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Refugee Resettlement in Virginia: A Spotlight on Resources and Services in Virginia

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According to the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, over half of the world's 22.5 million refugees are children under the age of 18.¹ Refugees are individuals who have fled their country due to a substantiated fear of persecution, violence, or death based upon their race, nationality, political, religious, or other social group affiliation. The United States has the largest formal refugee resettlement program in the world, historically accepting more than 50,000 refugees per year in the last nine years.² The goal of a resettlement program is to offer a viable solution for refugees in long-term protracted situations where they are unlikely to be able to return to their country of origin. 118,431 refugees received permanent residence status in the U.S. in FY 2015.³

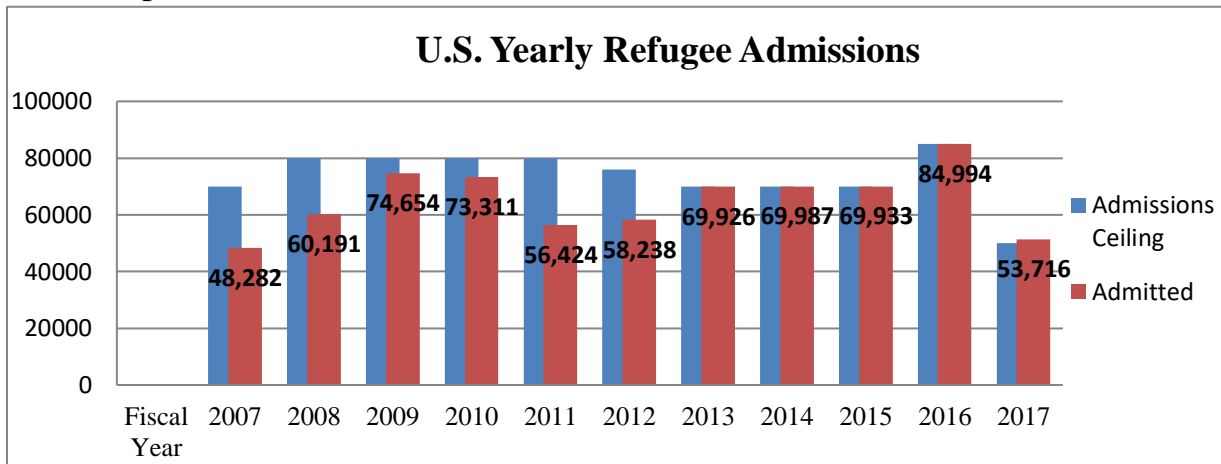


Figure 1: U.S. Yearly Refugee Admissions to U.S. Fiscal Years 2007-2017, Source: U.S. Refugee Processing Center.

It was estimated based on 2009-2013 U.S. Census Data that there are approximately 941,000 children aged 10 or younger that have parents who were refugees.⁴ From FY 2013 to September, 2017, the U.S. has resettled an additional 92,241 children under the age of 14 from 83 countries through the Refugee

¹ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. (2017). Figures at a Glance. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

² U.S. Refugee Processing Center. (2017). Admissions and Arrivals. Retrieved from <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

³ Baugh, R. & Witsman, K. (March, 2017). *Annual Flow Report: U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents 2015*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics.

⁴ Hooper, K., Zong, J., Capps, R., & Fix, M. (2016). *Young Children of Refugees in the United States: Integration Successes and Challenges*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

Resettlement Program, accounting for approximately one third (33.36%) of all refugee admissions during that time period. 30,991 of those children were admitted in the fiscal year 2016 alone, historically the highest year for refugee admissions in the last decade.⁵ President Obama, because of the global refugee crisis, raised the ceiling in 2016 from 70,000 to 85,000, and had set the ceiling for FY 2017 to 110,000. However, in January of 2017, President Trump lowered the refugee admissions ceiling to 50,000, historically the lowest it has been in the last ten years, and has set the ceiling for 2018 to 45,000. As of the end of FY 2017⁶ on September 30, the U.S. had admitted 53,716 refugees from 77 countries.

