



**Refugee**  
RESETTLEMENT  
INITIATIVE

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**NASH**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF **SYSTEM HEADS**

# THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT INITIATIVE AT NASH **EXPLAINER**

*TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS TO BE SITES OF WELCOME AND EMPOWERMENT FOR REFUGEES*

## OUR MISSION

*To create welcoming campuses and to promote the social and economic inclusion of refugees and displaced communities with institutions of higher education across the U.S.*

## Background

In early October 2021, NASH responded to requests from the federal government by laying the groundwork for government-university coalitions to address specific and urgent needs— primarily housing—of the tens of thousands of Afghan refugee families arriving as part of ‘Operation Allies Welcome.’ Twenty-two public and private institutions of higher education (IHEs) across 12 states have since mobilized to support hundreds of recently arrived Afghans. This initial effort was called the NASH Afghan Action Plan (AAP) and was publicly presented during the White House University and College Roundtable on December 7, 2021, as a notable example of leveraging the power of higher education systems and a new federal partnership with state university systems’ leadership.

As an outcome of this effort, NASH created the Refugee Resettlement Initiative (RRI) in December 2021, and has since expanded to support historic numbers of Afghans, followed by Ukrainians and Venezuelans, entering the United States since 2021.

Drawing on the power of ‘systemness’ and NASH’s wide and reliable leadership network, the RRI urges public IHEs to invest in educating, training, employing, housing and hosting refugees across the nation. At present, the RRI primarily seeks to serve displaced students and their families who are new arrivals to the U.S. With ‘soft landings, and strong beginnings,’ university communities support these new Americans joining the American workforce and society.

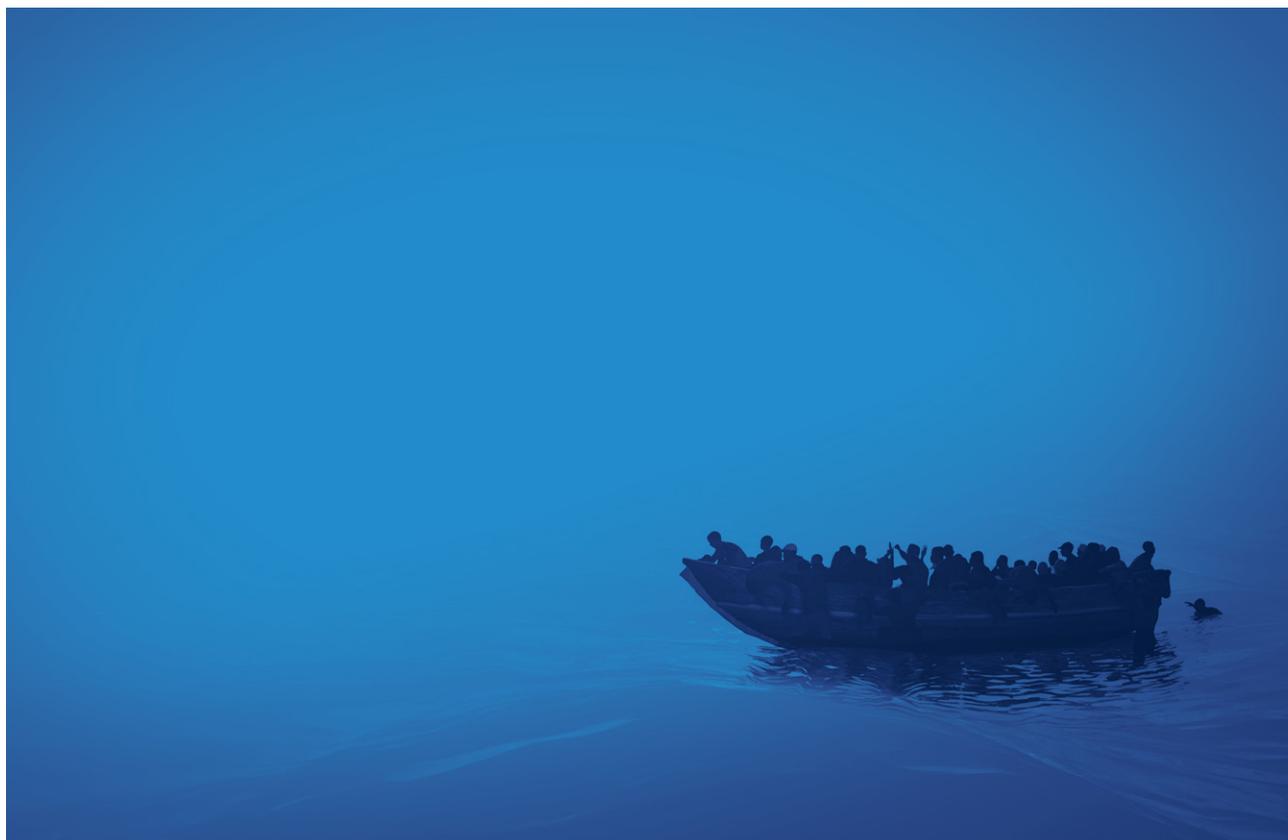
NASH’s RRI seeks to directly support campuses across public university systems to assist displaced students and their families, while also amplifying the “welcoming movement” on university campuses; helping to build safe and inclusive communities towards refugees; engaging and educating everyday people to support resettlement efforts; and contributing to our nation’s refugee protection commitments.

