



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

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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 state and local governments 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.

Infuse State & Local Funds for Affordable Housing and Refugee Resettlement

State and local governments should consider providing supplemental budgetary measures that fund housing assistance for newcomers in their state and communities. **Rental assistance funds** (e.g., [Columbus, Ohio](#)) can meet immediate gaps between housing prices and the federal cash assistance (and wages once employed) for refugees and newcomers. **Housing subsidies** can also be utilized to support [home repair](#), maintenance, utility, and [weatherization](#) costs. **Housing trust funds** (e.g. [Washington State](#) and [Polk County, Iowa](#)) are important tools to allocate community funds to increase and improve the inventory of affordable places to live - as well as to provide services to help people find and keep their home.¹ For more tools and resources for identifying and accessing funding resources for your community health initiative, check out this [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#) funding guide, as well as these [case studies](#) in sustainable financing mechanisms and these [local funding programs](#).

State and local governments should consider **down-payment assistance** for refugees and newcomers who are first-time homeowners to encourage stable and permanent housing, particularly for larger families. States can also implement **property tax credits**, such as by [eliminating income](#) for refugees, asylees, and asylum seekers' property taxes.

Establish Newcomer Housing Voucher Program

States and localities should explore household-based rental assistance, such as through vouchers and homelessness prevention services. States in particular should explore developing 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. The creation of a dedicated housing voucher would have extensive benefits in overcoming current housing obstacles.

¹ The Polk County Housing Trust Fund created the [Healthy Homes East Bank \(HHEB\)](#) (Healthy Homes Des Moines) intervention to reduce clinic and hospital visits tied to pediatric asthma in three low-income neighborhoods. The program uses health education and community health workers to raise families' awareness, and home repairs to improve indoor air quality.

Increase Affordable Housing Stock for Refugees and Newcomers

States and localities should invest in the rehabilitation and new construction of affordable, safe, stable, and [healthy](#) housing. [Tax abatements](#), [housing bonds](#), and [tax incentives](#) to construct or rehabilitate affordable rental housing for low-income households (e.g., in [Virginia](#)) - particularly near public transit - are integral to expanding access to housing for refugees and newcomers. Tax credits can also be used for environmental mitigation projects, such as in [Vermont](#). For more examples of state tax credits to support projects in neighborhood development areas, check out [low-income housing tax credits program descriptions](#) and these [local incentive programs](#).

Prevent and End Discrimination Against Refugees and Newcomers

States and localities should enact **anti-discrimination provisions** to address anti-refugee sentiment by property managers that discriminate against newcomers 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. In addition, states could consider carving out mandates to expand rental unit accessibility, such as by expanding the number of guaranteed [rental housing](#) for those exiting homelessness or actively being served by an immigrant or refugee resettlement program.

States have expanded certain tenant protections since the COVID-19 pandemic, such as through the civil right to counsel, measures prohibiting source-of-income discrimination, eviction record sealing and expungement legislation, rent stabilization and anti-rent gouging legislation, and “just cause” eviction laws. The NLIHC [reviews state examples](#)² and offers recommendations for developing and implementing laws aiming to protect renters over the long term [in this brief](#). We recommend policymakers consult with impacted communities and integrate a refugee and newcomer lens to these proposals.

Integrate Refugee and Newcomer Experience into Affordable Housing Programs

State and local housing assistance, homelessness prevention, and permanent housing solutions should include the experiences and acute needs facing refugees and other formerly-displaced populations, who - by definition - were forced from their homes due to violence and persecution. Refugees have been displaced on average [between 10 and 26 years](#) - and as the United States rebuilds the U.S. resettlement program, it is important to integrate their perspectives. As a result, states and localities should consider establishing [housing commissions and boards](#) that include representation from resettlement providers and impacted communities. Other initiatives, such as [zoning reform](#), [rehabbing owner-occupied units](#), [right-to-counsel](#), [eviction prevention](#), and [right-to-cure periods](#), should also be considered with a particular eye toward refugee and newcomer needs.

Amplify Needed Congressional Action & Hold the Biden Administration Accountable

Members of Congress have important roles to play in [funding](#) and establishing housing assistance and [affordable housing programs](#). Congress should provide robust funding, exert oversight over the administration’s operations of refugee resettlement and housing programs, and support positive legislation that expands access to affordable, safe, and stable housing. Our recommendations to Congress are detailed [here](#). For additional materials, [click here](#). State and local elected leaders can also hold the administration accountable to support refugee and newcomer needs. Oversight recommendations on housing programs are available [here](#) (March 2023) and [here](#) (March 2022).

Additional Resources about the U.S. Resettlement Program:

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

² “Twenty-one states have passed measures prohibiting source-of-income discrimination, which guarantee that individuals who utilize public assistance, such as Section 8 housing choice vouchers, will not be denied housing simply because of their source of income or the way they pay for housing. Ten states have passed eviction record sealing and expungement legislation, which ensures that renters who have an eviction filing present on their public record will not be denied housing by a prospective landlord because of their eviction history. Three states have passed rent stabilization and anti-rent gouging legislation, which guarantees that tenants will not face excessive rental increases during their tenancy. Six states have passed “just cause” eviction laws, which limit the grounds on which landlords can evict tenants to “just” or “good” reasons, such as nonpayment of rent or violation of a lease term agreement. Three states – Washington, Maryland, and Connecticut – have implemented right-to-counsel protections, which provide legal guarantees that tenants facing the threat of eviction are able to access legal representation in court.”