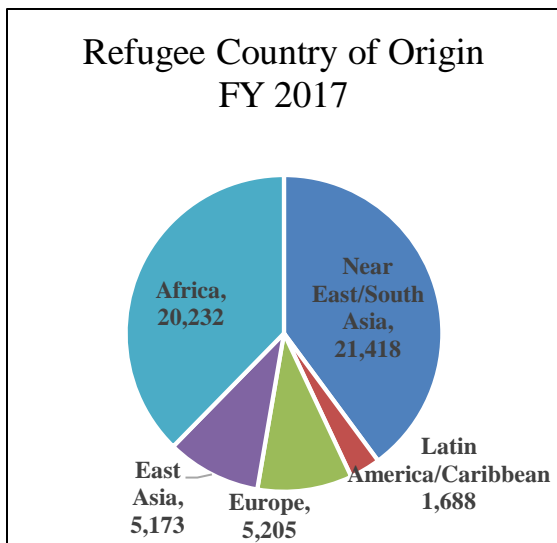


Figure 2: Refugees Resettled in the U.S.
Source: Wrapsnet

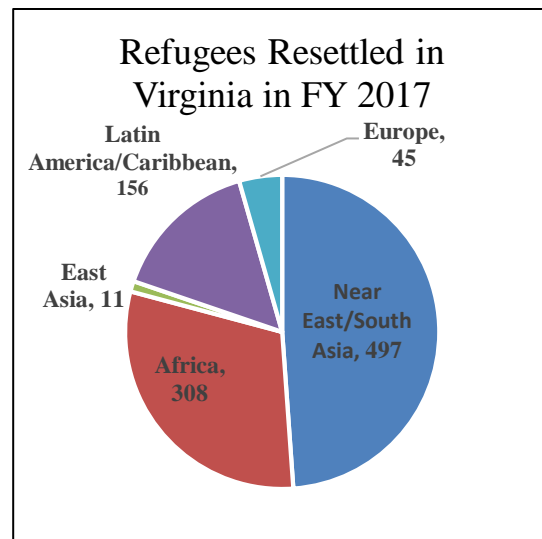


Figure 3: Refugees Resettled in Virginia.
Source: Virginia Newcomer Information System

Virginia’s Refugee Population

From FY 2013-2017, Virginia received cumulatively 6,776 refugees from over 35 countries for resettlement. In addition, the Refugee Resettlement Program in Virginia, which is managed by the Department of Social Services’ Office of Newcomer Services, has overseen services to an additional 7,353 individuals who meet the requirements for refugee resettlement services.

⁵ VECPC analysis of data retrieved from the U.S. Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS), Retrieved from <http://ireports.wrapsnet.org/> on September 28, 2017.

⁶ *Note: In this report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1-September 30).*

In Virginia, there are several groups that receive refugee resettlement services through agencies (see Table 1). The first group is refugees that resettle under the United States Refugee Admissions Program. The next category is comprised of Iraqi and Afghani nationals who assisted the U.S. government and were granted a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). The SIV provides the option to receive resettlement services. An additional category is comprised of families or individuals that enter the United States through legal or illegal channel. In this category families and individuals can apply for asylum if they are coming into the country under refugee-like conditions.⁸ Asylum status is a form of protection for people who meet refugee status, but are already in the U.S. or are seeking admission at a port of entry. The United States granted affirmative asylum to 26,124 people in FY 2015. Virginia was the residence of the 6th highest number in the nation with 716 residents positively receiving affirmative asylum.⁹ Once individuals or families are granted asylum, they are eligible to receive refugee services. Additionally, the program serves a much smaller group of individuals in refugee-like circumstances, such as victims of human trafficking.¹⁰ Finally, the Unaccompanied Minor Refugee Program serves refugee minors that enter the country without a parent or guardian and are eligible for the same benefits and services that children in the state foster care system receive. Minor refugees can be referred by UNHCR because of their

Children and Adult Resettlement in Virginia		
	Children under 18 Resettled	Adults Resettled
Refugee	2257	4519
SIV	2450	3330
Asylee	167	932
Other (CAM, Haitian/Cuban entrants, Amerasians, and Trafficking victims)	59	415

Table 1: Total Population Served from FY 2013-2017 in Virginia by Category⁷

⁷ Source: Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Newcomer Services, Refugee Arrival Data, Retrieved from <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/> on October 27, 2017.

⁸ Office of Refugee Resettlement, (January 9, 2017). *What we do*. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/what-we-do> on October 27,2017.

