

SCUSA 71 Policy Paper: Migration and Refugees

Purpose

The issues of migration and refugees pose challenges to national identity, security, humanitarian interests, global stability, and the presence of the United States on the international stage. The country ought to optimize its domestic processes for the collective benefit of internal and foreign governments, their constituents, and those seeking refuge, asylum, and American citizenship. This would occur through renewing diplomacy through the expansion, reinforcement, and reprioritization of budgets.

Background

The United Nations defines an immigrant as “someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status,” and defines a refugee as someone outside their country of origin due to “feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence,” or other similar circumstances. The Trump administration dramatically altered US immigration and refugee policy as it plans to cap 2020 immigration at a historic low of 18,000 – 75% less than the historic high of the Obama administration’s 2016 cap. Additionally, stricter immigration and refugee oversight emerges from redirected military, disaster relief programs, and education funds toward the proposed \$5.1 billion border wall, as well as Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to support so-called “criminal investigation” of undocumented persons. In contrast to Trump administration's efforts, 68% of Americans support immigration as essential to our national identity, suggesting that these policies conflict with national interest.

Discussion and Analysis

The current U.S. immigration system allocates federal resources in inefficient ways that serve neither the citizens of the U.S. nor migrants and refugees. Two areas of U.S. immigration policy in which these funds are under-utilized include: the naturalization and documentation process; resettlement and integration processes. The documentation process in the U.S is convoluted, deterring migrants from abiding by the law and, thus, unsuccessfully integrating into American society. Inconsistent visa allocation and a dearth of well-prepared legal personnel (including immigration lawyers, judges, social workers, and translators) is exacerbated by the continual reliance on executive orders and actions in regard to immigration policy, a pattern that leads to a poorly standardized processes and deters those who are seeking to adjust their status. Although establishing documented entry for migrants and refugees differ, the resettlement and integration phase is similar. In regard to this phase, there is a need for increased funds and resources directed to language training, occupational training, access to food, housing, and education. These resources if strategically allocated serve to benefit both migrants and refugees. Absence of documentation undermines the ability for migrants and refugees to learn language, pursue an education, and financially support themselves. Becoming documented benefits all parties; migrants, refugees, and receiving communities. While this policy is primarily concerned with domestic issues, we are also compelled to encourage an increased awareness and communication with the international community, particularly concerning the rapid emergence of climate refugees and IDPs. These developing issues are growing into a potential national security concern and international humanitarian crisis, demanding our attention as an influential state in the international arena.

Recommendations

Addressing Root Causes

Political/Economic Instability - To improve livelihoods of people's suffering political and economic instability, we recommend USAID focus on international agriculture, healthcare, and service sectors. This would build on existing programs, fostering sustainable economies with local NGOs through microfinance/microlending, workshops on best practices and management, and supply chain development. There must be accountability to ensure funds go to the intended population.

Climate Change and IDPs - Climate change must be acknowledged as a factor in migration and displacement. The United States must recommit to the Paris Climate Agreement explore incentives for American and foreign private sectors and local NGOs to invest in sustainable solutions, mitigating the effects of climate change. We should voice support for a UN resolution urging sustainable solutions for IDPs.

Streamlining the Immigration Process

Current immigration policy is unable to process the number of applicants. To make this process as efficient as possible, funds should be redirected into the propagation of more immigration lawyers and judges as well as USCIS agents to reduce the current backlog of applications of adjustments of status and expedite future applications. To ease both eligibility and access to documentation, a base set of standardized requirements toward documentation should be transparently communicated between the United States and international organizations that assist those seeking residence in the United States.

Reallocating Resources

The HSI should be absorbed by the FBI, with proportional funding allocations. With the absorption of HSI, all efforts and funding for OPLA and ERO into a restructured CBP that focuses on accountability and transparency. The proposed policy provides the same security services through established institutions with stronger oversight and a non-partisan approach, freeing up billions of dollars. The private sector can contribute funding for immigration and refugee programs and initiatives. The federal government should incentivize these types of financial expenditures by offering tax exemptions for private companies and organizations who contribute to the integration of immigrants and refugees.

Resettlement and Integration

Policies must focus on both expanding productivity and growing community wealth. To increase our national economic competitiveness on the global stage, we must empower resettlement and integration efforts by reforming the following federally subsidized programs:

Refugee Admission and Resettlement

The potential of resettlement is hindered by disorganization, lack of funding and clear structural guidance. We propose the following: increase the funding of resettlement offices' cooperative endeavors towards supporting refugees, asylees, and other entrants in their provision of accessible legal and advocacy services, comprehensive education and affordable housing; establishing a system of accountability and transparency of PRM, ORR and respective partner organizations.

USCIS Citizenship and Assimilation Grant

This current program funds 41 public or private nonprofit organizations for their provision of citizenship instruction and naturalization services to lawful permanent residents. In accordance with the demand for these services, we propose the following expansion: Retitle grant program from "Citizenship and Assimilation Grant" to "Citizenship and Integration Grant" to reflect the definition change; Expand eligibility to organizations providing assistance to refugees and undocumented migrants; Expand eligibility to organizations providing programs that include language instruction, skilled relicensing, and job training; Change grant distribution from a biannual timeframe to a yearly dispersal; Double the current \$10M grant to fund more organizations that meet preset criteria across all 50 states.

Works Cited

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