



**Statement for the Record**

**U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on**

**"Oversight of the Administration's FY2017 Refugee Resettlement Program"**

**September 28, 2016**

The National Immigration Forum (Forum) advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to the nation. Founded in 1982, the Forum plays a leading role in the national debate about immigration, knitting together innovative alliances across diverse faith, labor, law enforcement, veterans and business constituencies in communities across the country. Coming together under the Forum's leadership, these alliances develop and execute legislative and administrative policy positions and advocacy strategies. Leveraging our policy, advocacy and communications expertise, the Forum works for comprehensive immigration reform, sound border security policies, balanced enforcement of immigration laws, and ensuring that new Americans have the opportunities, skills, and status to reach their full potential.

**Introduction**

The National Immigration Forum appreciates the opportunity to provide its views on the Administration's Refugee Resettlement program, which provides vulnerable individuals fleeing violence with safe haven in the United States. The U.S. refugee resettlement program is a long-standing humanitarian effort consistent with our nation's core values. The country, in turn, has benefitted from resettled refugees who make positive contributions within our local communities and to the U.S. economy. For these reasons, the Forum supports continued refugee resettlement and exploring ways to expand refugee resettlement efforts to the United States.

**Resettled Refugees Contribute to U.S. Economic Growth**

By 2020, the nation is projected to be short 7.5 million workers, and many industries are concerned about growing skills gaps.<sup>1</sup> We hear time and again that talent shortages negatively impact business's productivity and innovation, thus hurting our nation's economy. Our business allies across the nation express concern over labor shortages and skills gaps. In 2015, Manpower found that 32 percent of employers in the United States had difficulty filling jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Unless steps are taken at multiple levels, these trends will continue and severely undermine our nation's economic competitiveness. Resettled refugees can help to complement and strengthen the U.S. domestic workforce by filling important gaps, growing the economy, and increasing wages.

Studies have found that once refugees are acclimated to their new lives in the United States, they make positive contributions to the U.S. economy by holding jobs, spending money as consumers, owning small businesses, and paying taxes.<sup>3</sup> Refugees also help revive struggling U.S. cities by bringing with them their entrepreneurial spirit and cultural vibrancy. In fiscal year 2015, refugees were resettled in every state, contributing to communities all across the nation.<sup>4</sup>

A 2012 study of resettled refugees in Cleveland, Ohio found that refugees paid \$2 million in local and state taxes and helped to boost Cleveland's economy by \$48 million.<sup>5</sup> In nearby Columbus, Ohio, a 2015 study found that refugees are twice as likely to start a business as the general population and currently support an estimated 21,273 jobs in the central Ohio region.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See generally Ben Gitis and Douglas Holtz-Eakin, *How Changes in Immigration Can Impact Future Worker Shortages in the United States and Silicon Valley*, American Action Forum (Oct. 23, 2015), available at <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/how-changes-in-immigration-can-impact-future-worker-shortages-in-the-united/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Manpower Group, *2015 Talent Shortage Survey* (2015), available at [http://www.manpowergroup.com/wps/%20wcm/connect/408f7067-ba9c-4c98-boec-dca74403a802/2015\\_Talent\\_Shortage\\_Survey-lo\\_res.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&ContentCache=NONE](http://www.manpowergroup.com/wps/%20wcm/connect/408f7067-ba9c-4c98-boec-dca74403a802/2015_Talent_Shortage_Survey-lo_res.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&ContentCache=NONE).

<sup>3</sup> See generally Kalena Cortes, *Are Refugees Different from Economic Immigrants? Some Empirical Evidence on the Heterogeneity of Immigrant Groups in the United States*, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA) (March 2004), [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=524605](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=524605); see also Randy Capps, Kathleen Newland, Susan Fratzke, Susanna Groves, Michael Fix, Margie McHugh, and Gregory Auclair, *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges*, Migration Policy Institute, (June 2015), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, *FY 2015 Served Populations by State and Country of Origin (all served populations)* (Apr. 22, 2016), available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/fy-2015-served-populations-by-state-and-country-of-origin-refugees-only>.

