



University Sponsorship of Refugee Students

**Initiative on Increasing U.S. Education
Pathways for Refugee Students**



November 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As forced displacement reaches historic levels, opportunities for refugees to reach safety have contracted. Among the displaced are hundreds of thousands of students dreaming about continuing their education. Less than 1% of refugees are resettled, and while 39% of students are able to access higher education worldwide, only 5% of refugee students access higher education. There are a multitude of barriers facing refugee students seeking to pursue their studies and find safety. The U.S. college admissions process involves fees and testing requirements that are often inaccessible to refugees. Even once accepted, the costs of attending are insurmountable for many refugee students. Furthermore, the current legal channel for refugee learners wanting to attend college or university in the United States is the F-1 visa system, which is complex for refugee students to access and does not provide them with a durable solution.

This report's policy and program recommendations outline a path for the U.S. to develop and implement a university sponsorship program for refugee students. Such a program would allow refugee students to enter the U.S. under a newly-established private sponsorship category (P-4) of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and study at a sponsoring college or university.

Key policy recommendations for the U.S. Government, including the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and partner agencies:

- Enable higher education institutions or an implementing organization representing them to nominate directly, or identify, students to be privately sponsored and resettled to the United States.
- Approach program design with additionality in mind; meaning sponsored refugees would ultimately be additional to government-assisted refugees.
- Consider an alternative indicator of success for university-sponsored refugees other than early post-arrival economic self-sufficiency.
- Offer a mechanism for sponsors to cover travel costs and offer postponement of travel loan repayments to account for the unique context of university sponsorships.
- Allow eligible students whose refugee status is pending to access the USRAP. In those cases, allow a designated organization to screen candidates for likely U.S. refugee status conferral.
- Make every effort to accommodate strict academic admissions timelines, requiring students to arrive in the U.S. by the middle of August preceding the academic year.
- Enact key improvements to the F-1 visa to better accommodate refugee learners who may not have access to private sponsorship through the new P-4 category.

Key program recommendations for colleges and universities, donors, and other relevant stakeholders:

- A U.S.-based Implementing Organization (I.O.) should identify, select, and partner with higher education institutions (HEIs) to participate in the university sponsorship program.
- The I.O. should be responsible for the coordination, implementation, and evaluation of the program and for national cohort support for the students in the program.
- The I.O. should partner with overseas organizations or, as needed, be present to facilitate the recruitment, application, preparation, and travel process.
- The I.O. should develop a consolidated application process that will consider both a student's academic qualifications and their potential to be admissible to the U.S. as a refugee by the U.S. Government.
- Students should need to meet a set of academic eligibility criteria (including English skills) determined in collaboration with sponsoring HEIs and the I.O.
- Students should need to meet refugee eligibility criteria through either 1) valid refugee status conferred by either UNHCR or host state, or 2) a screening process to determine the individual's likely eligibility for refugee status under the U.S. refugee definition.
- Students accepted to the program should study full-time.
- To sponsor students, HEIs should meet partner responsibilities, determined by the I.O. in alignment with PRM requirements for private sponsorship.
- Students should be a part of and connected to a national cohort of students.
- The program should be inclusive and intentional about making sure it works for those who carry additional responsibilities, including supporting their families.
- The I.O. and HEIs should partner to provide orientation and holistic services to support integration throughout student enrollment.



Launching a university sponsorship program for refugee students will require robust support from diverse stakeholders, including campus stakeholders and donors. The report outlines anticipated program costs and a funding strategy that focuses on public-private partnerships through local and national pooled funding mechanisms. The report also recommends an intentional messaging campaign targeted at particular audiences, especially higher education leadership and campus communities.

This report is the outcome of six months of work involving representatives from approximately sixty organizations and institutions. President Biden’s February 4, 2021 Executive Order, in which he indicated the likely creation of a private sponsorship program, provided the opportunity and impetus to advocate for colleges and universities to be included in this new program so they can sponsor refugee students directly (“university sponsorship”). In May 2021, the Presidents’ Alliance, with partners, launched the Initiative for U.S. Education Pathways for Refugee Students to significantly increase refugee student entry into the U.S. to pursue higher education and have a pathway to stay. The focus of the Initiative has been to advocate for, design, and promote a university sponsorship program.

This is the moment for the U.S. to embark on the essential next step in expanding refugee access to higher education. The need for additional legal pathways for refugees is vast, and the disparity in access to higher education, immense. Today, there is not only a clear policy opportunity to make university sponsorship possible, but there is also momentum and support from funders and higher education institutions to enable it to successfully launch, grow, and embed itself in campuses and communities across the U.S.



GLOSSARY

Refugee and Immigration

Country of First Asylum

The country in which a refugee or asylum seeker is based before moving on to a complementary pathway/resettlement opportunity after being forced to flee their home country. Also referred to as current host country.

Durable Solution

Any means by which the situation of refugees can be satisfactorily and permanently resolved to enable them to live normal lives with full access to rights and freedoms. These traditionally include voluntary repatriation (return to country of origin), local integration in their current host country, or resettlement to a third country.

F-1 Visa

The main type of student visa in the U.S. and current avenue for refugees to enter the U.S. as students.

Refugee

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Refugee Resettlement

The transfer of refugees most in need of international protection to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence, usually through UNHCR’s identification and referral process.

Resettlement Agency

Under the U.S.’s traditional resettlement program (not private sponsorship), resettlement agencies are responsible for placing refugees

with one of their local affiliates and for providing initial services for refugees resettled in the U.S. The Department of State’s standard cooperative agreement with each resettlement agency specifies the services the agency must provide.

Third Country

A country that admits refugees and other persons in need of international protection that is not the country of origin or current country of asylum.

Pathways and Sponsorship

Complementary Pathways

Safe and regulated avenues for refugees to access third countries that complement traditional government-run, UNHCR-operated resettlement. Ideally these will be pathways to permanent residency.

Complementary Education Pathways

Facilitate refugees’ movement to a safe third country for the purpose of education, while also having their protection needs met.



Community Sponsorship

Refugees are paired with groups of individuals, such as local clubs, businesses, university communities or faith groups, who commit to providing clearly defined financial and/or in-kind contributions and volunteer services to support refugee welcome and integration.

Private Refugee Sponsorship

A form of community sponsorship in which private entities or organizations like universities lead in, and provide financial and logistical support for, the relocation and integration of refugees nominated by sponsors and accepted through resettlement or complementary pathways programs.

University sponsorship of refugee students

An education pathway for refugee students to be admitted as students into a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in a third country and as refugees with a pathway to permanent residence. As part of sponsoring the student, the HEI commits to providing financial and logistical support for the student.

University Sponsorship Program Actors

Campus Committee

Designated group determined by HEI Sponsor, this includes a program liaison, student leadership, faculty, and cross-departmental staff who take on the responsibility of welcoming and connecting students to resources and services.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Accredited, degree-granting public or private colleges and universities in the United States providing postsecondary programs and degrees (e.g., doctorate, master's, baccalaureate, associates, Tribal, and special focus institutions).

HEI Sponsor

The college or university that is committed to enrolling a refugee student and providing financial and logistical support for the student. HEI Sponsors can be public or private, two-year or four-year, and special focus institutions (e.g., law and engineering schools).

Implementing Organization (I.O.)

The proposed national entity responsible for coordinating all stakeholders and activities of the program.

Initial Cohort

The program will launch with a first group of refugee students, which will be the initial cohort. This cohort would likely access the USRAP through a pilot program of PRM. This report uses the term 'pilot' to refer to PRM's intended 2022 private sponsorship pilot.

Program Liaison

A senior administrator or faculty member designated by an HEI Sponsor to serve as the point of contact for the HEI, I.O., and student. Each participating HEI Sponsor will have one program liaison.

Overseas Partners

Non-governmental or community-based organizations outside of the U.S. in communities where refugees live (in urban or camp settings) that may play a role in the outreach and recruitment of students as well as assist with the application process, paperwork and pre-departure activities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Forced displacement has doubled in the past decade, and 2020 was another record-setting year in terms of the number of people forced to flee their homes. By the end of 2020, 82.4 million individuals were displaced worldwide and an estimated 1.4 million are currently in need of resettlement.¹ At the same time, fewer than one percent of refugees are resettled each year. For years, the U.S. was the global leader in providing safety for forcibly displaced populations, resettling more refugees than any other country. But in 2018, the United States fell behind Canada for the first time since the Refugee Act of 1980.² While data on complementary pathways is limited, it appears the number of refugees who come to the U.S. on student visas numbers in the thousands, compared to over one million international students in the U.S. total.³ At a time when the need for resettlement and complementary pathways is growing exponentially, opportunities for refugees to reach safety in the U.S. are falling short. The need for collective action to support refugee students could not be greater.

While 39% of students are able to access higher education worldwide, only a dismal 5% of refugee youth access higher education. A multitude of barriers create and perpetuate this inequity.⁴

The F-1 visa system, the current legal channel for refugee learners wanting to attend college or university in the U.S., is complex for refugees to access and does not provide them with a durable solution.⁵ Student visas are, by legal definition, temporary: the student must prove that they are entering the U.S. in non-immigrant status and do not have an intent to immigrate. F-1 students must also demonstrate that they can cover all their educational and living costs for the duration of their program. Thus, the F-1 visa does not, as currently designed, provide durable protection to refugees who enter the U.S. as international students.

Since the creation of the federal refugee resettlement program in 1980, there has not been a systematic mechanism for universities to sponsor refugees. Currently, small numbers of refugee students make their way to the U.S. to study, enriching U.S. college and university campuses with their resilience, skills, and diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Organizations and smaller scale initiatives at institutions have provided private scholarships to refugee students.

“ Being in the United States and getting access to education here opened so many opportunities. I genuinely feel that my future is limitless. If I was still in a refugee camp in Malaysia, I would have been married at a young age and have many kids. My life would be so different from what I can imagine today. I believe that this proposed U.S. university sponsorship program will make a life-changing difference for refugee students because it gives them a chance to follow their dreams.”

Miriam Cing, Junior at Trinity College,
Student Voices for Refugees Co-Chair, Myanmar,
resettled in the U.S. through USRAP

Examples of Scholarship and Access Programs for Refugee Students

Refugees currently depend on a very limited number of scholarships and programs designed to support refugees to access U.S. higher education.

- Specific HEIs offer scholarships for students with refugee backgrounds. Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students (CUSDS), across its first two cohorts, has now supported 33 students from 19 countries. Salve Regina University and Wheaton College also each have a scholarship for refugee students.
- Certain international college access programs serve refugee students. For example, KenSAP (Kenya), Bridge2Rwanda (Rwanda), United States Student Achievers Program, USAP (Zimbabwe), and African Leadership Academy (South Africa) support their scholars to navigate applications for U.S. university admissions and financial aid, secure their U.S. international student visa, arrange travel to the U.S., and provide them with practical and cultural training to prepare them for university.
- The IIE Odyssey Scholarship provides full scholarships and support services to refugee youth around the world. Beginning in late 2021 and 2022, the scholarship will include opportunities at U.S. colleges and universities.
- Refugee-led efforts, such as Munia International founded by Habso Mohamud, also help refugees access U.S. colleges and universities.
- While refugees may also be eligible for scholarships not specifically designed for displaced students, these are highly competitive and often not attuned to the particular challenges refugee students face in admissions processes.

Opportunity

On December 17, 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), recognizing the need for greater solidarity and responsibility sharing to find sustainable solutions to refugee situations. A key objective of the GCR is to expand access to third country solutions for refugees, including through resettlement and complementary pathways. To that end, UNHCR, states and other actors jointly developed a strategy aiming to create additional complementary pathways for 2 million refugees by 2028.⁶ In addition, UNHCR has set a target of 15 percent of refugees enrolling in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by 2030.⁷ The creation of university sponsorship for refugee students contributes to both goals by creating a complementary pathway and access to education for refugee students.

