Refugee and Immigrant Student Resources

Between homework, exams, activities, and social lives, students have a lot to juggle and manage. For immigrant and refugee students, school life can be even more complex, with a host of additional legal and personal concerns. Many immigrant students are worried about interactions with immigration officials, discrimination from classmates and instructors, and separation from family and loved ones who might be hundreds or thousands of miles away.

Having access to resources for immigrant students empowers them and the people around them to stand up for their rights, connect with their new communities, and thrive in a new academic environment.

Understanding the Basics

Immigration is a complicated and often controversial issue, and much of the mistreatment of immigrant students stems from a lack of understanding. To provide opportunities and safe environments for immigrant
and refugee students, there are a few essential points to know.

**Key Definitions**

Students who are attending school outside of their home country come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. They typically fall into one of the following categories:

- **Immigrant:** A person who chooses to leave their country of origin and permanently relocate is considered an immigrant. Immigrants are distinct from refugees in that their decision to move is based on preference or interest rather than necessity.
- **Refugee:** When a country becomes violent or dangerous, people may have no other choice than to leave their homes. A refugee is a person who contacts the United States government and receives protected status before crossing the border.
- **Asylum seeker:** Like refugees, asylum seekers are attempting to escape a perilous environment. However, asylum seekers, or asylees, do not request refugee status prior to entering the country.
- **Migrant:** A migrant is an individual who has left their home country in search of a better situation, such as the opportunity to work or receive an education. Unlike refugees and asylum-seekers, migrants are not forced from their homes by violence, conflict, or persecution.

Although each of these categories has overlapping characteristics, it's important to distinguish between them because students may have specific needs or challenges based on their status. For example, a student who is a refugee may struggle with fear or anxiety stemming from the war that drove them out of their home country.

**Noteworthy Statistics**

Immigrant and refugee students are enrolled in colleges across the country. To get a clearer perspective on their presence and the challenges they face, consider these statistics:

- According to the Department of Education, children and adolescents who were born in other countries represent approximately **6% of the total student population** in the United States.
- Among all students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States, **more than 5.3 million** are from immigrant families.
- Approximately **427,000 students enrolled in higher education** institutions in the United States do not have documentation, and less than half of those students are eligible for the protection offered by the policy known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- Almost **70% of students** with parents who do not have documentation live at or around the poverty line.

**Immigration and Asylum Processes**

People who want to immigrate or seek asylum in the United States must pass through a strict and sometimes lengthy series of procedures. The specific steps differ based on the reason for and method of entering the country.
To apply for asylum, a person must be physically present in the United States. Asylum is only granted if it's determined that there is a reasonable or credible fear of war, violence, or persecution. If approved, a person receives several benefits:

- Protection from being returned to their home country
- Authorization to work
- The ability to request a Social Security card
- The option to petition to bring additional family members into the country

After a year, an asylee is also permitted to apply for lawful permanent resident status. At this stage, they use the same system as individuals who want to permanently relocate to the United States to be closer to family, study, or work. This immigration process is comprised of multiple stages, including:

- Submitting a Visa petition
- Paying fees
- Providing financial and civil documents
- Participating in an interview

From beginning to end, immigration can take several months or more than a year, depending on the individual circumstances.

**Legal Resources**

Navigating the United States immigration system is daunting, especially for immigrants who are non-native English speakers. As a result, students may not realize when their rights have been violated or threatened. These are key points that every immigrant or refugee student should know:

- Some states have laws that prevent students without documentation from attending public colleges, but there are no national laws prohibiting college enrollment.
- According to the Office of Civil Rights, students have no obligation to disclose their immigration status to the schools that they attend.
- Under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, it's illegal for schools to reveal a student's immigration status without their consent.
- Although students without documentation aren't eligible for federal financial aid, they are free to apply for other types of scholarships, grants, and loans.

In addition to having an awareness of these basic rights, students may also need help from legal professionals. These organizations offer legal support to immigrants and refugees:

- **National Immigration Law Center (NILC):** The NILC is dedicated to protecting the rights of immigrants via legal and policy challenges.
- **Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC):** Through the ILRC, students can connect to immigration attorneys and access extensive resources about their rights.
- **United We Dream:** United We Dream fights to protect the legal rights of all immigrant students.
• **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU):** The ACLU provides a detailed list of immigrants’ rights.

## Educational Resources

Many colleges offer dedicated support services for immigrant and refugee students, as well as opportunities for tutoring, English language lessons, and advising. Students can also take advantage of a range of online resources, including:

• **Higher Ed Immigration Portal:** A new digital platform that integrates data, policies, and resources for DACA and undocumented, other immigrant, international, and refugee students.

• **Voice of America (VOA):** The Learning English program through VOA includes free beginning, intermediate, and advanced level English lessons.

• **USA Learns:** Students can take beginning and intermediate English courses through the USA Learns website.

• **Educational Testing Service:** Many colleges and universities require non-native English speakers to take the TOEFL, which measures their aptitude for speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

• **My Undocumented Life:** This site helps students gain a better understanding of the college application and enrollment process.

## Financial Resources

Financial aid is crucial for college students, most of whom can't afford to pay for school out of pocket. Resources are often even more limited for immigrant students, particularly those who are not authorized to work in the United States.

