appropriations or relevant legislation should integrate anti-discrimination provisions to help mitigate these issues.

Endorse Inclusive Legislation: We support inclusive legislation that would protect, strengthen, and expand housing affordability and availability in the United States. Additional information about this legislation to support access to housing and homelessness prevention can be found [here](#). Bills that contain provisions toward these ends include:

- [Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act](#) (118th Congress)
- [Ending Homelessness Act](#) (117th Congress)
- [Rent Relief Act](#) (117th Congress)
- [American Housing and Economic Mobility Act](#) (117th Congress)
- [Eviction Crisis Act](#) (117th Congress)
- [Stable Families Act](#) (117th Congress)
- [Fair Housing Improvement Act](#) (118th Congress)
- Reforming Disaster Recovery Act ([H. R. 4707](#) and [S. 2471](#), 117th Congress)
- [Choice in Affordable Housing Act](#) (118th Congress)
- Yes In My Backyard Act ([H.R. 3198](#) and [S. 1614](#), 117th Congress)

The National Low Income Housing Coalition's (NLIHC) 2023 policy priorities can be found [here](#) and [here](#). A state-by-state guide of housing needs can be found [here](#). More information about housing programs, including rental, special, and homeownership programs, can be found [here](#) (interactive web link) and [here](#) (PDF).

We also urge all Members of Congress to co-sponsor and support passage of positive legislation that restores and strengthens the refugee resettlement program and asylum protections. Bills that contain provisions toward these ends include:

- [The Refugee Protection Act](#) (reintroduction forthcoming), which would restore and strengthen the refugee resettlement program and asylum protections. The bill would also expand protections to those who have assisted U.S. troops and immigrant children and families.
- [Afghan Adjustment Act](#) (reintroduction forthcoming), an urgently-needed, bipartisan bill that should be included in upcoming must-pass legislation which would allow certain Afghan evacuees and those relocated with humanitarian parole, a temporary status, to have an opportunity to apply to become lawful permanent residents – the same legal status they would have received had they been admitted as refugees. The bill additionally expands criteria for the Afghan SIV program.

Additional Resources about the U.S. Resettlement Program:

- [Resettlement 101](#)
- [Resettlement Process: Steps of the US Refugee Admissions Program](#)
- [Refugee Integration & Economic Contributions to the United States](#)
- [Refugee Resettlement Advances National Security](#)
- [Refugee Housing Solutions](#)

For additional materials, please visit: <https://bit.ly/HousingLeaveBehinds>