At over 4,000 HEIs, the largest number globally, the U.S. higher education community has great potential to expand refugee access to postsecondary education and, at the same time, provide safety and protection to the displaced students it welcomes. HEIs in the U.S. are prepared to meet this moment. In recent years, they have significantly widened their social missions, global education efforts, and advocacy

for undocumented, immigrant, and international students. At the same time, they have increased their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion and have expanded outreach to displaced students, including through delivering learning in refugee camps and funding scholarships for displaced students.

With an administration interested in supporting durable solutions for refugees through higher education, there are opportunities to develop innovative programs and policies to help refugee students come study on campuses across the U.S. In the Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2022, President Biden announced the launch of a private sponsorship pilot program anticipated for 2022.⁸ This program would make college and university sponsorship possible, meaning private sponsors could identify and refer refugees to a new Priority 4 (P-4) category and apply to sponsor their resettlement, providing funding and core resettlement services. Admitting refugee students through a P-4 category of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) would expand the existing referral categories (Priority 1, 2, and 3) through which refugees are currently resettled in the U.S.

Due to the limitations of the existing F-1 visa program and the immense potential for refugees to access complementary education pathways, the Initiative recommends that the United States



admit refugee students participating in university sponsorship under the new P-4 category. University sponsorship for refugees would remove the legal barriers currently preventing talented refugees residing in a first country of asylum from attending U.S. colleges and universities and provide them with a path to permanent residency and citizenship.

“

In my case, access to higher education was a literal lifeline; it allowed me to escape Syria and dodge the mandatory military draft, which could've meant I'd be taking part in the Syrian war defending a totalitarian regime, rather than pursuing my dreams of becoming an architect. The scholarship to Illinois Tech, and later a scholarship to Columbia University, changed the course of my life.”

Majed Abdulsamad, Illinois Tech alumnus, Syrian Youth Empowerment Co-Founder

2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Student-Centered

University sponsorship should be student-centered and focus on refugee learners' inherent strengths, placing students' prior knowledge, experience, and learning in the foreground of decision-making and program design. Accordingly, throughout the process of designing the policy framework and program model, students have served as co-chairs and working group members and engaged in every stage of the process. A student-facilitated design workshop gave students with refugee backgrounds an opportunity to provide feedback on the university sponsorship model. A successful university sponsorship model will center refugee students throughout the program implementation and evaluation. Designing and implementing a student-centered program is the right and best approach to enhance refugee self-reliance.⁹ Guided by the principle of engaging refugee students at every step, the voices and lived experiences of refugee students who advised the Initiative during this process are placed front and center throughout this report.

“

Refugee youth have the potential to act as agents of change. Let's engage refugee students in the design. We know our own challenges best and can contribute to solutions.”

Bwema Matata, Graduate student at Columbia School of Social Work, Democratic Republic of Congo



Private Sponsorship

Private sponsorship is the pairing of refugees with groups of individuals, such as local clubs, businesses, university communities, or faith groups, who commit to providing financial, logistical, and integration support for refugees accepted through resettlement programs. In some contexts, private groups also can nominate, or name, the individual refugees they wish to sponsor. Given the significant interest and capacity of U.S. campuses to support refugee students, the Initiative believes colleges and universities have the potential to play a leadership role in the development of private sponsorship in the United States. Private university sponsorship can expand the pool of refugees identified to come to the U.S., strengthen campus communities, and foster positive attitudes towards refugees and resettlement in areas where refugees are not traditionally resettled.

Additionality

A university sponsorship program, within the context of a broader private sponsorship program, should follow the principle of “additionality.”¹⁰ If traditional, government-assisted resettlement is augmented, rather than supplanted, by private sponsorship, the U.S. will resettle the same number of the most vulnerable refugees as it would have without private sponsorship. At the same time, the U.S. will create additional pathways for refugee students to secure both safety and academic opportunity. Additionality can incentivize potential sponsors who may be motivated by the knowledge that their resources facilitate the resettlement of refugees who would otherwise not have been resettled.

To move toward establishing a program that is truly additional, the Initiative recommends that the U.S. government formally and explicitly create additional places for sponsored refugees each year, distinct from its annual government-assisted resettlement target. The quota of privately-sponsored refugees could be set as an



absolute number each year, or as a percentage of the annual Presidential Determination of government sponsored refugees.¹¹

Equity, Transparency, and Accountability

The Initiative’s recommendations are informed by a deep commitment to developing a university sponsorship program that is built on equity, transparency, and accountability. Through the outreach, recruitment and application process, supports will be designed for refugee students to access the program equitably. The application and selection process will be as transparent as possible so that the organizations involved can be held accountable for equitable access.

3 POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Infrastructure and Feasibility

The President, working through the Department of State and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), can draw on existing legal authority to create a private sponsorship program in the United States.¹² This authority was previously used by then-President Reagan in the 1980s to establish a private sponsorship program for refugees, which was discontinued in 1996.¹³

A new ‘priority’ access category—Priority 4 (P-4)—would create access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for privately-sponsored cases. This proposed P-4 category would be implemented alongside the three other referral submission categories.¹⁴ As mentioned above, in his FY 2022 Report to Congress, President Biden announced the launch of a private sponsorship pilot program anticipated for 2022. The Report to Congress states the “P-4 category will be linked to the pilot program and cover refugees supported by private sponsors who accept primary responsibility for funding and providing core resettlement services.”¹⁵ The report further outlines that the private sponsorship pilot program will include two components: 1) matching, where

private sponsors will be matched with refugees who already have access to USRAP; and 2) identification, where certain private sponsors will be authorized to identify and refer refugees to the P-4 category and apply to sponsor their resettlement. A university sponsorship program would operate through the identification mechanism.¹⁶

3.2 Refugee Eligibility Determination

Many people in need of international protection do not have the benefit of having had formal refugee status conferred by a state or UNHCR.¹⁷ While formal recognition as a refugee is one possible starting point for access to complementary pathways, requiring formal recognition also poses significant operational challenges. The Initiative recommends that the U.S. government allow individuals whose formal confirmation of refugee status is pending (registered asylum-seekers) to be eligible for a university sponsorship program. These individuals would be subject to appropriate security and refugee eligibility screenings before being admitted.

For the proposed university sponsorship program, an Implementing Organization (I.O.) would act as the intermediary between student



applicants overseas and college and university partners in the United States. Details about how this might work are included in [Section 4.2](#).

3.3 Inclusion of Family Members

The program should have the possibility to admit both individual students and students with family members. While it may be challenging logistically and financially to include students with families in the initial phases, the program should aim to accommodate families. To achieve greater gender equity, the program must strive to include women who may have spouses or children and who want to pursue an educational degree.¹⁸ Although additional support services would be required for successful resettlement when welcoming family members, one of the strengths of the U.S. higher education system is its breadth and diversity. Many U.S. colleges and universities routinely enroll nontraditional students, including those with families. These campuses would be prepared to sponsor students with family members accompanying them to the United States.

3.4 Adjustments to USRAP Requirements

Reception and Placement Services

Although many of the necessary supports and resettlement goals remain similar across the traditional USRAP and a new private sponsorship program, the nature of university sponsorship requires some alteration of current USRAP requirements. For refugees coming to the U.S. through traditional government-led resettlement, resettlement agency affiliates must provide a standard set of Reception and Placement (R&P) services, spanning a refugee's pre-arrival through their initial 90 days in the

country.¹⁹ Private sponsors will likely be required to provide similar services. In the case of university sponsorship, where the private sponsor will be a U.S. HEI, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) should adapt the cooperative or sponsorship agreement that outlines the R&P services to account for students' unique situations and profiles.

Economic Self-Sufficiency

The current primary measured outcome is economic self-sufficiency at 90 days. The Initiative recommends PRM adjust this for university sponsorship to more accurately reflect the reality that students cannot take on full-time work until after graduation. In the context of university sponsorship, the student would arrive in the U.S. to attend an institution of higher education for the specified length of a tertiary education program. They would enroll in full-time studies, with the sponsoring institution providing them financial support as they do so. A university sponsorship program will equip graduates to enter the U.S. labor market with credentials, greater English fluency, local networks, and higher earning potential—which will assist them in achieving and sustaining financial self-sufficiency post-graduation.



Travel Loans

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) typically issues interest-free travel loans to resettled refugees to cover airfare to the U.S. Adult refugees must start paying back the loans six months after arrival. Though these loans allow newly-arrived refugees to build a credit history, they can be a challenging burden on those struggling to make ends meet so soon after arrival. In the context of university sponsorship, success could be derailed if a significant economic burden, like travel loan repayments, forces the refugee to seek employment instead of being a full-time student. PRM should explore alternatives to account for the unique context of university sponsorship, including a mechanism for sponsors to cover travel costs and offering postponement of travel loan repayments until six months after the student is no longer enrolled in school.

Recommendations on F-1 Visa

Given that not all eligible refugee learners will be able to access university sponsorship, the Initiative also developed recommendations to improve the F-1 visa system for refugees. These recommendations include:

- Grant all students from conflict-affected countries Special Student Relief to allow more flexibility around their course load and employment eligibility.
- Instruct consular officers to:
 - Interpret non-immigrant intent and ties to a residence abroad with appropriate discretion and focus on evaluating the student applicant's immediate intent to enroll as a bona fide student. For refugee students and students from conflict-affected countries, consular officers should be satisfied by an intent to return when conditions in the conflict-affected country of origin are normalized.
 - Not refuse a student visa application solely because of attendance at a lesser-known college or academic program.
 - Appropriately assess financial means and travel documents.
 - Provide both students and Congress with clear information about the reason for student visa denials.

In addition, the Initiative recommends that Congress enact legislation to extend dual intent to students. This would mean students could express an interest in transferring to another legal status after completing their degree during the visa interview.

These suggested improvements will not just benefit refugee learners but also other students whom the United States wishes to attract to our higher education institutions and communities. See [Appendix A](#) for the Initiative's detailed recommendations on how to improve the F-1 visa program.

4 PROGRAM DESIGN

The following section outlines the design of the proposed university sponsorship program in the U.S., including the roles of key actors, an overview of program elements, and the intended impact such a program would have on participating stakeholders and U.S. society more broadly.

A key feature of the proposed model is that an Implementing Organization (I.O.) would act as a bridge connecting refugee students overseas, higher education institutions (HEIs) in the U.S., and the USRAP. The I.O. would link the various actors and ensure refugee students do not get lost in the USRAP pipeline or the U.S. college and university admissions process. A centralized coordinating body is necessary due to the complexity of syncing these two application processes (USRAP & HEI admissions) and the unfamiliarity of U.S. HEIs with refugee populations and the resettlement process. Under the proposed model, students participating in the program and sponsoring HEIs will be supported by the I.O., while maintaining independence and agency.