Immigrant students, including refugees and asylees, who have documentation verifying their qualification status can apply for federal financial aid. To do so, they must complete a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)](https://www.fafsa.gov). Students without documentation are not eligible for federal aid. No matter your immigration status, there are financial resources available to help fund your education, including:

• **TheDream.US:** TheDream awards scholarships to students who don't have documentation and demonstrate significant financial need.

• **Denes J. Bardos Award:** Immigrant students who excel in science or engineering are eligible to apply for this award from the Bardos Foundation.

• **Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF):** DACA students of Hispanic heritage can apply for financial support from the HSF Scholar Program.

• **Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans:** This program supports immigrant students who plan to attend graduate school in the United States.

• **ScholarMatch:** Through ScholarMatch, students can not only look for financial aid opportunities but also receive one-on-one advising and access valuable online resources.

• **Informed Immigrant:** The Informed Immigrant provides a detailed guide for students without documentation who are applying to college.

## Language and Cultural Resources

[https://www.mswdegrees.org/resources/refugee-immigrant-students/](https://www.mswdegrees.org/resources/refugee-immigrant-students/)
Students who are attending college in the United States may feel disconnected from their cultural heritage, native language, and traditions. These online resources can help them adjust to life in a new country while also maintaining their ties to their core values and beliefs:

- **The Immigrant Learning Center (ILC):** The ILC program includes English language, citizenship, and literacy classes.
- **Define American:** Established in 2011, this organization supports immigrants who want to share their stories and cultural backgrounds.
- **I Stand With Immigrants:** The I Stand With Immigrants Initiative invites immigrants to celebrate their cultures during Immigrant Heritage Month and special events and programs throughout the year.
- **National Association of School Psychologists (NASP):** Instructors and other school staff who want to develop greater cultural competency and sensitivity can benefit from the extensive resources provided by the NASP.

### Social and Emotional Resources

College students who are immigrants or refugees may feel isolated or ostracized and may experience symptoms of culture shock. In addition to adjusting to college life, they are also coping with changes to their diets, climate, and living situations. If you’re a refugee or immigrant student who wants to find ways to engage with the people around you, try these tips:

- Look for on-campus clubs and organizations for international or minority students who have similar backgrounds.
- Participate in activities related to your interests, such as sports or the arts.
- Exchange contact information with at least one other student in each of your classes.

Sometimes immigrant students need additional support to adjust to college life. These organizations provide insights, recommendations, and referrals for students who are facing culture shock, stress, and other emotional and social challenges:

- **Coalition for Immigrant Mental Health (CIMH):** The CIMH connects immigrants to mental health resources and service providers.
- **Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Exchange Programs:** This government bureau offers a detailed description of the effects of culture shock and how to address them.
- **The Psychiatric Times:** This article teaches educators, mental health professionals, and community members about the difficulties students encounter when adjusting to a new culture.
- **Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC):** The WRC assists women who are refugees to overcome challenges such as sexual violence and reproductive rights violations.
- **Luminus:** Among the many services Luminus offers are family and community programs as immigrants adjust to life in the United States.
- **Immigration Equality:** This human rights organization serves immigrants who are also members of LGBTQ or HIV-positive communities.

### Housing, Community, and Networking
From finding a safe and stable place to live to searching for job opportunities, immigrants and refugees have a variety of needs once they arrive in the United States. Whether you’re an immigrant in need of assistance or an ally who wants to offer support, these organizations are a good place to start:

- **UndocuProfessionals**: This community of professionals without documentation offers workshops, conferences, and mentorship opportunities.
- **U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)**: The USCRI helps refugees and their families find homes and establish community networks throughout the United States.
- **Welcoming America**: Welcoming America works to create more inclusive communities that are open to people from different backgrounds, including immigrants and refugees.
- **USAHello**: USAHello provides resources in many different areas, including locating housing and receiving career training.

## Advocacy and Future Action

Immigrant and refugee students are among the most vulnerable populations in the country. Advocating for these students is essential to ensuring their physical safety, emotional well-being, and academic success.

Support might come in the form of personal interactions, such as intervening if an immigrant or refugee student is the victim of discriminatory behavior. You can also make a difference on a larger scale by donating to or volunteering with a reputable organization, such as:

- **Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)**: KIND accepts monetary donations and offers opportunities to volunteer in positions such as translators, interpreters, and pro bono attorneys.
- **Refugee Council USA**: The Refugee Council connects volunteers with a network of local resettlement agencies in the United States.
- **International Rescue Committee (IRC)**: The IRC offers a variety of volunteering opportunities for individuals who want to support refugees and immigrants.
- **Detention Watch Network (DWN)**: The DWN is a national organization that works to identify and challenge injustice in the United States immigration system.

## Resources

A Comprehensive Guide to Careers in Public Health

“Look for the Helpers”: A Guide to Public Service Careers

Understanding the Bully: Learned Behavior and How to Intervene

A Comprehensive Guide to Eating Disorders and How to Help

Fentanyl Awareness Guide for Parents, Teens, and College Students


Guide to Crafting a Perfect Social Work Personal Statement