<sup>5</sup> HIAS, *Economic Impact of Refugees in the Cleveland Area: Calendar Year 2012* (October 2013), at 4-5, available at [http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/clevelandrefugeeeconomicimpact.pdf?\\_ga=1.191821354.1096693022.1449774105](http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/clevelandrefugeeeconomicimpact.pdf?_ga=1.191821354.1096693022.1449774105).

<sup>6</sup> Community Research Partners, *Impact of Refugees in Central Ohio: 2015 Report* (2015) at 23, available at [http://www.wrapsnet.org/Portals/1/IMPACT%20OF%20REFUGEES%20ON%20CENTRAL%20OHIO\\_2015SP.pdf](http://www.wrapsnet.org/Portals/1/IMPACT%20OF%20REFUGEES%20ON%20CENTRAL%20OHIO_2015SP.pdf).

Additionally, the report concluded that total economic contributions from refugees in central Ohio amounted to upwards of \$1.6 billion a year.<sup>7</sup>

The Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has also benefitted from a large number of Somali, Hmong, and Burmese refugees who have opened small businesses in struggling neighborhoods, helping to spur economic growth throughout the city.<sup>8</sup> Utica, New York, which once faced a population decline, has also seen similar economic benefits from refugees, who now make up roughly one-fourth of the city's population.<sup>9</sup> Refugees in Utica have opened small businesses, created new jobs, and restored vibrancy of the city by buying and renovating homes.<sup>10</sup>

Refugees in more rural areas have also contributed to their local communities by filling labor shortages in the dairy and agricultural industries. In Idaho, where more than half of dairy laborers are immigrants,<sup>11</sup> refugees help to fill the shortage of reliable year-round dairy labor by working in dairy farms and cheese plants.<sup>12</sup> According to Bob Naerebout, Executive Director of the Idaho Dairyman's Association, "refugees have become a valuable workforce" for the third-largest dairy producing state in the nation.<sup>13</sup>

### **U.S. Businesses Invest in the Refugee Workforce**

Most recently, following the September summits on refugees hosted by the United Nations and President Obama, more than 50 U.S. companies such as Airbnb, Uber, and Microsoft pledged \$650 million dollars towards expanding educational and employment opportunities for resettled refugees worldwide.<sup>14</sup> Many U.S. businesses across a wide range of sectors already work closely with refugee resettlement organizations to help refugees develop

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ibrahim Hirsi, *How immigrants in the Twin Cities build the economy—and revitalize neighborhoods*, MinnPost (Jan. 30, 2015), <https://www.minnpost.com/community-sketchbook/2015/01/how-immigrants-twin-cities-build-economy-and-revitalize-neighborhoods>.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Hartman, *A New Life for Refugees, and the City They Adopted*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 10, 2014), [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/nyregion/a-new-life-for-refugees-and-the-city-they-adopted.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/nyregion/a-new-life-for-refugees-and-the-city-they-adopted.html?_r=0).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> See Ali Noorani, *Visa reform could be the Smartest way to secure our borders*, THE WASH. POST (Sep. 12, 2016), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/09/12/visa-reform-could-be-the-smartest-way-to-secure-our-border/?utm\\_term=.1918c3d61c1a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/09/12/visa-reform-could-be-the-smartest-way-to-secure-our-border/?utm_term=.1918c3d61c1a).

<sup>12</sup> *Their own public Idaho, Twin Falls, a conservative city in Idaho, likes refugees*, THE ECONOMIST (Jun 4, 2016), <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21699874-twin-falls-conservative-city-idaho-likes-refugees-their-own-public-idaho>.