Table 1: Implementation Phases

	INNOVATION PHASE	SCALEABLE PHASE	EMBEDDED PHASE
TIMEFRAME	First 2 years	First 3-5 years	Beyond 5 years
TARGET DEGREE TYPES	Baccalaureate and Associate's degrees (Community Colleges must have a 2+2 program)	Progressively open to additional degree types	All
GEOGRAPHY - OVERSEAS	Limited based on overseas processing capacity	Open to additional locations based on the expanded student recruitment & application process	Global
SCALE ENVISIONED	< 30 students and ~10 HEIs	< 150 students annually by 2026	>500 annually

4.1 Roles, Requirements, and Responsibilities

Table 2: Role of I.O. and HEI Sponsor

IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION	PROCESS (SEE SECTION 4.2 FOR DETAILS)	HEI SPONSOR
<p>I.O. and overseas partners conduct outreach and recruit potential students.</p> <p>I.O. conducts outreach to HEIs and establishes agreements to sponsor.</p>	<p>Outreach & Recruitment</p>	<p>HEI is encouraged to promote sponsorship opportunities and direct refugee students to apply to the program.</p>
<p>I.O. administers a consolidated application process, including academic qualifications, personal background, and refugee eligibility.</p>	<p>Application</p>	<p>HEI provides input on application design, particularly academic qualifications expected at their institutions.</p>
<p>I.O. manages the selection process and works with U.S. Government (USG) on USRAP referrals and with HEIs to ensure the best placement and academic match for each selected student.</p>	<p>Selection & Admission</p>	<p>HEI receives a vetted candidate pool from I.O. for consideration, with each individual HEI making admission decisions.</p>
<p>I.O. offers standard virtual or, with overseas partners, in-person pre-departure orientation services to the program cohort.</p> <p>I.O. facilitates recipient travel and entry arrangements in collaboration with relevant partners.</p>	<p>Pre-Departure/ Pre-Arrival</p>	<p>HEI contributes to the creation and content of pre-departure orientation, and may participate (virtually) in some activities.</p>
<p>I.O. organizes a virtual or in-person orientation upon recipient arrival in the U.S. to establish a cohort and introduce recipients to each other and to relevant I.O. staff.</p>	<p>Student Orientation</p>	<p>HEI includes students in both the international student and general student orientations on campus.</p>
<p>I.O. provides technical assistance, ongoing training and resources for HEI, program liaison, and campus committees to provide integration support.</p> <p>I.O. maintains regular communication with students and HEIs.</p>	<p>Reception & Placement Services</p>	<p>HEI provides support through existing resources on campus, program liaison, and intentional integration efforts of the campus committee and campus community.</p>
<p>I.O. provides technical assistance, ongoing training and resources for HEI, program liaison, and campus committees to provide integration support.</p>	<p>Support Services</p>	<p>HEI provides support through existing resources on campus, program liaison, and intentional integration efforts of the campus committee and campus community.</p>
<p>I.O. engages in a public-private partnership strategy to raise funds for the operating costs of the I.O.</p>	<p>Fundraising</p>	<p>HEI commits to minimum financial and in-kind contributions to help cover costs including tuition, room and board, and on-campus support.</p>

Role of the Implementing Organization

To ensure a university sponsorship program is successfully implemented across the United States and includes a diverse representation of post-secondary institutions, the Initiative recommends the I.O. be responsible for overseeing the implementation and coordination of the U.S. college and university sponsorship program (hereafter “the program”). The I.O. will serve as the hub for coordinating all programmatic areas and be the main point of contact for participating host institutions, government partners, and any overseas partners. It will build the infrastructure and relationships necessary to launch, expand, and sustain the program.

The Initiative recommends that the I.O. possess the following key qualities:

- Extensive knowledge of the U.S. higher education system, including institutional types and admission standards and processes;
- Experience liaising with U.S. government agencies and international counterparts;
- Existing relationships with U.S. post-secondary institutions;
- Knowledge of and experience navigating the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program;
- Prior experience coordinating, assessing, and developing programs with multiple stakeholders;
- Demonstrated track record of multi-sector fundraising, including receiving large U.S. government grants, as well as private (foundation and/or corporation) funds;
- 501(c)(3) tax deductible status for contributors;
- Experience working with students, preferably international, refugee and immigrant students.

The I.O. will develop an external communication and outreach strategy to raise awareness of the program and its impact and convey how different stakeholders can engage in and support the program. The I.O. will furthermore participate in domestic and international meetings and conferences to share and advertise the program at the national and international level, highlighting the important role higher education communities around the globe can play in creating durable solutions through higher education for refugees.

Partnership with HEIs

The I.O. will be responsible for developing, identifying, selecting, managing, and expanding a consortium of institutions that have agreed to a set of sponsor commitments. The I.O. will be the primary point of contact for participating institutions, providing clear program policies and processes, resources and training, and other administrative and programmatic support as needed. The I.O. will also conduct outreach and information sessions regarding refugee students and university sponsorship with the wider higher education ecosystem.

Once approved as an HEI Sponsor, HEIs, represented by the program liaison and campus committee, will undergo training and onboarding prior to receiving refugee students. The I.O. will conduct the initial onboarding, which will detail program goals, campus resource identification, and resettlement services. The I.O. can also advise HEI Sponsors on how to raise funds to support campus costs.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To reach scale, improve program delivery and outcomes, and build on lessons learned, the I.O. will develop and implement a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy together with key stakeholders. The strategy will be grounded in an iterative design approach, where program elements are repeatedly tested, analyzed, refined, and adapted based on feedback and lessons

Creating Cohorts and Keeping Students Together

Keeping refugee students from similar experiences together promotes a safe and welcoming campus environment and fosters a support system. Ideally, the I.O. will work with HEI Sponsors to admit students strategically, matching students with universities and colleges that have students with similar backgrounds.

- For example, Anisha Rai’s experience as a recipient of the Posse Foundation scholarship, and being a part of a cohort (a “posse”), has served to support her academic success, mental health, and overall well-being throughout her studies. Anisha, a Bhutanese-Nepali refugee student advisor for the Initiative and currently a sophomore at University of Wisconsin-Madison, explains: “Having someone else who went through the same process can be so much better for the student’s mental health and social life. It means they have someone to talk to who understands where they are coming from.”
- When HEI Sponsors cannot accept more than one student, the I.O. could consider arranging a city-based or regional cohort in which several universities within the same geographic area each accept a student and agree to facilitate connection between the students.

learned. To ensure the program is accountable to and responding to the needs of refugee students, the I.O. will build in mechanisms to regularly solicit and integrate their feedback.

Role of Sponsoring Higher Education Institutions

HEI Sponsors can include public or private colleges and universities that are two-year (with a two plus two agreement or equivalent) or four-year institutions.²⁰ Each institution will need to meet sponsorship requirements and develop sustainable funding models with support from the I.O. as needed. Participating HEIs should identify a campus committee composed of individuals from across the campus community and identify a senior administrator or faculty member to serve as the program liaison and primary point of contact for the refugee student and I.O.

The Initiative recommends the following requirements for HEI Sponsors:

- Offer placement to small cohorts of refugee students (e.g., at least 2-3) and if not possible, a minimum of one each year;
- Agree to partner requirements for private sponsorship, determined by PRM;
- At a minimum, cover partial tuition but preferably full tuition, on-campus housing, and a dining plan for the duration of a student’s study, through institutional funding, private donations, and/or local philanthropic partners (see [Section 6](#) on Funding);
- Provide student health insurance for the duration of a students’ study;
- Agree to flexible admissions policies for refugee students that take into account their unique situations, like waiving the SAT or ACT requirement and accepting more flexible English proficiency exams, such as the Duolingo English Test (DET);²¹

- Identify a senior administrator or faculty member as the program liaison, who will serve as the primary point of contact for the I.O. and member of the campus committee;
- Establish a campus committee to coordinate initial Reception & Placement services and integration support;
- As the program develops, apply their newfound expertise to mentoring new HEI Sponsors.

Establishing Campus Committees

The HEI Sponsor should establish a campus committee composed of a wide array of stakeholders (e.g., student leaders, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni). The program liaison and campus committee will coordinate initial Reception & Placement services, as required by PRM, and integration support such as airport pick-up and

residence setup. They will also ensure students receive holistic support throughout their time on campus. Local community members and/or representatives of local non-profits will also be encouraged to participate in the campus committee.

Academic Program and Education

Refugee students participating in the program will be degree-seeking full-time students and should be provided with the same services as any other degree-seeking student at the HEI. For example, HEIs should assign an academic advisor to students and provide access to tutoring services and other campus resources. Program liaisons should track the academic progress of refugee students, and the HEI should provide additional academic support if needed. Students will enroll and attend classes in pursuit of a degree in the area of study of their choosing.

Leveraging Student Leadership: The Case of Canada

As demonstrated by the [Student Refugee Program \(SRP\)](#) run by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), postsecondary student advocates can be integral to carrying out resettlement services.²² WUSC SRP, which began as a network of student advocates for refugees, has grown into a thriving peer-to-peer refugee sponsorship program.²³ Since SRP's official establishment in 1978, 100 Canadian HEIs have sponsored 2,400 refugee students.

How does SRP work? Postsecondary student advocates are the drivers of SRP. With training and guidance from WUSC (and in some cases, campus staff or faculty advisors), Canadian student leaders sign on to become sponsors, negotiate sponsorship agreements with their institutions, and join "Local Committees" to provide direct support and reception services. In addition, Canadian students levy their own tuition, develop tuition and accommodation waiver agreements with their institutions, and fundraise to help finance refugee sponsorship. They also work to reduce stigma about refugees in their communities.²⁴

Canadian student sponsors not only take the lead on helping integrate refugee students, they are themselves changed by the experience. Student leaders report that getting involved in sponsorship leads to increased cross-cultural awareness, professional development, and lifelong friendships.²⁵

4.2 Process Overview

The process for refugee student entry under P4 category will involve coordination between the I.O., overseas partner organizations, the U.S. government and HEIs. From application to arrival on campus will be about a 22-month process.

Table 3: Application and Admissions Timeline

Timeline (22 months) Start: Oct, Year 1 End: Aug, Year 2	Year 1												Year 2																	
	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG							
Students apply	Oct	← Students apply to Implementing Organization Deadline: October, year 1 • Criteria: academic & refugee eligibility																												
Implementing Organization (IO)*	Oct - Nov		← Candidates prescreened																											
	Oct - Jan			← Prescreened candidates evaluated for academic eligibility																										
	Oct - Feb					← Academically eligible candidates evaluated for refugee eligibility Students with refugee status: I.O. verifies refugee document (UNHCR or state) Students without refugee status: I.O. or partner interviews candidate to assess eligibility for U.S. refugee status																								
	Feb - Mar						← Finalists selected and interviewed																							
	Mar							← Students selected for program and notified																						
	Mar - Apr								← Selected students referred to US Refugee Coordinators (RefCoords)																					
													Pre-Departure Orientation →			Jan - Jun														
U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)	Mar - Apr						← RefCoords submit cases to Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs)																							
	Apr - May							RSCs process cases: RSC focal points for P4 students ensure cases do not get stuck (Security checks File preparation Education about the process)																						
													USCIS interview →						Dec - May											
																Medical screening →				May - Jul										
																			Flight to U.S.** →				Jul - Aug							
Higher Education Institutions (HEI)***	HEIs apply to I.O. →			Jan - Mar																										
	I.O. reviews applications →							Mar																						
	I.O. selects HEIs →								Mar - Apr																					
	I.O. conducts initial orientation for HEIs & campus committees →												Sep																	
	I.O. matches students with HEIs →															Oct - Nov														
	HEI admissions decisions →																		Dec - Jan											
	I.O. finalizes remaining matches and notifies students of acceptance and placement →																Jan - Mar													
																			Student arrives in U.S. →				Jul - Aug							
																			Campus committee provides initial reception services →				Jul - Aug							
																		Student orientations →				Jul - Aug								
																		Student begins classes →				Aug								

* with overseas partners | ** If student is not approved for travel by August Year 2, all efforts will be made for them to travel the following December or January. HEIs will agree in advance to start date flexibility | *** with campus committees

Student Outreach and Recruitment

The university sponsorship program will conduct intentional outreach and recruitment to ensure refugees have equitable access to the program. This involves engaging a range of local partners and using a variety of platforms to connect with potential students.

The Implementing Organization will partner with overseas organizations to:

- Conduct information sessions to introduce the program to relevant local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, secondary school teachers, etc. in the country or countries of asylum;
- Create an open call for applications utilizing social media platforms and messaging boards in refugee communities;
- Include diverse submission methods, both online and on paper;
- Host information sessions before the application deadline for students to understand the program, process, and requirements;
- Coordinate outreach and dissemination of the application in collaboration with relevant partners overseas, ensuring underrepresented groups such as women, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ community have access;
- Connect potential students with current or former students in the program.