Through transformative change, and as more NASH members become welcoming systems and campuses, we are helping to expand the allyship of refugee advocates and supporters within public university systems, and building new partners of refugee resettlement, alongside state and federal leadership.

## What We Do

The RRI's activities include:

- **Brokering new partnerships while raising awareness** of a new role that universities can play as co-sponsors and private sponsors of refugee students and families, such as in Maryland, Nevada, Washington, New York;
- **Providing technical and coordination support** in the form of “train the trainers” programs and communities of practice in partnership with “Every Campus A Refuge” (ECAR), the Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education (CPE), and other such entities;
- **Advocating and raising funds** for this work from the federal, state, and the philanthropic sectors



## Who Do We Work With?

The NASH RRI works to support all people with forcibly displaced backgrounds, including people with refugee status, humanitarian parole, asylum seekers, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, and formerly internally displaced persons. Several of the RRI's programs only engage people with legal refugee status because of external restrictions, but the goal of the RRI is to be inclusive of all displaced or formerly displaced people in their early years in the U.S.

## Our Current and Emerging Work

### THE NASH CATALYST FUND FOR THE RRI

The NASH RRI's Catalyst Fund invites NASH member systems to nominate innovations in refugee student and family support being led by university community champions. Faculty, staff, and student groups of NASH member institutions are eligible to apply for the Catalyst Fund. The RRI values students as innovators, initiators, and implementors of refugee-support programs, and is committed to supporting students as owners of this work, at every level.

Examples of awards are: Western Kentucky University's Resilient Refugee Program, Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner's RI Reconnect, and Washington State University's Every Campus a Refuge Chapter. Read more about each program and apply to the Catalyst Fund at: <https://nash.edu/catalyst-fund/>



### NASH-ECAR

Partnering with Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR) to build programs at IHEs to host refugee families in on-campus housing, and with the wider goal of establishing ECAR chapters across the NASH network. Through this partnership, ECAR and NASH have developed a joint "Train the Trainers" program to prepare campus leaders to implement these programs tailored to their university's specific culture and needs. In 2023: 15 trainings at campuses nationally have been scheduled so far, with a growing waitlist for prospective fall trainings. Read more here: <https://nash.edu/2022/09/nash-announces-new-historic-partnership-with-every-campus-a-refuge-ecar/>

### KENTUCKY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE SCHOLARSHIP

Creating a Community of Practice to implement the first statewide humanitarian scholarship for hundreds of displaced persons in Kentucky. Funded by the Kentucky state legislature in the summer of 2022, this program has been crafted and is managed by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (KYCPE), the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, and by NASH and its national partners. The RRI connects college and university staff implementing this scholarship with technical experts in refugee and migrant support in monthly Community of Practice meetings, in partnership with IIE, the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, the Community Sponsorship Hub, and others. Learn more here: <https://cpe.ky.gov/ourwork/internationalstudents.html>

## RRI’S CHAMPIONS: BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF DO-ERS

Building a community of doers – RRI champions who seed and scale innovation in refugee support by universities. We believe that it takes only one dedicated champion to influence a campus to support refugees. RRI Champions are individuals or groups at NASH member university systems which have partnered with the RRI to support refugees on campuses through any of the RRI’s programs. These may include hosting an Every Campus A Refugee (ECAR) chapter, developing a scholarship for refugee-background students, building out refugee student support programs, and more.

Exemplary Champions include Dr. Patty Perillo and Michael Glowacki at the University of Maryland, who are hosting 32 individuals in on-campus housing through ECAR in 2022; Dr. Lee Nimocks and Jennifer Fraker, who helped shape the creation of the Kentucky Humanitarian Assistance Scholarship, to devote \$10 million towards scholarships for refugee-background students in Kentucky by the end of the 2023-24 school year. View our RRI Champion profiles on Instagram or Twitter, @RRI\_NASH.