<sup>13</sup> Miriam Jordan, *In Aftermath of Terror Attacks, Tensions Rise in Idaho Over Refugee Workers*, WALL ST. J. (Feb. 12, 2016), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/in-aftermath-of-terror-attacks-tensions-rise-in-idaho-over-refugee-workers-1455307825>.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Jordan, *Refugee Crisis Spurs Companies to Act*, WALL ST. J. (Sept. 20, 2016), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/refugee-crisis-spurs-companies-to-act-1474344062>.

the skills necessary to participate meaningfully in the U.S. workforce. It is clear that U.S. businesses recognize the value of the refugee workforce and the opportunities which refugees present for the U.S. economy.<sup>15</sup>

Chipotle, a leading national fast casual restaurant, partners with resettlement agencies to recruit refugees for its urban farming and culinary entrepreneurship programs. Since 2009, the company has been working closely with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in multiple U.S. cities to train and employ refugees.<sup>16</sup> In 2013, Chipotle launched the MicroProducer Academy to educate refugees with agricultural backgrounds about the U.S. agricultural and food industries.<sup>17</sup> According to Chipotle, refugees referred to such programs by IRC are more than seven times more likely to be qualified and hired by the company compared to other applicants.<sup>18</sup>

Chobani, a top-selling Greek yogurt company, actively hires refugees and other immigrants in New York and Idaho for its yogurt factories.<sup>19</sup> The company reports that resettled refugees currently make up 30% of Chobani's employees.<sup>20</sup> Chobani's Founder and CEO, Hamdi Ulukaya, also supports refugees through Tent, a foundation he established to encourage other private businesses to hire and train resettled refugees.<sup>21</sup>

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. also recently announced plans to partner with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in nineteen U.S. cities to train and hire refugees for various positions, ranging from housekeeping to management.<sup>22</sup> The company also plans to launch a pilot hospitality and training program in Dallas and San Diego, focusing on developing skills necessary to succeed in the hospitality and management industry.<sup>23</sup> According to Starwood's Associate Director of Community Partnerships and Global Citizenship, Kristin

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<sup>15</sup> Naki B. Mendoza and Amy Lieberman, *The Private Sector Imperative for the Refugee Crisis*, DEVEX (Sept. 21, 2016), <https://www.devex.com/news/the-private-sector-imperative-for-the-refugee-crisis-88776>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, *Refugee Crisis*, (last update Sept. 21, 2016), <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/corporate-citizenship-center/refugee-crisis>.

<sup>17</sup> Press Release, *Chipotle Cultivate Foundation Awards \$500,000 Grant to the International Rescue Committee*, BUSINESS WIRE (Nov. 17, 2014), <http://ir.chipotle.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=194775&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1990245>.

<sup>18</sup> Adele Peters, *Refugees Wanted: Meet the Companies Creating Jobs for the Displaced*, Co.Exist (Sep. 14, 2016), <https://www.fastcoexist.com/3063077/refugees-wanted-meet-the-companies-creating-jobs-for-the-displaced>.

<sup>19</sup> Pinar Tremblay, *An immigrant himself, Chobani yogurt founder becomes icon for refugees*, Al-Monitor, (Oct. 5, 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/contents/articles/originals/2015/10/turkey-usa-kurdish-immigrant-becomes-icon-for-refugees.html>.

<sup>20</sup> See *supra* note 18.

<sup>21</sup> See *supra* note 16.

<sup>22</sup> See *supra* note 14.

<sup>23</sup> See *supra* note 16.

Meyer, the dedication and passion which refugees bring to their jobs “definitely outweighs” the company's increased investments into refugee training programs.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Figure 8 Investment Strategies, an investment firm, has also pledged to recruit, hire, and train refugees in order to provide high skilled refugees with opportunities to gain key industry licenses and certifications through the companies' training program. Figure 8 Investment Strategies has also partnered with Global Talent Idaho and the Idaho Labor Department to create new internship opportunities and financial literacy training for refugees as well as refugee business owners.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It cannot be ignored that the United States benefits from resettled refugees who make an important contribution to the economic health of our nation, benefiting all Americans. U.S. businesses have also taken a leadership role in recognizing the value of refugees for economic growth, investing millions of dollars in programs that seek to train and employ qualified refugees to fill workforce gaps.

The Forum believes that a generous U.S. refugee resettlement policy not only helps protect the world's most vulnerable populations from violence but also helps to promote a diverse and vibrant U.S. workforce. The Forum urges Congress to support increased refugee resettlement to our nation, which helps to grow our economy and benefit all workers, refugees and native-born alike.

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<sup>24</sup> See *supra* note 18.

<sup>25</sup> See *supra* note 16.