“ A mentorship program is instrumental in students’ lives. We had a team of mentors from various universities in Kenya who devoted themselves and moved around the schools in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. They notified refugee students about scholarship opportunities through Whatsapp and in person.”

Atem James Maker, Graduate student at School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, South Sudan



Application Process

Once recruited, refugee students will apply to the program via an accessible, flexible, and centralized application process designed with the specific needs of refugee students in mind. This consolidated process will simplify the application process for both students and participating HEIs, while allowing all parties to maintain agency.

The I.O. will manage the following activities to streamline the application and admission process:

- In collaboration with participating HEIs and overseas partners, design an accessible, open, and transparent application process with clear eligibility criteria;
- Provide reasonable support to applicants during the application period, addressing barriers applicants may encounter during the process;
- Coordinate with standardized test and/or credential evaluation providers to address gaps in student qualifications or documentation of qualifications, if needed.



Eligibility and Selection

To establish eligibility, the I.O. and overseas partner organizations first evaluate candidates based on academic criteria. Drawing from evidence-based, holistic approaches like TheDream.US and Posse Foundation, the selection process will reframe the question of academic eligibility.²⁶ By including institutions with varying admissions requirements, refugee students with diverse academic backgrounds and experiences are eligible to apply. Candidates who meet the established academic standards are next evaluated for refugee eligibility qualifications.

The selection committee, composed of I.O. staff and other key partners, will determine who to admit to the program following the academic and refugee eligibility evaluations outlined above. The committee will consider the student profiles and available HEI Sponsors to determine who is selected for that year's cohort. When informing candidates they have been selected, the I.O. will emphasize:

- Only the Admissions Office of a U.S. HEI can decide if they will be admitted to a particular U.S. college or university. The I.O. will commit to finding a placement (meaning identifying a host institution that agrees to admit the student) for all students it selects;
- The U.S. Government (USG) makes the final decision on their resettlement to the U.S.;
- This entire process will take 18-22 months and is not guaranteed to result in successful resettlement given that USG has the ultimate authority to approve refugees for resettlement to the U.S.

Suggested Student Eligibility Criteria and Evaluation

Academic eligibility

The I.O. and partners will conduct an initial screening to assess students' academic potential. Academic criteria will be more flexible than typical U.S. higher education criteria to account for the particular contexts of refugee learners, where transcripts and test scores do not necessarily reflect students' abilities.

Minimum Requirements will include:

- High school graduate - possesses academic documents or alternative credential;
- Competent in both oral and written English;
- Has not already completed the degree they are intending to pursue in the U.S. (partially completed degree accepted).

Refugee eligibility

- Individuals must be in need of international protection and deemed likely to meet the U.S. refugee definition to be eligible. The I.O. will accept applications from individuals not yet officially recognized as refugees to enable a wider pool of applicants and greater accessibility.
- When students already have refugee status, the I.O. will verify their documents with UNHCR.
- When students do not have refugee status, they must at least be registered as an asylum seeker with UNHCR or their host state. The I.O. or a contracted partner organization with the requisite expertise will then conduct an additional screening interview and assessment.²⁷ The interviewer will assess the validity and credibility of the individual's refugee claim and the likelihood that USCIS would determine the applicant is a refugee and admissible under U.S. law.²⁸

USRAP Processing

In addition to serving as a bridge between refugee students overseas and U.S. HEIs, the I.O. would also connect both students and HEIs with the USRAP. Once students are selected for the program, the I.O. will refer their cases to the USRAP for processing under a newly-created P4 category for privately sponsored refugees. Once in the USRAP pipeline, students will go through the same processing steps as other refugees (P1-3), with particular safeguards built in to ensure their cases are processed in a timely manner in line with academic calendars. As a guiding principle, refugee students will be engaged as active agents during each step of the process.

Steps in USRAP Processing

The following steps outline the recommended process for students to be referred to the USRAP and processed in time to enter the U.S. by August preceding the relevant academic year (see Table 3: Application and Admissions Timeline):

- 1. I.O. refers selected candidates to U.S. Refugee Coordinators (U.S. RefCoords) at U.S. Embassies/Consulates:** I.O. submits referral forms to the U.S. RefCoords. Referral forms capture basic biographical data, proof of refugee/asylum seeker status, current address overseas, and any other information required by the USG.
- 2. U.S. RefCoords submit cases to Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs):** RefCoords verify referral forms are complete and forward all completed cases to the relevant RSCs for processing.
- 3. RSC processes cases:** P4 student cases should be processed similarly to P1-3 cases — the RSC should educate the applicant about the process, prepare their file, and initiate the necessary biographic security checks.²⁹
 - To ensure that student cases are processed expeditiously, RSCs in regions where this program operates (eventually globally) should assign a focal point for P4 student cases.³⁰
 - The focal point should track all P4 student cases and, when needed, liaise with relevant actors to resolve issues with an aim to ensure students can travel by August preceding the relevant academic year.
 - If students are not in locations frequented by an RSC, the focal point should travel and conduct pre-screening interviews themselves, or conduct remote interviews if USG policies allow.
 - In the program’s initial phases, the focal point should also educate RSC colleagues and USCIS Missions on the university sponsorship pathway.
- 4. USCIS interview:** USCIS interviews P4 student to determine whether the applicant is a refugee under U.S. law and admissible to the US. If USG policies allow, USCIS could consider remote interviewing for these cases so they can adjudicate student candidates in a timely manner.
- 5. Medical screening:** P4 students would undergo the same medical screening as other refugees resettled to the U.S.
- 6. Flight to US:** P4 students will fly in July or August of the relevant academic year. Assuming the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is involved in arranging travel for privately sponsored refugees, IOM will reserve student seats in advance to ensure timely departures.³¹

Pre-Departure Program

The I.O. will provide a pre-departure preparation program for incoming first-year students based on a foundational curriculum developed by the I.O., with input from HEIs and in line with PRM baseline requirements. Depending on available resources, the program will be delivered either in-person by overseas partners, virtually by the I.O., or a combination of the above. The Initiative recommends in-person programming, but recognizes this would entail significant resources and logistical complexity. Any overseas partners involved will tailor the foundational curriculum to fit local needs. As the program evolves, the I.O. will arrange for program alumni and peer mentors to participate as leaders, both helping to develop and, where possible, facilitate, the pre-departure program.

The pre-departure program will be broken down into two major topics:

Cultural Orientation

The portion will align with current best practices in USRAP Pre-Departure Cultural Orientation Programs. It will cover topics such as pre-arrival processing, travel logistics, rights as a resettled refugee, the role of the sponsoring HEI, U.S. law, financial literacy, culture shock, adjusting to life in America, major differences in American culture, and more.

College Readiness

An academic success unit will introduce students to the U.S. higher education system and include programming that enhances student academic skills (such as academic English, college-level writing, quantitative skills, critical thinking, and academic integrity).

A navigating campus unit will cover topics that ensure success in a college campus setting. These topics include utilizing campus resources, interacting with peers and professors, participating in co-curricular activities, and more.

“

As refugees, it happens a lot where everything is done for you. Including and engaging refugee students in the process is key. Let the student take the lead and be there to assist. Does she know what she needs? Does she know how to get to a connecting flight? It's important to do this not for her, but with her.”

Georgette Bisoka, Boise State University alumna, Congo, resettled in the U.S. through USRAP

Student Arrival & Orientation in the U.S.

The I.O. will host a cohort orientation in-person or online for all refugee students arriving as part of the university sponsorship program. This orientation will build on the Pre-Departure Preparation Program students received overseas, foster an additional community of support for the students beyond their campus, and introduce the students to the support staff and services offered by the I.O. This will be a pre-university program that eases the student's transition to the U.S. and to academic life at a U.S. college or university.

Upon arrival on campus, students will be introduced to their mentors and other partners and taken to their on-campus housing. Selected mentors, the campus committee, and program alumni will participate in orienting new students. Students will also attend the international student orientation and general new student orientations on campus.

Examples of Topics for Post-Arrival Student Orientations

- Cultural orientation³²
- Legal requirements of resettlement
- Finances
- Campus tour, resources, and introductions
- Academic Advisor introduction
- Mentor introduction
- U.S. Higher Education systems (grading, credits, etc.)
- Review of goals and class enrollment
- Career services introduction: opportunities and plans for part-time campus or off-campus term employment; opportunities and plans for summer internships or employment.


4.3 Support Services

Resettlement Services

Under the traditional Reception and Placement (R&P) program of the USRAP, PRM requires resettlement agencies to provide refugees with certain services to ensure their basic needs are met during the first 90 days post arrival.³³ The Initiative recommends that HEI Sponsors, with support from the I.O. and campus committee, be expected to carry out similar R&P services, hereafter referred to as “resettlement services,” with some exceptions and additions.³⁴

 **Prior to the refugee student’s arrival, the HEI’s program liaison, in coordination with the campus committee, relevant HEI staff, and the I.O., should:**

- Provide any required documentation to the student and/or I.O. to support travel arrangements;
- Facilitate a virtual campus orientation, connecting the student to the program liaison at the university, as well as other contacts, such as an academic advisor or a peer mentor to facilitate campus integration;
- Supply the student’s residence with essential furnishings; campus committees may be encouraged to solicit contributions from the broader community.

 **In order to comply with the expectations that PRM holds with regard to resettlement services, within the first 90 days of arrival, the campus committee should coordinate initial reception services and provision of basic needs, including:**

- Airport pick-up;
- Culturally appropriate food and appropriate seasonal clothing on arrival;

- Housing and personal safety evaluation;
- Health screenings and immunizations ;
- Introduction to campus health services;
- Pocket money;
- Assistance with Social Security card application, AR-11 change of address form, and selective service registration;
- Enrollment in classes.

The HEI’s program liaison, in coordination with the campus committee, should be responsible for creating and documenting the completion of each required service through an electronic case file, to be monitored by the I.O.

Integration Support



To ensure students entering the U.S. on the university sponsorship program will thrive academically and personally and to further facilitate their integration on campus and in their new communities, the I.O. should:

- Designate an organizational point of contact to check in with refugee students on academic progress, personal well-being, and any other questions or concerns students may have;
- Distribute a program manual to recipients providing helpful resources, tips, and information on living and studying in the United States;
- When not available on campus, offer resources for virtual counseling services, with specialists in trauma-informed services, and train the students on accessing the resources;
- Provide resources for legal information (e.g., organizing information sessions on topics such as family reunification) and referral to relevant immigration services (status adjustment to lawful permanent resident);
- Connect with the HEI Sponsor campuses annually to meet with the students, program liaison, staff and faculty advisors, and program’s peer mentors through campus visits or national gatherings.



The HEI Sponsor should:

- Designate a faculty or staff advisor (can be the program liaison) to check in with students regarding their academic progress, integration, and psychosocial support needs, and to connect them to resources as needed;
- Designate at least one peer mentor for each refugee student;³⁵

“

As a refugee, there’s a lot of culture shock you’ll face. Newcomer students need to have a bit of background on what they’re getting themselves into. Being a person of color in the U.S. is hard, but being a minority and a refugee who’s new to American culture and campus life adds additional challenges. The program should provide cultural orientation, so refugee students know it’s not going to be an easy journey.”

Anisha Rai, Sophomore at University of Wisconsin-Madison, Bhutanese-Nepali, resettled in the U.S. through USRAP

- Draw on existing resources to provide supplementary English language and academic writing training (4-12 months, depending on need);
- Promote a welcoming campus environment by receiving cross-cultural skills training from the I.O. and supporting the development of a vibrant and sustainable campus committee.³⁶

Students may also want opportunities to self-organize. The HEI Sponsor and I.O. should foster opportunities for refugee student mobilization at campus and national levels. HEI Sponsors are encouraged to offer additional holistic support services that will set students up for success and improve student retention.