## EDUCATION TO WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

Working with partners like World Education Services to build strong pathways for refugees to emerge from IHEs prepared for the American workforce, and with the skills needed to navigate the working world. The RRI is leading one such project with the Rhode Island Governor’s Office and the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC), to expand the state’s “RI Reconnect” employment on-ramping programs to refugees and newly arrived Rhode Islanders.

## STATE-WIDE ADVOCACY

Engaging in state-wide consultations with public universities and other state actors to develop a plan of action for the state that connects to: workforce development, integration and inclusion of newcomers and engagement of the wider community. This work is done in partnership with Welcoming America. Upon request from state actors, the RRI is organizing statewide convenings, to bring together actors from policy, resettlement services, and higher ed. An example of these convenings is the Feb. 14, 2023 convening of the Missouri Office of Refugee Administration and University of Missouri, along with other nonprofit and higher education actors. To inquire about support in facilitating a statewide convening, contact Program Manager Jane Roch at [jroche@nash.edu](mailto:jroche@nash.edu).

## STUDENT LEADERSHIP

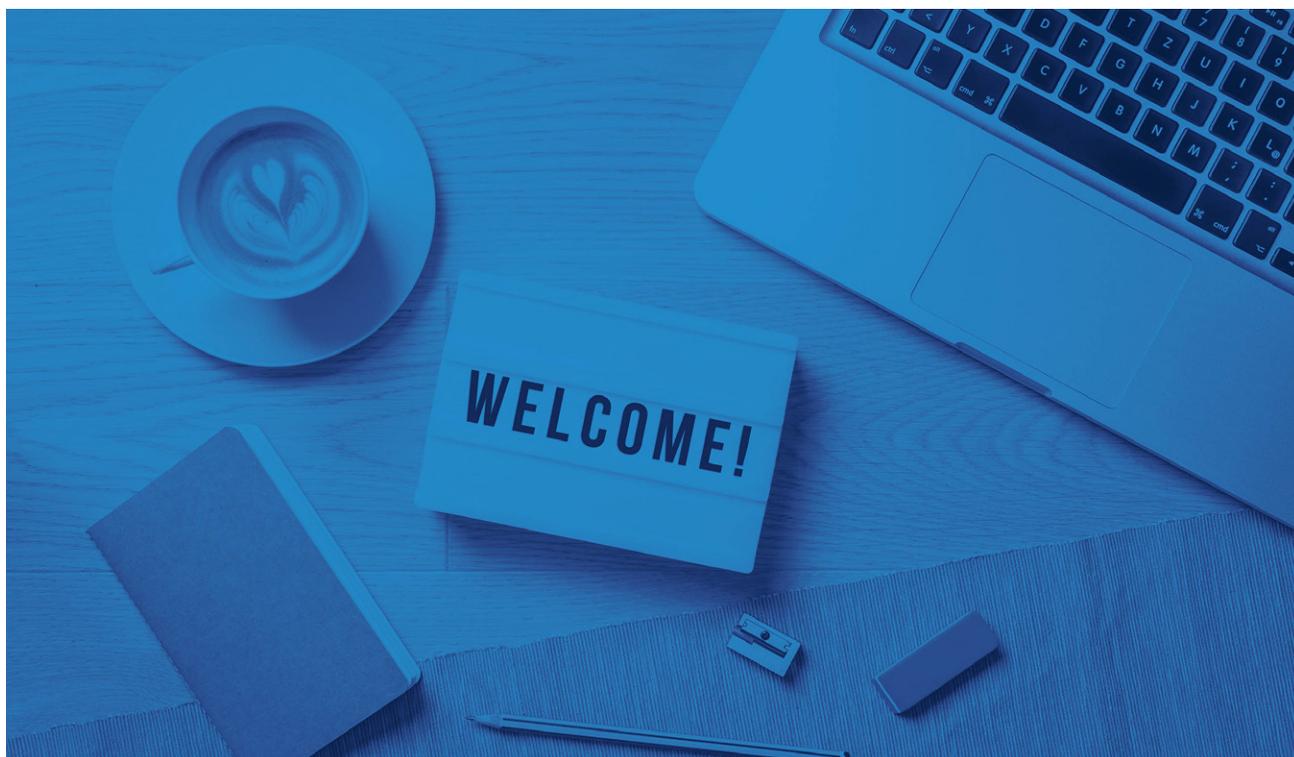
Fostering leadership among refugee-background students to inform and own aspects of campus support for refugees; engaging students in support of refugees on campuses, through volunteering, advocacy, and education on refugee issues. The RRI encourages students to join the RRI Champions Network, apply for the Catalyst Fund, and connect with the RRI team for one-on-one project consultations and research opportunities. Contact Program Lead Olivia Issa for more information at [oissa@nash.edu](mailto:oissa@nash.edu).