⁹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2015). Refugees and Asylum. Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum>

¹⁰ Note: This includes individuals found to be victims of human trafficking, Amerasians (decedents of both Southeast Asian and American heritage) and their families, Cuban and Haitian entrants in certain circumstances, as well as individuals admitted under the Central American Minor (CAM) Refugee Program.

vulnerable status, alternately, they may enter the country unaccompanied and later be granted asylum and admitted into the program. In FY 2015, Virginia had 67 children participating in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program in Richmond and Roanoke, VA.¹¹ Some of the top countries of origin were Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and Eritrea.¹²

Overall, the number of individuals granted asylum and receiving services in Virginia has decreased over the last five years, from 328 in FY2013 to 121 in FY2017¹³, most likely because of the significant backlog of asylum applications¹⁴. Additionally, this category has a much lower proportion of children than the other categories, with only about 15% of asylum grantees served in Virginia being children. While the number of refugees being resettled has remained somewhat constant, averaging about 1,400 per year, the number of individuals under the SIV program increased drastically from 1,019 in FY 2014 to 2,339 being resettled in FY 2017.

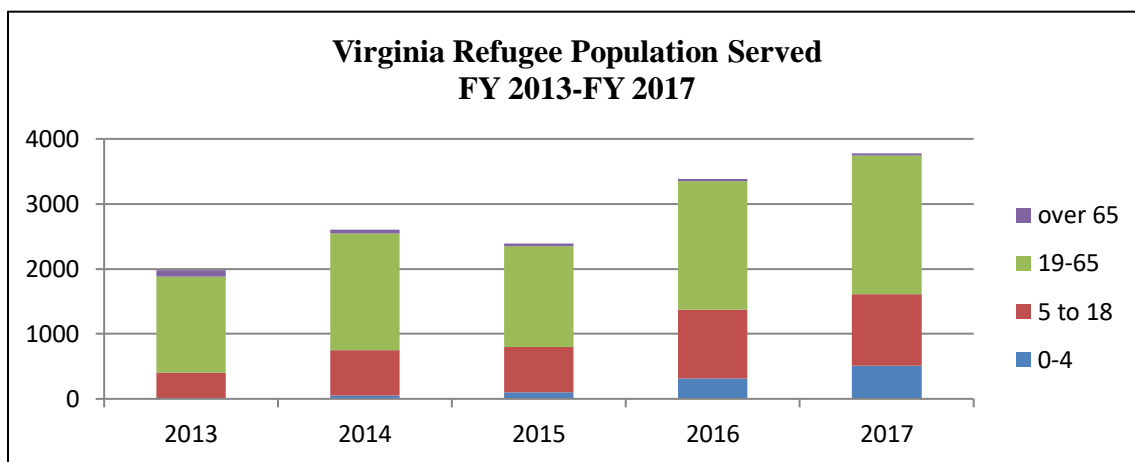


Figure 4: Virginia Refugee Population Served by Age Bracket for FY2013-FY2017, Source: Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Newcomer Services.

¹¹ Administration for Children and Families. (2015). *Annual Report to Congress, Office of Refugee Resettlement FY 2015*. (Washington, D.C.) Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/arc_15_final_508.pdf

¹² Administration for Children and Families. (2014). *Annual Report to Congress, Office of Refugee Resettlement FY 2014*. (Washington, D.C.) Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/orr_annual_report_to_congress_fy_2014_signed.pdf

¹³ Source: Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Newcomer Services, Refugee Arrival Data, Retrieved from <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/> on October 27, 2017.

¹⁴ US Department of Homeland Security, (June 29, 2017). *Annual Report 2017: Citizenship and Immigration Services*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS%202017%20Executive%20Summary.pdf> on October 27, 2017.

Children Being Served in Virginia

From FY 2013 to 2017, there have been 14,129 individuals who were served by the Refugee Resettlement Program in Virginia. Of these, 984 have been pre-school aged (4 or under) and 3,949 have been school aged (5-18). Each year has seen an overall increase in children in both age brackets resettled in Virginia and receiving services (See Figure 4). Additionally, the proportion of very young children being resettled in Virginia has grown significantly from .003% in FY 2013 to 14% of the resettled population in FY 2017.¹⁵ The largest countries of origin for children under 5 include Afghanistan (with about half of these being resettled under the SIV program), Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan (See Table 2).