Path to Employment

The university sponsorship program will consider long-term integration needs beyond graduation. The I.O. will help the student build their social and professional networks, checking in with them and connecting them to relevant resources and people. The HEI Sponsor, in coordination with the campus committee and local community partners, will also draw on existing resources to provide professional development activities (career counseling, networking events, internships, campus employment). The I.O. and HEI Sponsor will work to connect refugee students to summer internship opportunities to build professional skills and expand networks. When needed, the I.O. will provide training and resources to assist the HEI Sponsor in carrying out tailored professional development activities.

Students Speak to the Importance of Mental Health

Refugee students may be dealing with prior trauma on top of post-migration stressors.³⁷ According to Erick J. Rozo, who is originally from Venezuela and a current Columbia University student, university sponsorship must address mental health needs of students:

“Having that extra support for mental health should be a requirement. Some of us are not only traumatized, but we are trying to submerge ourselves in a world where we are lacking in many tools to keep moving forward. We are human beings who need networks of support to address future challenges.”

A refugee student originally from Burundi who prefers to remain anonymous shares:

“As refugees, we go through a lot. There’s a lot of trauma that goes unaddressed. We don’t know how that is going to affect us after arrival on campus, socially or in our classes. While you can’t force someone to see a counselor, it’s important to encourage refugee students to seek help. They’re going to have a family back home that’s probably going through a lot. Maybe they’re dealing with problems financially. Being a refugee comes with a lot of responsibility.”

Students expressed that connecting program recipients to those who have gone through similar experiences is one way to promote mental health and address feelings of isolation. As mentioned previously, using a cohort model can help foster these connections and build psychosocial support.

Students Speak to the Importance of Mental Health (continued)

While U.S. universities often have built-in support (e.g., counseling; disability services), these services are not always easy to access. Students recommended that the HEI Sponsor explicitly raise awareness about these services during orientation, and be clear about how to access them. As Olivia Issa, a US-born senior and advocate for refugees at The George Washington University, explains:

“Such a vital part of having resources is knowing about them. It’s one thing to have access to resources, it’s another to know how to access them.”

Students also recommended that the campus committee work to reduce stigma about getting help on campus. Anisha Rai, a Bhutanese-Nepali refugee and sophomore at University of Wisconsin-Madison, points out:

“Mental health is taboo in my culture. Refugee students need people to connect them with resources to understand that it is ok to seek out help.”

4.4 Impact

The university sponsorship program will amplify and expand refugee access to higher education, which will have a meaningful impact not only on refugee students, but also on colleges and universities and the surrounding campus communities. It also will have implications for the U.S. and refugees worldwide. The Initiative identified primary impacts that will define success and drive the implementation of the university sponsorship model.

For refugee students, the university sponsorship program:

- Increases access to higher education with 30 refugee students enrolled in the initial cohort and around 500 students per year within 5 years;³⁸
- Creates a durable solution and a pathway to legal permanent residence and citizenship;
- Fosters student academic success, retention, graduation, and job placement;
- Fosters integration into campus and U.S. communities.

For colleges, universities, and campus communities, the program:

- Aligns with university missions to globalize and expand access to education;
- Builds inclusive student bodies by expanding the experiential diversity and perspective on campus.³⁹

For the U.S., the program:

- Fulfills the U.S. humanitarian promise to expand third country solutions for refugees by increasing the number of refugees coming to the U. S. annually, above and beyond the number to be resettled each year through traditional USRAP;
- Multiplies the workforce by allowing refugees to complete their education in the U.S. and promoting workforce development, filling skilled workforce needs of local communities and contributing to the economy;⁴⁰
- Broadens support for refugee resettlement and complementary pathways by providing opportunities to understand and connect with refugee students.

For the global community, the program:

- Expands the number of refugees achieving durable solutions, expanding legal pathways for refugees worldwide;
- Inspires other third countries to replicate and embrace the shared responsibility of creating complementary pathways for refugees.



5 BUILDING SUPPORT

To build support for university sponsorship of refugee students, the Presidents' Alliance, in close coordination with other organizations and institutions involved in developing these recommendations, is launching an education and awareness campaign called the RESPONSE Campaign: College and University Sponsorship of Refugee Students. RESPONSE stands for REFugee SPONSorship for Education.

This campaign will raise awareness of university sponsorship through outreach and engagement to campus leaders and constituencies. The RESPONSE campaign aims to answer and address questions and issues that arise before the program is implemented.

The goal of the campaign is to ensure that campus stakeholders understand university sponsorship of refugee students, including:

- What it means and entails;
- The opportunities it opens for refugee students around the world;
- How it is aligned with higher education's core mission of educational access and equity.

The Initiative developed tools and resources to support higher education institutions interested in participating as sponsors, including a checklist ([see Appendix B](#)).

Additionally, an education and awareness toolkit can be accessed online at the following address: <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/response-campaign/>



Why University Sponsorship of Refugee Students? Why Now?

Good for Refugees

- **Urgency:** the immense scope of the global displaced population is coupled with the urgent need to provide opportunities, including in higher education
- **Life-changing:** university sponsorship provides refugee students a path to permanent residency in the United States
- **Real stories:** the stories and real examples of refugee students strengthen, humanize, and localize the larger need

Good for Colleges and Universities

- **Values:** university sponsorship of refugee students upholds and advances core mission and values of higher education and many individual institutions
- **Opportunity:** university sponsorship presents opportunities for universities to be on the ground floor of a new policy
- **Leadership:** engaging in university sponsorship positions institutions and their leaders to be pioneers
- **Specificity to Higher Education:** higher education is uniquely positioned to be a life-changing and supportive environment for forcibly displaced populations

Good for All of Us

- **Moral imperative:** university sponsorship fulfills the moral imperative and U.S. tradition of providing safety to persecuted groups and individuals
- **Talent driver:** refugee students add talent, experiences, and perspectives to campuses and communities
- **Workforce multiplier:** enabling refugee students to complete their education in the U.S. will help communities meet their skilled workforce needs and contribute to the economy
- **Non-partisan:** welcoming refugee students is nonpartisan or bipartisan especially at the local level

6 FUNDING

6.1 Cost Overview

Costs for this program will include but are not limited to the Implementing Organization (staff, pre-departure activities and coordination, U.S. cohort coordination, training of U.S. HEIs, etc.), learning costs on campus (tuition, fees, room & board, books and supplies, etc.), and wraparound support costs (flights, housing, technology, emergencies, stipend, etc.). These costs will evolve over time as the program develops.

Within the first year for a cohort of 30 students, the estimated cost for the I.O. would be \$1 million. For the scaled version of the program with around 150 students, we estimate the costs for the I.O. to be approximately \$2.4 million annually. We anticipate further economies of scale will be gained as the number of student participants increases. Beyond I.O. costs, per student costs would range between \$41,450 - \$103,100 for the students' first year and \$38,350 - \$98,400 per year for each of the remaining years of the students' education. These per student costs include items like travel, technology, books and supplies, as well as tuition, room and board, internship support, etc. The wide range of per student costs reflects the varying tuition and room and board costs at different institutions (see [Table 5: Per Student Costs](#)).⁴¹

6.2 Strategy

The Initiative identified the following potential sources of funding for this program: government, institutions of higher education (endowments, faculty, students, alumni, etc.), philanthropy, faith-based organizations, corporations, and U.N. agencies and affiliates (e.g., USA for UNHCR). The array of sources point to an approach that incorporates a diversity of funding sources.

“ I believe that if universities participate and bring in refugees, the returns will be phenomenal. Refugees bring different backgrounds, different perspectives, and diversity to the campus where other students will be able to learn from them, as well. Many American students have a passion for making a difference for others, and want to be aware of the conflicts and social issues in this world. It will provide opportunities for local American students and refugee students to learn from one another.”

Neh Meh, Graduate student at Brandeis University, Thailand, resettled in the U.S. through USRAP

A public-private partnership strategy should guide this program. Public-private partnerships are when a government agency or agencies collaborate with the private sector to develop, fund, and implement projects. Ideally, this program would be launched as a public-private partnership from the beginning, with PRM covering some of the costs for the I.O. However, for the purposes of this report, the Initiative assumes the program may need to be launched using private funding, with the goal of incorporating public funding as soon as it becomes available and embedding public funding into the funding strategy for phases 2 and 3 of the program, described below.

The benefit of a public-private partnership model is that it allows the project to proceed without funding from PRM or other governmental entities, enabling the program to launch more quickly, while working toward the goal of sustainably integrating the program into governmental infrastructure via public funding.

Private Sources. The Initiative recommends securing private funding by establishing a funding collaborative and pooled funding mechanism, which would fund the initial cohort in the first phase. The funding collaborative would be led by the I.O., anchor funders, and HEI Sponsors and focus on raising private funding for both the initial and subsequent phases of the program. With a pooled fund, multiple funders would make grants to the I.O., allowing those funders to maximize their collective impact by combining their resources. The I.O. would then be responsible for distributing the funding as appropriate to the various entities involved in the program (overseas partners, HEI Sponsors, student participants, etc.).



The pooled funding mechanism, initiated by the funding collaborative, will fund the initial cohort and garner the attention of additional funders who may want to be involved in the pooled fund for subsequent phases of the program. The goal is to establish both a top-down pooled funding strategy and a local strategy such that funding for the I.O. and certain student costs are raised by the collaborative (see [Table 4: Implementing Organization Budget](#)), while HEI Sponsors can work with local foundations to secure funding for their own financial and in-kind contributions.

Public Sources. Private sources of funding alone cannot meet the full needs of this cause in the long term. It is imperative to build relationships with and advocate public entities to backfill and eventually fund a majority of this program. There exists a ripe political window for this type of work: there is sincere interest from actors within the Department of State (PRM). The hope is to create a sustainable program that could become a reference for other countries.

The Initiative recommends approaching cities and states that have committed to supporting refugees or have welcomed immigrants in order to seek out potential funding opportunities and collaborations with state and local governments. Several networks that work closely with city and state offices — including New American Economy, the National Governors Association, Cities for Action, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors — will be instrumental in beginning these conversations. Participants in the funding collaborative would begin initial outreach to these entities in phase 1 with the goal of incorporating public funds from cities and states in phase 2.

HEI Sponsor Financial and In-Kind Commitments. Participating HEIs will be required to commit to minimum financial and in-kind contributions that are in-line with their institutional capacity to help cover costs like tuition, room and board, and on-campus support. Relevant staff from the I.O. would be available to help strategize with HEI Sponsors for how

to fundraise for these institutional costs, but responsibility ultimately lies with the HEI Sponsor. HEIs need to determine their capacity for hosting refugees on their campuses and to develop funding models that will allow for sustainable replication within their own contexts. The Initiative recommends that HEI Sponsors determine the most appropriate constellation of administrators, staff, faculty, and/or student leaders to collaborate on developing this plan, bringing in the I.O. where relevant. The plan for sustainability will undoubtedly differ from campus to campus, but it is recommended that tuition funding take the form of a waiver, scholarship, or discount. Alternatively, tuition and other expenses can be covered through a combination of innovative approaches, including potentially student governments voting to designate a portion of student fees for a refugee student scholarship (akin to WUSC's Student Refugee Program model), crowdfunding, grants, and donations by alumni and campus community members. Additionally, participating HEIs may be required to pay an annual fee to the I.O. to support program management (this fee could be calculated on a per student basis or another formula).

6.3 Funding Phases

Innovation Phase. To ensure scalability and sustainability of the university sponsorship program, the Initiative recommends a multi-tiered funding strategy in which piloting the initial innovation phase (first two years from launch) be done via private funds to a pooled fund and through contributions from HEI Sponsors. As a part of this initial phase, the funding collaborative would be established. This collaborative should commence in early 2022 to create a pooled funding approach in which the respective missions of multiple major foundations are mobilized to maximize the funding pool. The launch of the university sponsorship program would take place at the same time.