## WELCOME CORPS: A NEW PROGRAM FOR RESETTLEMENT

On January 19, 2023, the U.S. Department of State announced Welcome Corps: a new model for refugee resettlement, in which groups of individuals can mobilize to privately sponsor a refugee's resettlement to the country. Welcome Corps is the boldest innovation in refugee resettlement in the U.S. in over 40 years, and will be made possible by extraordinary Americans joining together to welcome those seeking freedom and safety, and in turn strengthen their own communities. The NASH RRI envisions higher education communities at the center of this initiative, serving as welcomers, and providing the soft landings and strong beginnings crucial to newcomers' success in the U.S.

Welcome Corps is a service opportunity for everyday Americans to do what we do best – be a good neighbor, guide, and friend to a newcomer refugee finding their way in our communities – all with expert support to carry out welcoming activities. The RRI sees IHEs, under the umbrella of public university systems, as the ideal ecosystems for resettled refugees. From on-campus housing, to dining plans, health facilities, experience working with international populations, English language services, career centers, ample and educated volunteers, and a walkable campus, IHEs have all the necessary services for welcoming refugees to the U.S. And, we know that diverse campuses, including diversity of national origins, legal statuses, and lived experiences, are educational spaces for every member of the community. When refugees are on campuses, the whole campus community begins to discuss experiences outside their own, and become aware of the world around them. The RRI plans to engage our strong community of refugee advocates in higher education to respond to this call. Learn more about the Welcome Corps by visiting [bit.ly/welcomecorps](https://bit.ly/welcomecorps), and spread the word to others that may want to help, too.



## Who We Are



**Dr. Nancy L. Zimpher, Director, Power of Systems; Co-Director, Partnership for Federal Support of Systems.** Dr. Zimpher provides leadership support to the RRI as Director of the Power of Systems, and is chancellor emeritus of the State University of New York (SUNY). Zimpher was also dean and professor of education at Ohio State University, then Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; and president of the University of Cincinnati. Zimpher is the first woman to have served as Chancellor of SUNY, UWM’s first woman chancellor, and UC’s first female president.



**Dr. Colleen Thouez, Founder and Director.** Dr. Thouez founded the RRI in 2021, and leads the initiative as its Director. Previously, Thouez served as the Director of the Welcoming and Inclusive Cities Division at the Open Society Foundations (OSF), where she conceived the Mayors Migration Council and its Global Cities Fund for Pandemic Relief, the Africa-Europe Mayors Dialogue, and the US-based University Alliance for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants. Thouez has also held leadership positions at the United Nations in the dual fields of adult education and international migration, where she worked for over 17 years in New York and in Geneva.



**Dr. Linda Lopez, Senior Advisor.** Dr. Lopez serves as Senior Advisor to the RRI since 2021. Previously, Lopez was the head of the Office of Immigrant Affairs for Los Angeles Mayor Garcetti, leading initiatives focused on economic and immigrant inclusion, financial and health access for underserved populations and created public-private partnerships to advance equity and inclusion in the city. Lopez was also an Associate Dean at the University of Southern California. Lopez is the founder of Impact Strategies Inc., a strategic consulting firm advising governments and philanthropy on their social and economic impact investments.



**Jane Roche, Program Manager.** Jane Roche is the Program Manager of the RRI. Prior to this role, Roche advised ‘Every Campus a Refuge’ ECAR, supporting the design of its implementation fidelity plan. Roche has also served as Program Associate for the University Alliance for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants (UARRM). A PhD candidate at the Rutgers University-Newark Division of Global Affairs, Roche’s academic and policy interests are to advance knowledge about the role of State and non-State actors – including universities – in the implementation of resettlement policies.



**Olivia Issa, Program Lead.** Olivia Issa is the Program Lead for the RRI. Issa has also served as co-chair of the Steering Committee for UARRM’s Student Voices for Refugees, and as Program Infrastructure Co-Chair for the RESPONSE Campaign, to build infrastructure to increase refugee access to higher education. As a college student at the George Washington University, Issa founded the Welcoming Campus Initiative to increase the inclusion of refugee-background students on campus – a proposal which has since been adopted by students at Georgetown and George Mason Universities.