Top 10 Countries of Origin		
Country of Origin	Under 5	Aged 5-18
Afghanistan	712	1853
Iraq	79	725
Democratic Republic of Congo	42	330
Syria	26	135
Bhutan	16	141
Ethiopia	11	68
Myanmar	13	63
Sudan	5	71
Eritrea	8	66
Somalia	9	61

Table 2: Top 10 Countries of Origin for Refugee Children in Virginia from FY2013-2017 *Source: Virginia Department of Social Services*

There are seven geographical areas of Virginia where refugees are resettled, corresponding to agency offices: Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, Newport News, Harrisonburg, Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Roanoke. Out of these areas, Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Newport News have the highest number of children under 5 and children 5-18 (see Figure 5).¹⁶

¹⁵ VECPC analysis of Virginia Newcomer Information System Data, available from the Virginia Department of Social Services, retrieved from <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/> on October 27, 2017.

¹⁶ Virginia Office of Newcomer Services (September 30, 2017), Virginia Refugee Data [table]. Virginia Department of Social Services. Retrieved from <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/> on October 25, 2017.

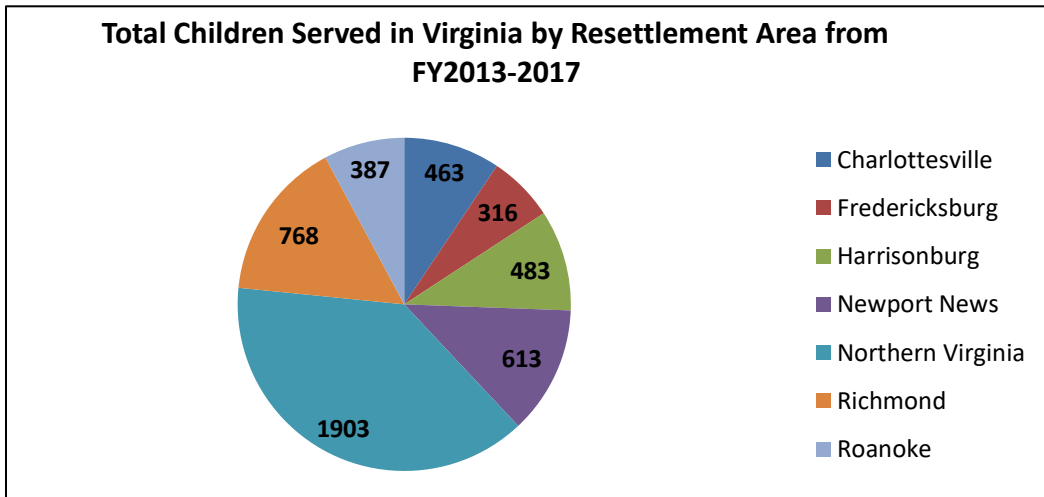


Figure 5. Source: VECPC Analysis of Virginia Newcomer Information System Data

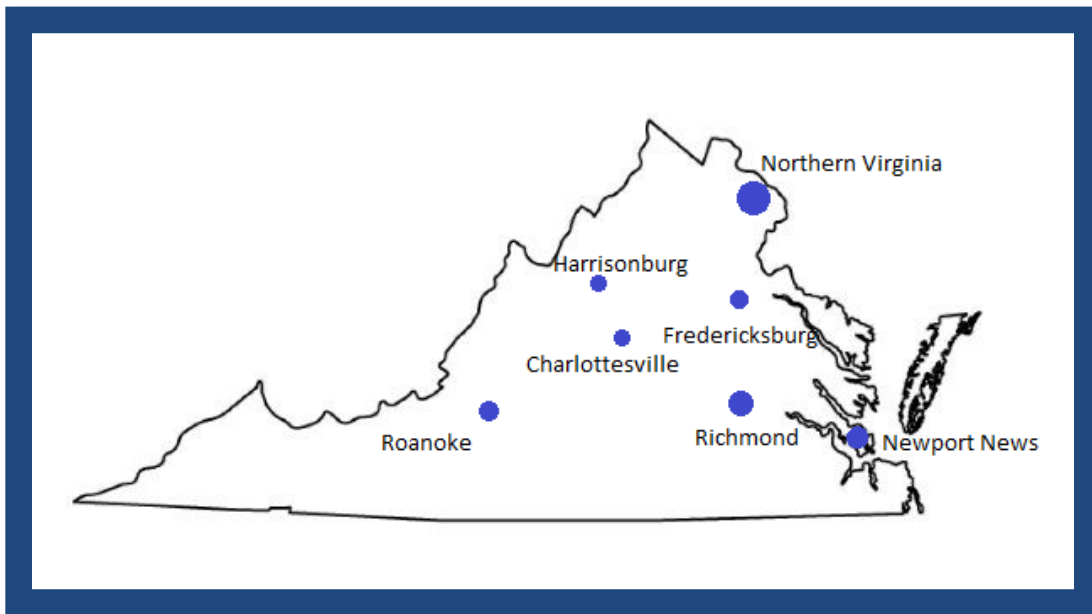


Figure 6: Map of Refugee Resettlement Areas in Virginia

Refugee Resettlement Providers

There are six non-profit refugee resettlement agencies operating within the Commonwealth of Virginia: Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington, Church World Service, Commonwealth Catholic Charities, International Rescue Committee, International Rescue Committee-Richmond, and Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area. These agencies work to resettle families