Scaleable Phase. The replication and scaling phase will be 4+ years, with expeditious results-based monitoring where possible. During this phase, the I.O. will measure outcomes like student success and iterate regularly. Available funds would increase through more significant contributions to the pooled fund, more robust university contributions, and public funds directed to the program at federal and local levels.



Embedded Phase. During the embedded phase, public funding will be secured locally and nationally, funding from universities and related sources will be institutionalized, and private entities (e.g., financial institutions, corporations, etc.) will have made long-term investments. For this phase, the Initiative recommends using public funding to cover as many operational costs for the I.O. as possible so that private funds can be allocated toward student costs.

Table 4: Implementing Organization Budget

COSTS	INNOVATION PHASE (30 STUDENTS)* ANNUAL COST	SCALABLE PHASE (150 STUDENTS)* ANNUAL COST	RECOMMENDED SOURCE OF FUNDING
Overseas Program (support and staffing student recruitment, selection, and pre-departure preparations)	\$250,000	\$750,000	National Pooled Funding/PRM (USG)
National Cohort Annual Gatherings	\$100,000	\$350,000	National Pooled Funding
Program Management (student orientations and ongoing support, building and maintaining an HEI consortium, HEI training and ongoing support, marketing and communication, program development and fundraising)	\$525,000	\$1,100,000	National Pooled Funding/PRM (USG)
Administrative/Operating Costs (rent, IT, phone and communications, materials and supplies, licenses, and other indirect costs)	\$125,000	\$200,000	PRM (USG)
TOTAL	\$1,000,000	\$2,400,000	

*Innovation Phase includes 4 staff members; Scalable Phase includes 8-10 staff members.

Table 5: Per Student Costs

USES	ANNUAL COST	RECOMMENDED SOURCE OF FUNDING
Pre-departure documents (medical tests, travel to interview, documents, other)	\$200 (first year only)*	PRM (USG)
Flight to the US (one way)	\$1,000-\$2,000 (first year only)	Private/In-Kind Contributions (option of IOM travel loan)
Flight within the US (if needed)	\$200-500 (first year only)	Private/In-Kind Contributions
Initial costs (room furnishings, towels, sheets, toiletries, winter clothes)	\$1,200 (first year only)	In-Kind Contributions/Local Pooled Funding
Technology (computer and mobile phone)	\$1,000 (first year only)	In-Kind Contributions/Local Pooled Funding
Books and supplies	\$750-\$1,000	In-Kind Contributions/Local Pooled Funding
Ongoing support for personal expenses (transportation, living stipend of suggested \$200 per month)	\$2,400	Local Pooled Funding
Tuition (NOTE: Students will become eligible for federal financial aid and perhaps state aid after first year) ⁴²	\$15,000-\$60,000	College/University (or with Pooled Funding based on a cost-sharing model)
Room	\$6,000-\$18,000	College/University
Food	\$4,000	College/University
Student on-campus support (health insurance, mentorship, academic support, staff/faculty costs and mentoring, etc.)	\$3,500	College/University
Housing during campus closure times (holidays, summer)	\$3,000	In-Kind Contributions/ Local Pooled Funding
Emergency assistance	\$500-\$1,000	Local and National Pooled Funding
Summer and academic year internship or employment support costs, test preparation costs for seniors	\$3,000-\$5,000	Local and National Pooled Funding
TOTAL	\$41,750 - \$102,800 for the first year • \$38,350 - \$98,400 for subsequent years	

* "first year only" indicates the first year the student is on campus

7 OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The Initiative will proactively address the challenges and risks involved in implementing a university sponsorship program by:

Maintaining additionality

For ease of processing, there will be a temptation to draw from the existing USRAP pipeline and rely on the existing resettlement infrastructure and process. The I.O. should learn and lean on resettlement agencies to draw on existing expertise and knowledge, but be sure to develop university sponsorship as a form of private sponsorship, additional to the existing opportunities for refugee students. This strategy requires an intentional outreach and recruitment strategy to identify students not already in the existing pipeline for resettlement. It also requires PRM to formally and explicitly create additional places for sponsored refugees each year, distinct from its annual government-assisted resettlement target.

Syncing timelines

The immigration, security, medical and travel process will need to align with the academic and admissions calendar. The USRAP processing timeline includes a number of possible delays that will be out of the control of the I.O. In an effort to mitigate, the I.O. will accept students to the program and begin the RSC referral process well in advance of the academic admissions process. This will allow for unforeseen delays and promote refugee students being able to arrive in the U.S., attend orientations, and be on campus for the start of their first semester.

Ensuring accountability

The I.O. will be responsible for ensuring that each HEI Sponsor completes all required resettlement and integration services. The I.O. will develop mechanisms to monitor service delivery and will establish a framework and policy for accountability to the student recipients.

Promoting inclusivity and equity

The program design will strive to be as accessible and inclusive of all refugee students as possible. The Initiative considers the program design and implementation an iterative process that will allow it to adjust to be more accessible, especially as refugee contexts change and new barriers emerge.

Securing funding

The most common concern of higher education institutions interested in sponsoring students is funding. This is especially true as the aim is for colleges and universities to select more than one student and to continue to welcome students every year. The Initiative identified this risk early in the design process and brought together a working group specifically focused on establishing a funding strategy. The I.O. will also be responsible for supporting the HEI Sponsors to access diverse, innovative, and sustainable funding.

8 CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

As the global refugee crisis continues to grow, now is the moment for the U.S. to expand not only refugee admissions, but also to create a complementary pathway through university sponsorship. In addition to providing an opportunity for refugees to access higher education, it creates a way for colleges and universities to live out their missions and expands the experiential diversity and perspectives on campuses across the U.S. University sponsorship harnesses the resources and generosity of campus communities to welcome and integrate refugee students.

In order to account for the lengthy overseas processing timeline, the Initiative recommends launching the program as soon as possible. Launching the program in January 2022 would mean the initial cohort of refugee students would start in fall 2024. The Initiative on U.S. Education Pathways for Refugee Students exemplifies the willingness of stakeholders to partner in making university sponsorship possible. The Initiative participants — including current and former refugee students, other students, and representatives from the fields of humanitarian relief, refugee resettlement, higher education (admissions, access, student support, faculty, senior leadership, advocacy, etc.), and philanthropy — stand ready and eager to work collaboratively to implement university sponsorship of refugee students in the U.S.

“

As a refugee myself, it was really difficult to get documents to come to the U.S. for school. I believe that making it easier for refugee students to get documents will be one way of helping refugees around the world.”

Diing Manyang, Senior at The George Washington University, South Sudan



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On May 17, 2021, the Presidents' Alliance, with partners, hosted an inaugural strategy meeting on how to significantly increase refugee student entry into the U.S. to pursue higher education. The meeting marked the launch of an initiative to mobilize higher education leadership to advocate for, design, and engage in a university sponsorship program to increase refugee student entry and access to the U.S. and U.S. higher education.

The meeting launched a six-month process, bringing together current and former refugee students, leaders of refugee resettlement, higher education institutions, philanthropic organizations, and experts in advocacy, international education, and student admissions, in five working groups to develop a robust policy framework and program model for the university sponsorship of refugee students in the U.S. Thank you to the over 100 individuals who contributed their time and expertise to the working groups that informed this report.

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**PRESIDENTS'
ALLIANCE**

ON HIGHER
EDUCATION AND
IMMIGRATION



With deep appreciation for the generosity of time,
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Coordinating Team for the Initiative on U.S. Education Pathways for Refugee Students

