



Leaders in International Higher Education

2023 Annual Conference

Understanding Refugee Student Journeys & Creating Pathways to Higher Education

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2010:

41 million
forcibly displaced people



2020:

82 million
forcibly displaced people



HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT



GLOBAL
37%



REFUGEES
5%

SOURCE: UNESCO (2017), UNHCR (2018)

Forcibly Displaced Students

STATUS	Origin/Journey	Documents	Access to Federal Financial Aid?	Clear Pathway to US Citizenship?
Refugee	Resettled in the US via the US Refugee Admissions Program	I-94	Yes	Yes
Parolee	Currently many Afghans, Ukrainians, Venezuelans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, Haitians	Foreign passport with CBP PAROLED stamp; EAD with CII parolee category; I-94	Varies	No
F1 visa holder	May have refugee status in a country of asylum, but arrive in US as international student	Foreign passport/ Refugee travel document	No	No

Refugee Student Journeys

- ❖ **Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp**
 - according to 2017 UNHCR report, “94% of eligible secondary school aged children are out of school and 87% of those enrolled are overage
 - students who finish secondary school in kakuma are already the top learners but face lack of access, funding, and opportunities to continue their education and fewer than 1% of eligible students are able to continue their education at the tertiary level
 - Refugee students scores on KCSEs are often lower than their counterparts in Kenyan schools who have access to trained teachers, resources and a higher quality of life

Elimisha Kakuma



- ❖ Elimisha Kakuma, means “**Educate Kakuma**” in Swahili
- ❖ It is the first college-preparatory gap year program **designed specifically for refugees by refugees** from Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northwest Kenya seeking higher education
- ❖ It was founded in 2021, by three graduates of Bridge2Rwanda (B2R), all of whom are **former refugees from Kakuma Refugee Camp** and studied in the US, along with their former Lead Teacher at B2R, Deirdre Hand (MA Education, Virginia Tech)

Successes & Challenges Faced by Elimisha Kakuma

successes

- ❖ Built a successfully functioning center equipped with solar energy and WIFI
- ❖ 100% Placement into colleges, at least 50% full financial aids
- ❖ Students enrolled in colleges such as Dartmouth performing tremendously well

Challenges

- ❖ Students not meeting specific college requirements
 - Our students are not in the typical college age range
- ❖ Lengthy CTD application process
- ❖ Visa Denials
 - US not used to the Conventional Traveling Documents (CTDs)

What Refugee Students Bring On campuses

- ❖ Global Classroom
 - a wealth of experiences and knowledge about the world
- ❖ Resilience
 - Overcame traumatic experiences
- ❖ Diversity
 - cultural diversity, ethnic, economic etc that benefits the university in the long run

Oklahoma State Experience

In the Fall of 2021, Oklahoma State University partnered with Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma to welcome 72 Afghan evacuees to Stillwater and contributed to their resettlement in significant ways:

- Initial resettlement services provided by CCEOK, then long-term resettlement transitioned to ELIC (summer of 2022).
- 19 apartments were provided by OSU's student housing, along with other university services.
- The ELIC created the Afghan Resettlement and English Services Program (CARES), now called Supporting Afghan Neighbors (SAN).
- ELIC offers 3 different intensive English Instruction courses to adults: English Fundamentals, English for Cultural Integration, and English for Occupational Purposes (including childcare when necessary).
- ELIC has also partnered with Stillwater Public Schools to facilitate a smooth transition children into our schools.

Students in the OSU experience

- ❑ Weren't initially expecting students, but they surfaced quickly
- ❑ Currently 5 Afghans enrolled as degree seeking (2 undergrad, 3 graduate students)
- ❑ Another 25-30 English language students (clients)
- ❑ Obstacles encountered:
 - ❑ protecting student privacy
 - ❑ in-state tuition
 - ❑ funding issues
 - ❑ academic performance

Key Lessons

What we did well (well, ok)

- Messaging—build goodwill across campus
- Tie-in to institutional mission
- Community buy-in: economic resource/econ development

What I wish we did better:

- Integrating students and faculty into the project.
- consistency of funding policies
-

Existing Pathways: F1/J1

F-1 VISA

The main type of student visa in the U.S. and current avenue for refugees to enter the U.S. as students.

F-1 VISA BARRIERS:

- Need to show financial support for length of program
- Not a durable solution for protection - student must show intention to return to their home country
- Limited access to permanent residences and work authorization

Highlights from my research:

- Students hoped this would lead to a durable solution to their status
- Importance of informed staff at IO, particularly with post-graduation/OPT advising for refugees
- Happy to share more on challenges and recommendations specific to supporting and advising those with travel documents

Existing Pathways: Post-resettlement

P1-P3 CATEGORIES

Refugees are admitted to the U.S. through existing refugee definitions, vulnerability-based resettlement criteria and vetting.

Resettled refugees who arrive via these categories may seek to access higher education after they have arrived in the U.S.

- P-1 (Priority 1): Individuals referred by the UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or certain NGOs
- P-2 (Priority 2): Groups of special humanitarian parole
- P-3 (Priority 3): Family reunification cases

P1-P3 BARRIERS:

- Less than 1% of refugees worldwide are resettled
- No immediate pathway to education - focused on economic self-sufficiency via employment within 90 days of arrival

Forging Pathways Over the Past Two Years

- Humanitarian parolees
- Temporary Protected Status

Positive Developments - Multi-stakeholder efforts

- Kentucky Humanitarian Scholarship
- Qatar Scholarship for Afghans Project (QSAP)
- And...

PROPOSED NEW COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PATHWAY

Refugee students would enter the U.S. through a
UNIVERSITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM.



Selection criteria would be based on academic qualifications and potential. To be eligible, students would need to meet the refugee definition.

FEWER BARRIERS TO REFUGEE STUDENTS:

- Durable solution - students come in as refugees with a clear pathway to lawful permanent residence and citizenship
- Educational access - students can enroll as full time students and access higher education

Welcome Corps

The Welcome Corps is a new program that empowers everyday Americans to come together to privately sponsor refugees, building on our country's long tradition of providing refuge.

Together, sponsor groups welcome refugee newcomers by securing and preparing initial housing, greeting refugee newcomers at the airport, enrolling children in school, and helping adults to find employment.



**Coming
Soon!
College &
University
Sponsorship**

Resources

→ **Higher Ed Immigration Portal**
<https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/>

→ **RESPONSE Campaign**
<https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/response-campaign/>

→ **Welcome Campus Network**

Community of higher ed institutions that meets every other Friday 1pmET

If you are interested in connecting with us or learning more about any of these opportunities, contact **Laura Wagner (laura@presidentsalliance.org)**