**Hourie Tafech, PhD, Education to Workforce Consultant.** Dr. Hourie Tafech is Special Advisor at the RRI. Her focus is on refugee education and on economic inclusion; she is spearheading the development of the NASH RRI education and work strategy. Tafech is also faculty at Guilford College, where she serves as Program Manager for UARRM, leading the refugee workforce inclusion initiative, which aims to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of refugees in the United States. Prior to defending her doctoral thesis at Rutgers University, Tafech created the first student-refugee led NGO in Europe, in Malta.

## Why IHEs?

At the RRI, we believe that **Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs)** are the ideal ecosystems for resettled refugees. From on-campus housing, to dining plans, health facilities, experience working with international populations, English language services, career centers, ample and educated volunteers, and a walkable campus, IHEs have all the necessary services for welcoming refugees to the U.S. We believe that by mobilizing campuses to host refugees in their first few years in the U.S., we can help create a culture of using existing resources to launch refugees into successful, sustainable, and self-sufficient lives after leaving campuses. And, we know that diverse campuses – including diversity of national origins, legal statuses, and lived experiences – are educational spaces for every member of the community. *When refugees are on campuses, the whole campus community begins to discuss experiences outside their own, and become aware of the world around them.*

This kind of global learning is usually reserved for students who study abroad; an experience that is inaccessible to so many due to cost, academic requirements, or legal status. In bringing the world to U.S. campuses, IHEs are fostering a sense of global citizenship among students, faculty, staff, and alumni, producing members of society who are educated in how to treat others who are different from them, and aware of how international events impact their professional and personal lives, no matter their fields of study and professional aspirations.



## What NASH Members Can Do to Get Involved

1. **Join the NASH RRI network** by checking out <https://nash.edu/refugee-resettlement-initiative>, contacting Program Manager Jane Roche at [jroche@nash.edu](mailto:jroche@nash.edu), and signing up for the RRI newsletter: <https://mailchi.mp/nash-dc/rri>
2. **Host a refugee student and/or family on multiple campuses**, either as a co-sponsor or private sponsor. The NASH-ECAR “Train the Trainers” program equips participating systems with the information needed to customize, develop, and sustain welcoming and resettlement programs on their campuses. In addition, NASH’s RRI encourages colleges and universities to explore involvement in *Welcome Corps*, a new model for refugee resettlement, in which groups of individuals can mobilize to privately sponsor a refugee’s resettlement to the country. For more information on the training and involvement in Welcome Corps, contact Program Manager Jane Roche at [jroche@nash.edu](mailto:jroche@nash.edu).
3. **Offer timely support by leveraging on-campus resources**, including housing, enrollment (e.g., scholarships, tuition waivers), on-ramping (e.g., transfer recognition, credentialing), placement of scholars in graduate programs, and in-house residency for eligible faculty (including housing and employment). State-wide efforts to reduce (or waive) tuition for immigrants and refugees exist in some states, and are being explored as models for assisting refugees on a state-by-state basis.
4. **Mobilize to reinforce a refugee welcoming movement in the U.S.** Based on NASH’s experience partnering with systems to develop the NASH Equity Action Collaborative (<https://nash.edu/equity-action>), there is evidence of systems already leveraging existing resources for such efforts ranging from welcome centers, Dream Centers, College Promise, and other inclusive on-campus offerings.

## How IHE Communities Benefit

In working with the RRI, IHE communities have the opportunity to match their missions to their actions. Whether it be goals of serving the local community, producing global learners, or putting diversity, equity, and inclusion theories into practice, the goals of the RRI to bring refugees to campuses align with the missions of many IHEs. Additionally, when students, faculty, and staff are able to engage with individuals impacted by conflict or persecution internationally, they develop a wider understanding of the issues they often only read about in textbooks. Making campus ecosystems more inclusive of refugees is vital to ensuring that they are truly sites of diversity – including diversity of experiences – and that graduates of those IHEs are aware of experiences unfamiliar to their own.



## Our Partners

Partners in this work include:

- Accelerator for America
- American Immigration Council
- Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
- Church World Services
- Cities for Action
- Community Sponsorship Hub
- Every Campus a Refuge
- Institute of International Education
- International Rescue Committee
- Office of New Americans
- Open Society Foundations
- Open Society University Network
- Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
- Scholars at Risk
- Shapiro Foundation
- Universities in Exile
- Welcome.US.
- Welcoming America
- World Education Services