Oscar Bahati

Presidents' Alliance on
Higher Education and Immigration

Miriam Feldblum

Presidents' Alliance on
Higher Education and Immigration

Nele Feldmann

Global Task Force on
Third Country Education Pathways

Emily Fine

Presidents' Alliance on
Higher Education and Immigration

Kyle Farmbry

UARRM/Rutgers University-Newark
Guilford College

Rosie Hughes

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Jane Roche

Student Voices
for Refugees

Laura Wagner

Presidents' Alliance on
Higher Education and Immigration

Overseas Infrastructure Working Group

Bior Ajak

DREEM Project

Vidur Chopra

Teachers College,
Columbia University

Miriam Cing

Student, Trinity College,
Student Voices for Refugees

Alan Davidson*

Kenya Scholar Access Program

Robin Dunn Marcos*

International Rescue Committee

Hatim Eltayeb

African Leadership Academy

Rebecca Granato*

Bard College

Zachary Gross

RefugePoint

Rosie Hughes**

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Fonda Kempton

Bridge2Rwanda

Sarah Krause

Community Sponsorship Hub

Emmanuel Kwigenga

Student, Brandeis University

Amos Kwizera

COBURWAS International Youth
Organization to Transform Africa

Linda Liu

The College Board

Catherine MacKay

Church World Service

Michelle Manks*

World University Service of Canada

Wes Milner

Western Carolina University

Eva Muriuki

Equity Group Foundation

Katherine Rehberg

Church World Service

Rachael Sears

Southern New Hampshire
University

Stacy Simon

World Education Services

Manal Stulgaitis

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Buay Tut*

RnR Consultants LLC

Keith David Watenpaugh

UC Davis - Human Rights Studies

*co-chair **coordinating team

Program Infrastructure Working Group

Diya Abdo

Every Campus A Refugee

Jonathan Becker

Bard College and Open Society
University Network

Raymon Burton*

One Refugee

Lok Darjee

Student, University of Utah

Nele Feldmann**

Global Task Force on Third Country
Education Pathways

Elizabeth Ferris

Georgetown University

Erin Fitzgerald*

Salve Regina University

Olivia Issa*

Student, No Lost Generation GWU

Mary Karam McKey

Institute of International Education

Erol Kekic*

Church World Service

Matson Kitamisi

Student, Huron University College

Anne-Marie McGranaghan

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Neh Meh

Student, Brandeis University

Jennifer Murray

Bard College

Tom Pham*

Presidents' Alliance

Katrina Powell

Virginia Tech

Joanna Regulska

University of California, Davis

Jane Roche**

Student Voices
for Refugees

Nicholas Sabato

Arizona State University

Belma Sadikovic

Minnesota State University

Shailja Sharma

DePaul University

Stacey Shaw

Brigham Young
University

Sandra Vines

International
Rescue Committee

Policy Infrastructure Working Group

Sioban Albiol

DePaul University

Denise Bell

Amnesty International USA

Louis Caldera

Presidents' Alliance

Jane Fernandes

Antioch College

William Fish

Washington International
Education Council

Elizabeth Foydel*

International Refugee
Assistance Project

Susan Fratzke

Migration Policy Institute

Anna Gekht*

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Jess Goode

Illinois Institute of Technology

JC Hendrickson

International Rescue Committee

Ania Kwadrans

The Refugee Hub

Matthew La Corte*

Niskanen Center

Kate Macom

Church World Service

Habso Mohamud *

Muina International

Elsa Núñez

Eastern Connecticut State University

Meredith Owen

Church World Service

Fatima Sanz

World Education Services

Heather Stewart

NAFSA: Association of
International Educators

Jill Welch*

Presidents' Alliance

Rashae Williams*

Student, Rutgers University-Newark,
Student Voices for Refugees

*co-chair **coordinating team

Education & Awareness Working Group

Jennifer Dewar*

Duolingo English Test

Kyle Farmbry**

UARRM/Rutgers University-Newark
Guilford College

Paul Hersh*

Columbia University

Anisha Rai*

Student, University of Wisconsin-
Madison, Student Voices for Refugees

Miriam Feldblum**

Presidents' Alliance

Christina Smith*

Student, University of Maryland,
Student Voices for Refugees

Michelle Bellino

University of Michigan School of
Education

Rajika Bhandari

Presidents' Alliance

Arash Bordbar

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Janis Boettinger

Utah State University

Katy Button

Georgetown University

Christina Callahan

Northwestern University

Lana Cook

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Anthony Cernera

Refugee & Migrant Education Network

Nhial Deng

Student, Huron University College

Mark Erickson

Northampton
Community College

Allan Goodman

Institute of International Education

Danielle Grigsby

Community Sponsorship Hub

Mark Khan

Brandeis International Business
School

Athiel Mading

Student, Lehigh University

Etienne Mashuli

Tujenge Africa Foundation

Mondiant Dogon

Nshimiyimana

Flowcode

Marko Princevac

University of California,
Riverside

Danielle Riou

Bard College

Benedicta Solf

Church World Service

Bernhard Streitwieser

George Washington University

Annetta Stroud

American Association of Collegiate
Registrars and Admissions Officers

Jeffrey Tousignant

Duolingo English Test

Funding Working Group

Gretchen Buhlig

Arizona State University
Foundation

Matt Clausen

100,000 Strong in the
Americas Innovation Fund

Dale Dawson

Bridge2Rwanda

Anna Greene

The United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Juliana Kerr

Walder Foundation

Joan Liu

United World College of SE Asia

Susana Liu-Hedberg

Open Society Foundations

David Manicom

The United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees

Emma McLeavey-Weeder

Duolingo English Test

Marko Princevac

University of California,
Riverside

Chrystina Russell*

Southern New Hampshire
University

Edward Shapiro

Shapiro Foundation

Colleen Thouez*

Open Society Foundations

*co-chair **coordinating team

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Syrian Youth
Empowerment

Nour Alhafar

University of Evansville

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Rutgers University-Newark

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Boise State University

Jessica Crist

The George Washington
University

Dylan Giravi

University of Utah

Omar Kaziz

Salve Regina University

Diing Manyang

The George Washington
University

Atem James Marker

Columbia University

Bwema Matata

Columbia University

Joseph Dudi Miabok

Harvard University

Alice Muhoza

Oakwood University

Agathe Mwehu

Wheaton College

Erick Rozo

Columbia University

Sami Salloum

Columbia University

Gad Sezirahiga

University of Wyoming

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McGill University

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APPENDIX A

Recommendations to Update the F-1 Visa Program to Better Accommodate Refugee Students

A university sponsorship program for refugee students, also known as a P4 refugee classification, will allow refugee learners to overcome many of the barriers the F-1 student visa program presents for refugee students seeking educational opportunities in the United States. But not all refugee learners will be fortunate enough to participate in the new university sponsorship program, and many students in conflict-affected areas around the world will still have to rely on obtaining F-1 visas for entry into the United States to study. To make the F-1 program accessible and viable for refugee learners, the Initiative recommends the following modifications.

Administrative Recommendations:

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should announce Special Student Relief (SSR) for all students from countries with “emergent circumstances,” without relying on a request from the regulated community for such action.

- 1 SSR is the suspension of certain regulatory requirements by the DHS secretary for F-1 students from parts of the world that are experiencing emergent circumstances. Regulatory requirements that may be suspended or altered include duration of status, full course of study, and off-campus employment eligibility.

SSR provides international students the opportunity to continue their studies and maintain their international student status. Emergent circumstances are world events that affect F-1 students from a particular region and create significant financial hardships, such as but not limited to:

- Natural disasters;
- Wars and military conflicts;
- National or international financial crises.⁴³

DHS should proactively issue SSR whenever emergent circumstances occur, and the Department of State should follow by announcing Special Student Relief for J-1 students with emergent circumstances.

- 2 Special Student Relief (SSR), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED):

Special Student Relief (SSR) should be available independent of an announcement of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED), although such announcements should automatically trigger a process for announcing SSR for students from affected countries.

Although the country circumstances required for a TPS designation and an announcement of SSR are commensurate, there is too often a delay in between a TPS designation and an SSR announcement. As a result, impacted students are forced to meet their academic and financial obligations while undergoing the trauma of watching what is happening in their home countries. While TPS and SSR for Burma were announced within the same two days in late May 2021, students from other countries have had to wait far longer. For example, TPS for Haitian citizens was announced on May 22, 2021, but SSR for Haitian international students was not announced until August 3, 2021. Similarly, Syrian TPS was announced on March 19, 2021, but SSR was not issued until nearly a month later on April 22, 2021.

TPS and DED are necessary but not sufficient for students from conflict-affected countries who wish to continue their studies. For example, in 1998, SSR was issued for students affected by the Asian Financial Crisis, and in 2005 during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, SSR was issued for international students who resided in areas affected by the hurricane.⁴⁴ Thus, SSR should continue to be available independent of a TPS or DED designation, but DHS should create an automated process whereby the granting of TPS or DED triggers an SSR designation as well.

The U.S. Department of State should re-issue consular guidance and ensure training regarding how to interpret immigrant intent.

- 1** Restore F-1 “residence abroad” language to the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) and clarify how non-immigrant intent should be viewed for refugee students. On August 8, 2017, DOS updated its FAM guidance on residence abroad for F-1 students, removing long-standing language that instructed consular officers to consider the “inherent difference” between a young F-1 visa applicant and a short-term B visa applicant. The current FAM entry now applies the standard nonimmigrant residence abroad entry of 9 FAM 401.1-3(F)(2) to F-1 students as well. DOS should restore the following well-crafted language to the FAM and provide training to consular officers regarding international student visas:
 - (U) The context of the residence abroad requirement for student visas inherently differs from the context for B visitor visas or other short-term visas (See 9 FAM 401.1-3(F)(2)). The statute clearly presupposes that the natural circumstances and conditions of being a student do not disqualify that applicant from obtaining a student visa. It is natural that the student does not possess ties of property, employment, family obligation, and continuity of life typical of B visa applicants. These ties are typically weakly held by student applicants, as the student is often young, single, unemployed, without property, and is at the stage in life of deciding and developing his or her future plans. Student visa adjudication is made more complex by the fact that students typically stay in the United States longer than do many other nonimmigrant visitors.
 - (U) The residence abroad requirement for a student should therefore not be exclusively connected to “ties.” You must focus on the student applicant’s immediate intent, rather than trying to predict what the student may or may not do following completion of studies. Another aspect to consider: students’ typical youth often means they do not necessarily have a long-range plan, and hence are relatively less likely to have formed an intent to abandon their homes. Nonetheless, you must be satisfied at the time of application for a visa that the visa applicant possesses the present intent to depart the United States at the conclusion of his or her approved activities. That this intention is subject to change is not a sufficient reason

to refuse a visa. Although students may apply to change or adjust status in the United States in the future, this is not a basis to refuse a visa application if the student's present intent is to depart at the conclusion of his or her studies.⁴⁵

The following language should also be added:

- (U) For refugee students and students from conflict-affected countries, you must only focus on evaluating the student applicant's immediate intent to enroll as a bona fide student and should be satisfied by an intent to return when conditions in the conflict-affected country of origin are normalized.
- 2 Instruct consular officers, as has been done in the past, that attendance at a lesser-known college, English language program, or a community college is not, in itself, a reason for refusing a student visa applicant.⁴⁶ The DOS should leave questions of academic choice and qualifications to be decided between the student and the institution and should instead focus on evaluating whether the student meets the requirements of a bona fide student. Furthermore, denial of a visa should not occur based on English-language competency, as it is the purview of the institutions to evaluate language proficiency and to provide English-language training programs (either in-house or outsourced), if necessary, to help students succeed.
 - 3 Ensure consistent application of consular guidance and/or provide training on how to assess financial means and travel documents.
 - When assessing financial means, consular officials should not ask for proof of multiple years of funding. Just like U.S. students, many students and their families will pay for their education as they go. Proof of funding for the entire duration of the program is not reasonable and should not be required. The language of the Foreign Affairs Manual updated on 5/27/21 gives the appropriate guidance about financial means, but inconsistencies still exist, with some consulates still requesting proof of cash for multiple years of funding.⁴⁷
 - Ensure consular officers are familiar with Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) and what rights the CTD provides, including in particular the right to return to the country of asylum.
 - 4 Provide transparent and clearly understandable information to students and to Congress about visa denials. Often, when prospective students are denied visas they are left to guess what aspects of their application may have led to the denial. When a student visa is denied, the prospective student should be provided a clear written explanation for the denial. Additionally, the Department of State should be required to provide an annual report to Congress about student visa denials, including a numerical breakdown of student visa denials and reasons by consulate, student country of origin, and student country of residency.
 - 5 Provide alternatives to in-person consular interviews for refugees who live in a country that restricts refugee movement within that country. In Kenya, for example, camp-based refugees need permission to travel to Nairobi, where the U.S. embassy is located. Although they can get permission to travel for such embassy appointments, the process can be slow and uncertain.
 - 6 Convey to EducationUSA all policy changes and updates to facilitate the ability of overseas advisors to guide students in navigating the visa process.

Legislative Recommendations:

Congress should expand “Dual Intent” to include F-1 students.

Due to outdated immigration law, student visas are, by legal definition, temporary: the student must prove that they are entering the United States in non-immigrant status and do not have an intent to immigrate to the U.S. Thus, the F-1 visa does not, as currently designed, provide durable protection to refugees.

However, current immigration law already permits dual intent in other nonimmigrant categories, such as specialty workers (H-1B) and intracompany transferees (L-1). Higher education, foreign policy, and business leaders have advocated for expanding dual intent for international students applying for F-1 visas to attend U.S. colleges and universities. The Initiative recommends that Congress enact the legislative language on dual intent from Section 3408 the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021. Expanding dual intent to include students would permit individuals who are being considered for an F-1 visa or who are entering the United States to communicate an interest in transferring to another legal status after the completion of their degree, an interest the current law prohibits.⁴⁸



APPENDIX B

Checklist for Colleges and Universities Interested in Becoming HEI Sponsors

STEP 1 - Consider key questions.

- What has our university's past relationship and experience been with refugee students? Who was involved? How does university sponsorship align with our institutional mission?
- Are we in a position to consider participating in the program? What is the approval process for such a program within our university/college, and who needs to be at the table?
- Who are the target audiences and key stakeholders on our campus to achieve buy in and engagement? What will they want to know? What do we need from them / want their action to be?
- Who might be our potential partners in support of the program, on campus and beyond campus? Who will support these students if / when they arrive?
- How does our HEI structure impact the university refugee sponsorship program? (public or private, centralized or decentralized, a largely residential or commuter campus, etc.).

STEP 2 - Identify and map key stakeholders in your campus community.

- Engage / achieve buy-in: These may include the president / chancellor, provost, senior administrators (Deans, EVP/VPs), trustees, University Senate, development / fundraising office, general counsel, student government.
- Educate: faculty, enrollment management and admissions officers, Office of Global Affairs (or equivalent), financial aid office, visa office, government affairs, DEI officers, student leadership and student clubs, current refugee students, alumni, other campus departments (communications, international student services, student affairs, health / counseling / psychosocial support services, career services).
- Outreach and build external relationships: Donors, local community, local organizations (such as local refugee resettlement agency and/or refugee support organizations), local legislators, key community leaders, local press / media.

STEP 3 - Match messaging and communication channels to each stakeholder.

- What is each stakeholder’s potential perspective on the program? What are their possible objections to the program? Which message(s) will resonate with which stakeholder to get them to do the desired action?
- See example messaging in <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/response-campaign/>
- What are the best ways for us to communicate our message? Which channel is best for communicating with each stakeholder? Does the message impact which channel we use?
- Channels can include in-person meetings, town halls, social media, press / op-eds, websites, community events, etc.

STEP 4 - Plan your outreach and engagement strategy.

- Map “owners” for program within the HEI - staff time / capacity, knowledge, expertise, and funding needed for outreach and engagement and to support the overall program.
- Who is the team / individual that will lead this program within the HEI? Who / what office is best positioned to “own” this program at this specific university? What outreach and engagement support is needed?
- Map timeline.
- What timeline best fits our resources (staffing, budget, school calendar, etc.)?
- How does the overall program timeline (as set out in [Table 3: Application and Admissions Timeline](#)) affect our specific institution’s timeline?