within the state of Virginia, providing comprehensive case management and providing critical services. Additionally, Commonwealth Catholic Charities works with local foster care agencies to place and work with unaccompanied refugee youth¹⁷.

Services Available

Refugees that are identified for resettlement in the U.S. (including both cases referred through the UN Refugee Resettlement Program and the SIV Program) are placed with one of the resettlement agencies listed above. The agency then decides where the family or individuals will be resettled. Refugees under both programs are provided with an interest-free loan from the U.S. Government to cover their travel to their resettlement location. Initial Refugee Reception and Placement funding is provided by the U.S. Department of State to the refugee resettlement agencies to pay for the first month's rent as well as basic furnishings and food and clothing for their apartment. These agencies also have access to translators to assist in communication with families.¹⁸ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement offers these agencies Matching Grant Funds to provide additional cash assistance and ongoing case management to employed refugees for 4-6 months after arrival. The overarching goal is to provide extra supports necessary to ensure that families become self-sufficient. In 2015, the agencies in VA received just over \$1.5 million in Matching Grant Funds.¹⁹

For families that don't meet the requirements for above, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement provides the Virginia Department of Social Services with grant funding to provide Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Medical Assistance, and English language and employment services to all eligible populations. These benefits are managed through the local Department of Social Services. These families, unlike many other immigrant populations, are also eligible for benefits available to citizens, such as

¹⁷ Office of Newcomer Services, Department of Social Services. (October, 2017). Retrieved from <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/>.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, Refugee Reception and Placement Program. (2017). The Reception and Replacement Program. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement/>

¹⁹ Gioosi, Thomas. (2016). Office of Refugee Resettlement: About the voluntary agencies matching grant program. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/matching-grants/about>

Medicaid, FAMIS, TANF, SNAP, and Energy Assistance, although they cannot receive both TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance at the same time.

The Federal Government allocates money to states and localities that have high concentrations of refugees under the Refugee School Impact Grant. The Virginia Department of Social Services received \$387,411 in FY 2015²⁰ and \$387,994 in FY 2014.²¹ For FY 2017, the federal guidelines changed and now use a formula based on the number of new arrivals of school age children in each state. Virginia was allocated \$395,299 on the basis of 1,304 new arrivals in the last two years.²²

Some states allocate these funds to the school districts, but Virginia uses this funding to pay for the Virginia Refugee School Achievement Program, which contracts with aforementioned agencies to fund Refugee School Liaisons who manage each case. Through this program, families and children receiving refugee resettlement services from one of these agencies receive assistance in enrolling their children in appropriate school programs and providing additional supports such as translators for school meetings and extra tutoring programs with volunteers. However, what is available to those families differs by locality. Some school districts, such as Harrisonburg and Newport News, have “Newcomer” programs that are sheltered classrooms for any child who is new to the United States and considers adjustment of language, culture, as well as educational system.

All districts have an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and some, like Arlington school district, have a High Intensity Language Training program for students with beginning levels of English and even provide supportive instruction in Spanish for some students in certain schools. Most areas of Virginia are able to offer early childhood education programming for low-

²⁰ Administration for Children and Families. (2015). *Annual report to Congress, Office of Refugee Resettlement FY 2015*. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/arc_15_final_508.pdf

²¹ Administration for Children and Families. (2014). *Annual Report to Congress, Office of Refugee Resettlement FY 2014*. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/orr_annual_report_to_congress_fy_2014_signed.pdf

²² Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2016). *Refugee School Impact Social Services Set-Aside*. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/fy-16-refugee-school-impact-social-services-set-aside>

income families through either the Virginia Preschool Initiative or Early Head Start or Head Start federal programming.

