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# Press Release: For World Refugee Day, New Report Shows Community Self-Help is Key for Refugee Integration

WASHINGTON 15 Jun 2007 - Almost 2.4 million refugees and asylees from at least 115 countries entered the United States between 1980 and 2006. Despite the refugee admissions ceiling being 70 percent lower (at 70,000 people) than when it was first introduced 27 years ago, the United States continues to resettle more refugees overall than any other country. A new study released in advance of World Refugee Day on June 20 by the Migration Policy Institute and the International Rescue Committee examines how organizations founded by refugees are helping others who have escaped violence and persecution abroad adjust to life in the United States.

In "Bridging Divides: The Role of Ethnic Community-Based Organizations in Refugee Integration," Kathleen Newland, Hiroyuki Tanaka and Laura Barker examine how ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) founded by refugees partner with the government, voluntary resettlement agencies and other institutions to provide refugees with essential services. ECBOs' activities range from helping refugees learn English, find jobs and apply for citizenship, to advocating for refugees' rights and interests.

The authors profile organizations in cities including: New York (boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens); Raleigh and Greensboro, NC; Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN; **Nashville, TN**; Lowell, MA; and Chicago, IL.

They find that in addition to confronting language, housing and financial barriers, refugees face cultural difficulties, ranging from difficulties adjusting to the rich American diet to persistent ethnic divides carried over from their home countries. The report illustrates several innovative programs from culturally appropriate health education to business clubs offered by ECBOs to help refugees become upwardly mobile and engaged.

"Think of how helpful it is for newly arrived refugees to work with other people who speak their language, understand their culture, and have had the experience of being refugees themselves," said Kathleen Newland, director of MPI's program on refugee policy and a member of the IRC board of directors. "This knowledge also makes ECBOs essential to communities from Lowell, Massachusetts, to Nashville, Tennessee as they work to integrate refugees into the fabric of society."

The report also addresses the challenges facing ECBOs in providing services, and presents recommendations and organizational development strategies. It suggests how other types of organizations can bolster and enhance the efforts of ECBOs to integrate refugees into the United States.

The authors include an overview of the current US refugee system, including information on the countries with the highest number of refugees in the United States, and states that resettle the majority of refugees. They also examine factors of how well refugees are integrating in the United States, including their use of social services and their workforce participation rates.

"Bridging Divides" is online at [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Bridging\\_Divides.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Bridging_Divides.pdf) and [www.theIRC.org/bridgingdivides](http://www.theIRC.org/bridgingdivides).

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*The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide. The International Rescue Committee is a global leader in relief, rehabilitation, post-conflict development, advocacy and resettlement services for refugees and others uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression.*

*MPI and the International Rescue Committee partnered on this study as part of a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement for the IRC's Strengthening Organizations Assisting Refugees (SOAR) project, which provides technical assistance to organizations founded by refugees, enhancing their capacity to serve their beneficiaries.*