STEP 5 - Start your outreach.

- Prioritize engagement opportunities that will have the greatest impact.
- Conduct program introduction sessions with key stakeholders (individually or as a group, depending on stakeholders).
- Create frequent and diverse touchpoints - for the program to be successful, it will require diverse input and support.
- Leverage the key messaging and marketing collateral frequently in communicating with stakeholders and the community.
- Frequently update key stakeholders on progress of the initiative, and engage the broader community when appropriate.

APPENDIX C

List of Abbreviations

CUSDS

Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students

HEI

Higher Education Institution

I.O.

Implementing Organization

IOM

International Organization for Migration

PRM

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

RSC

Resettlement Support Center

R&P

Reception and Placement

SRP

Student Refugee Program WUSC

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

USCIS

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

USG

United States Government

USRAP

United States Refugee Admissions Program

WUSC

World University Services Canada

ENDNOTES

- 1 UNHCR. (2021) Global trends: Forced displacement in 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>
- 2 UNHCR. (2021). Staying the course: The challenges facing refugee education. <https://www.unhcr.org/612f85d64/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education>
- 3 The estimate for the number of refugee students on student visas comes from data gathered and analyzed by UNHCR and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Their 2021 report found the annual average number of students coming to study in the US through student visas from seven countries with high asylum recognition rates was 3,116 in 2019 and, on average, 8,339 between 2010-2018. OECD and UNHCR. (2021). Safe pathways for refugees II: OECD-UNHCR study on Third-country Solutions for refugees: Admissions for family reunification, education, and employment purposes between 2010 and 2019, p. 17. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Safe%20Pathways%20for%20Refugees%20II%20Web-version001.pdf>. For data on international students, see Israel, E, & Batalova, J. (2021, January 14). International students in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/international-students-united-states-2020>
- 4 UNHCR. (2021). Staying the course: The challenges facing refugee education. <https://www.unhcr.org/612f85d64/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education>
- 5 International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP). (2020). Expanding complementary pathways for refugees and displaced persons: A blueprint for the U.S. Government, see especially chapter 6. <https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Expanding-Complementary-Pathways-for-Refugees-and-Displaced-Persons-A-Blueprint-for-the-U.S.-Government.pdf>
- 6 UNHCR. (2019). The three-year strategy (2019-2021) on resettlement and complementary pathways. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/resettlement/5d15db254/three-year-strategy-resettlement-complementary-pathways.html>
- 7 UNHCR. (2019). Refugee education 2030: A strategy for refugee inclusion. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/education/5d651da88d7/education-2030-strategy-refugee-education.htm>
- 8 U.S. Department of State. (2021). Proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2022. <https://www.state.gov/report-to-congress-on-proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2022/>
- 9 Enhancing refugee self-reliance is one of the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. See United Nations. (2018). Report of the UNHCR part II: Global Compact on Refugees. General Assembly (A/73/12). https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf

- 10** The Canadian Council for Refugees has defined additionality in the context of a private sponsorship program as meaning that “private sponsorship is additional to government assisted refugees. Each year the government makes its commitment, on behalf of Canadians, to resettle a certain number of refugees. Anything that Canadians do through private sponsorship is on top of that commitment. This means that [private sponsorship] allows Canadians to offer protection and a permanent home to extra refugees, who would not otherwise have the opportunity.” See Canadian Council for Refugees. (2013). Important changes in Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. <https://ccrweb.ca/en/changes-private-sponsorship-refugees>
- 11** IRAP, the Niskanen Center, and Amnesty International. (June 2021). Recommendations for Private Sponsorship Design in an Expanded Community Sponsorship System. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Private-Sponsorship-Paper.pdf>
- 12** Pursuant to the Refugee Act of 1980, the President determines the number of refugees to be admitted to the United States on an annual basis, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement within HHS is required to take into account the availability of private resources when developing and implementing its refugee policies and strategies. Refugee Act of 1980. Public Law 96-212, Section 412. (1980). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf>
- 13** See Bier, D. & La Corte, M. (2019). Private refugee resettlement in U.S. history. Niskanen Center. https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2016/04/PrivateRefugeeHistory.pdf
- 14** The other referral categories include refugees referred by UNHCR or a referring agency on an individual basis (P-1), refugees referred as part of a group of particular interest to the United States government (P-2), and refugees who gain access to resettlement through a family reunification petition (P- 3).
- 15** U.S. Department of State. (2021). Proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2022. <https://www.state.gov/report-to-congress-on-proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2022/>
- 16** Ibid.
- 17** UNHCR, in its guidance issued in June 2017, outlines that “the need for international protection arises when a person is outside their own country and unable to return home because they would be at risk there, and their country is unable or unwilling to protect them.” UNHCR. (2019). The three-year strategy (2019-2021) on resettlement and complementary pathways. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/resettlement/5d15db254/three-year-strategy-resettlement-complementary-pathways.html>
- 18** UNHCR. (2021). Her turn: It’s time to make refugee girls’ education a priority. <https://www.unhcr.org/herturn/>

- 19 U.S. Department of State. (n.d.). Reception and placement. <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/reception-and-placement/>
- 20 A two plus two program entails attending a community college for two years, then transferring to a college or university for another two years. In four total years, a student can earn both an associate's degree and a bachelor's degree.
- 21 The Duolingo English Test (DET) will provide fee waivers to any refugee student and the test can be taken from any computer with reliable internet access, rather than requiring travel to a testing center. The majority of U.S. colleges & universities now accept the DET. See Duolingo English Test. (n.d.) Who accepts the test. <https://englishtest.duolingo.com/institutions>
- 22 Manks, M., & Weighton, L. (2017). Building educational pathways for refugees: Mapping a Canadian peer-to-peer support model. WUSC & UNHCR.
- 23 Caron, M. (2021, February). Interview with Michelle Manks and Nour Mousa, World University Services Canada (WUSC) [Video]. Student Voices for Refugees. <https://www.uarm.org/>
- 24 WUSC. (2020). The Student Refugee Program: Guide for Local Committees. <https://wusc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/SRP-Guide-for-Local-Committees-2020.pdf>
- 25 Relich, S. (2014, January 27). Inside the Student Refugee Program. The Varsity. <https://thevarsity.ca/2014/01/27/inside-the-student-refugee-program/>
- 26 For instance, Posse Foundation, which uses the “Dynamic Assessment Process” to evaluate applicants, has a 90 percent graduation rate. See Posse Foundation. (n.d.). The Posse alumni report: The next generation of leaders. <https://www.possefoundation.org/uploads/reports/Posse-Alumni-Report.pdf>
- 27 The individual or individuals conducting this screening interview and assessment should have experience conducting Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and should possess knowledge of the U.S. refugee definition and USCIS adjudication process and standards. The I.O. may either hire someone with such expertise on staff or contract an experienced NGO to conduct these screening interviews and assessments. Interviews would likely take place remotely.
- 28 If students are being considered with family members, the interviewer would also screen any additional adult family member (e.g. spouse) included in the students' case.
- 29 While RSCs process students' cases for resettlement, the I.O. would simultaneously work to match students with a college, university, or community college in the U.S.

- 30** This focal point model would be similar to how RSCs handle family reunification cases. Depending on how other private sponsorship cases are managed, the focal point(s) may also oversee the processing of additional, or all, privately sponsored cases.
- 31** If IOM is not arranging the travel for P4 students, another agency should step in to provide comprehensive travel services that are tailored to refugee situations (arranging I-94 documents, travel letters, exit permits, etc.).
- 32** Given that P4 students will participate in a comprehensive “Pre-Departure Program” organized by the I.O. and partner organization(s), students would not be required to participate in the Cultural Orientation program for other resettled refugees. Cultural orientation provided to students in the program will include topics required by PRM and draw upon the existing resources from the Cultural Orientation Resources Exchange (CORE). See CORE. (n.d.). Who we are. <https://coresourceexchange.org/>
- 33** Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. (n.d.). Reception and placement. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/reception-and-placement/>
- 34** Traditionally, PRM requires resettlement agencies to enroll refugees in public benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Given that HEI Sponsors will likely provide student health insurance and dining plans, enrollment in public benefits like Medicaid or SNAP will likely not be necessary, but this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and students should be provided with information about these benefits.
- 35** It is recommended that students be given a peer mentor who is also a participant in the program, but a few years ahead of the new student.
- 36** Some student advisors noted that, in their experience, campus staff (e.g., international student offices) are often unaware of the complexities of refugee student situations. The program should provide educational resources not only to the campus committee, but also to other key stakeholders on campus.
- 37** While there is little research on refugee college student mental health, “refugees may face stressors in four major categories: Traumatic Stress, Acculturation Stress, Resettlement Stress, and Isolation.” See National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.). About refugees. <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/refugee-trauma/about-refugees>
- 38** This contributes to the UNHCR goal of achieving enrollment of 15% of refugee women and men by 2030. See UNHCR. (n.d.). 15by30 roadmap: Coming together to achieve 15% enrollment by 2030. <https://www.unhcr.org/605a0fb3b.pdf>

- 39** According to a 2018 WUSC Impact Study, 95% of Canadian student participants involved in WUSC Local Committees said that their awareness of global issues increased due to their participation as sponsors. 54% reported that their participation improved their cross-cultural communication skills. See Ghomeshia, K., & Hyman, I. (2018). Student Refugee Program impact study, p. 37. https://www.academia.edu/38330493/WUSC_Impact_Study_Final_Report_2018_pdf
- 40** A 2018 WUSC Impact Study found that SRP alumni “participants’ economic outcomes improved significantly over time. The vast majority of participants who had arrived 10 or more years ago were employed, and satisfied with their jobs and with their income.” See Ghomeshia, K., & Hyman, I. (2018). Student Refugee Program impact study, p. 4. https://www.academia.edu/38330493/WUSC_Impact_Study_Final_Report_2018_pdf
- 41** For comparison, see the overhead and per student costs from Canada’s WUSC program. Manks, M., & Weighton, L. (2017). Building educational pathways for refugees: Mapping a Canadian peer-to-peer support model. WUSC & UNHCR. <https://wusc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Building-educational-pathways-for-refugees.pdf>
- 42** For information on refugee eligibility for financial aid, see NAFSA. (2018). Tip Sheet for Refugee and Asylee Students. https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Tip_Sheet_Refugee_Asylee_Students.pdf
- 43** U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (n.d.). Special student relief. Study in the States. <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/special-student-relief>
- 44** Employment Authorization for Certain F-1 Nonimmigrant Students Whose Means of Financial Support Comes from Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, or the Philippines, 63 Fed. Reg. 31874 (June 10, 1998). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1998-06-10/pdf/98-15508.pdf#page=1>. Short-Term Employment Authorization and Reduced Course Load for Certain F-1 Nonimmigrant Students Adversely Affected by Hurricane Katrina, 70 Fed. Reg. 70992 (November 25, 2005). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2005/11/25/05-23309/short-term-employment-authorization-and-reduced-course-load-for-certain-f-1-nonimmigrant-students>
- 45** U.S. Department of State. (2005, September 28). DOS cable on evaluating residence abroad for F-1 students. https://www.nasfaa.org/_/file/_/amresource/DOScable_20050928.htm
- 46** Ibid
- 47** U.S. Department of State. (2021, May 27). 9 FAM 402.5 (U) Students and exchange visitors - F, M, and J visas. Foreign Affairs Manual and Handbook. <https://fam.state.gov/fam/09FAM/09FAM040205.html>
- 48** U.S. Department of State. (2005, September 28). DOS cable on evaluating residence abroad for F-1 students. https://www.nasfaa.org/_/file/_/amresource/DOScable_20050928.htm

University Sponsorship of Refugee Students

Initiative on Increasing U.S. Education
Pathways for Refugee Students



<https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/response-campaign/>

Contact: Info@presidentsalliance.org