Allocations for VRSAP for Various Agencies, 2017		
Agency	Amount	Funding
Catholic Charities-Arlington Diocese	\$132,670	3 school liaisons and administrative costs
Church World Service	\$42,234	ESL Volunteer Coordinator and administrative costs
Commonwealth Catholic Charities	\$115,616	1 school liaison for each locality: Newport News, Roanoke, and Richmond and administrative costs
International Rescue Committee	\$41,124	Family Support Coordinator and administrative costs
Lutheran Services Capital Area	\$45,000	1 school liaison and administrative costs

Table 4: FY 2017 Allocations for VRSAP for Agencies²³

Children admitted under the Unaccompanied Minor Refugee program in Virginia are placed with the Commonwealth of Catholic Charities for intensive case management of their foster care services. Refugee minors (and certain other immigrant minors who meet special requirements) are eligible for all foster care services that any minor in Virginia foster care receives. This includes education, housing in a least restrictive environment, career planning and support of development of socialization skills. All refugee children in Virginia foster care are eligible for extended services until the age of 21.²⁴

²³ Source: Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Newcomer Services (2017). Refugee Resettlement, FY 2017 Contract Renewals for VRSAP. Richmond, VA. Retrieved from <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/>

²⁴ Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Newcomer Services (April 1, 2016). *Refugee Resettlement Program Manual*. Richmond, VA. Retrieved from <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/ons/services.cgi> on October 2, 2017.

Recommendations

- Virginia has held a long standing commitment to shaping strong futures for children and families. As such, the growing population of children resettling from refugee backgrounds warrants careful consideration and understanding. Based the current trends in refugee resettlement in the Commonwealth and a commitment to best support children and families, VECPC makes the following recommendations:
 - While refugee reporting agencies collect and report employment data as a key indicator of integration, data on childcare arrangements, preschool enrollment, and school attendance would be valuable indicators as well, providing a more holistic view of integration of the family, and help to identify and address future needs.
 - The Virginia School Achievement Program is funded based on the number of arrivals between the ages of 5-18 targeting K-12 students. However, with the increase in preschool program availability in Virginia and the significant increase in refugee children aged 0-5 being resettled in the state, funding allocations for voluntary agencies' school liaisons and family support coordinators must be reconsidered to ensure families are adequately supported in their gaining access to high quality child care and preschool programming.
 - Refugee resettlement agencies can explore partnerships with childcare centers and preschools that can support the inclusion of cultural and linguistic liaisons or teachers with specialized language and cultural training their programs. Access to supportive child care is a necessity and provides families with the time to attend language classes or job training. As a model, Catholic Charities Health & Human Services in Cleveland, Ohio partnered with Appleseed Learning Center and used state childcare vouchers to subsidize the childcare services for Somali, Bantu refugee children.²⁵
 - More information is needed about what school districts in resettlement areas are doing to meet the educational needs of this population.

²⁵ Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services. Promising Practices Program. Retrieved from <http://www.brycs.org/promisingpractices/promising-practices-program.cfm?docnum=0034> on October 31, 2017.

While all districts in resettlement areas are receiving Title III-Immigrant Youth funds from the Virginia Department of Education, the allocation amounts and the services offered differ. As a model of promise, Harrisonburg City Public Schools has used Title III-Immigrant Youth funds to hire cultural home-school liaisons and establish a Welcome Center that assists newcomer immigrant families with registration.²⁶

- Because districts within resettlement areas are able to offer Preschool programming for most newcomer families on the basis of income and other factors, school districts should work to include ESL services at the preschool level. Two of Virginia's school divisions are working to make this a reality for preschoolers. Newport News Public Schools has specialized, sheltered ESL preschool classes for newcomer immigrants and Harrisonburg has initiated dual language immersion programming for preschoolers in response to the growing immigrant population.
- Data that shares student and parent experiences with particular community and school services for refugee children should be collected and carefully examined, such as the U.S. Refugee Youth Consultations²⁷. This vital information can serve as powerful indicators and feedback on the services offered as well as shed light on areas of need.
- Schools and organizations serving Virginia's refugee population can utilize resources such as Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (<http://www.brycs.org/>) which act as a hub, enabling the empowerment of immigrant families and their children.

²⁶ Garcia, A. & Carnock, T. (October, 2016). *A Critical Mass: Creating Comprehensive Services for Dual Language Learners in Harrisonburg*. New America. Retrieved from <https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/A-Critical-Mass.pdf>

²⁷ Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services. (2016). U.S. Refugee Youth Consultations. Retrieved from <http://brycs.org/youth/us-refugee-youth-consultations.cfm>