



IMMIGRATION

Key to the Future

The Benefits of Resettlement to Upstate New York

Scott Fein, Editor-in-Chief

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Scott Fein

Foreword

Rex Smith

Immigration Policy, a Chronology and its Demographic Implications

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PART I: OVERVIEW: WHAT IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTE

Chapter 1 Recurring Immigration Myths and the Facts That Disprove Them

Camille J. Mackler

Sarah Rogerson

Matthew K. Geiling

Chapter 2 New York State's Immigration Policy: A Perspective

Laura Gonzalez-Murphy

Jenny M. Munoz

Camilla Campisi

Chapter 3 Farmers Sponsoring Refugees

Rey Koslowski

Chapter 4 Immigration Inclusion Framework: Achieving the Promise of Immigrant Diversity

Dina Refki

Bilge Avci

Chapter 5 A Better Conversation on Immigration

Camille J. Mackler

Chapter 6 State Refugee Policies: A Reflection on National Discourses on Immigration

Patrick Benjamin

Chapter 7 Welcoming Asylum-Seekers as Community

Anna Mongo

PART II: WHERE IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTE

Chapter 8 The Business Perspective

Ken Pokalsky

Chapter 9 Economic and Social Benefits of Immigrant Integration in Upstate New York

Andrew Lim

Nan Wu

Chapter 10 Licenses for Undocumented Drivers and the Revitalization of Rural Communities

Richard Rifkin

Ava Ayers

Chapter 11 Immigration as an Economic Development Tool in Rural New York

Laura Schultz

Chapter 12 Refugee Resettlement: Utica's Experience

Shelly Callahan

Chapter 13 The Integration and Fiscal Impact of Refugees in Utica, New York

Paul Hagstrom

Chapter 14 New York Needs an Upstate Strategy for Immigrant Inclusion

David Dyssegaard Kallick

PART III: HOW IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTE

Chapter 15 What We Know About Immigrant Upward Mobility Programs That Work: Constructing a Path Forward for New York

Faith Nibbs

Chapter 16 Refugee Entrepreneurship: A Strategy for Encouraging Refugee Economic Inclusion

Kyle Farmbry

Hourie Tafech

Chapter 17 Strategies for Economic Development Outside of Urban Corridors

Arthur B. Markman

Jonathan P. Alba

James E. Jarrett

Matt Kammer-Kerwick

J. Bruce Kellison

Gregory P. Pogue

PART IV: BY THE NUMBERS: WHERE IMMIGRANTS COME FROM AND WHERE THEY ARE SETTLING

**Chapter 18 Unauthorized Immigrants in New York State:
A Demographic Portrait**

Tatiana Padilla

Matthew Hall

Chapter 19 Foreign-Born Population in Upstate New York

Jan Vink

Chapter 20 Foreign-Born New Yorkers

Dina Refki

**Chapter 21 To a Better Future for Undocumented Students Through
Institutional Support**

Elizabeth G. Carrature

Katia Yagnik

Julieta Schiffino

Chapter 22 New Americans in Upstate New York

Chapter 23 Epilogue: Refugee Settlement

Matt DeLaus

Rhiannon Snide

About the Contributors

INTRODUCTION:

A Little-Known Success Story

Do refugees contribute to a community's vitality or are they a drain on a community's safety net and resources? These questions have been raised for years as the national debate on immigration intensifies. They are likely to be raised anew as New York prepares to welcome more than 1,300 Afghan refugees and asylum seekers who have fled the Taliban regime that has overtaken their country. The resettlement of refugees in Upstate New York informs the answer to these questions. New York is a cultural and political mosaic. Downstate, typically left of center. Upstate, less populated and, in many areas, more conservative. Against this backdrop, the federal government, which determines where resettlement occurs, directed that approximately 6 percent of the refugees admitted to the U.S. since 2002 be resettled in New York (third in the nation, only slightly behind California and Texas), and of that number 90 percent be resettled in Upstate New York. Cynics said that introducing thousands of refugees into Upstate communities would be a combustible combination. Indeed, they were correct: combustion followed, but in a form that appeared to release an energy that buoyed these localities.

Yet, cynicism lingered, voiced by some less familiar with the host communities and those in Washington who struggled to understand the benefits of refugee resettlement. How can small cities and communities in Upstate New York and elsewhere absorb and benefit from the Afghans, Bengalis, Bhutanese, Bosnians, Egyptians, Guyanese, Jamaicans, Syrians, Iraqis, Somalians, Asians, Russians, and South and Central Americans among others. Recently, three New York nonpartisan think tanks tackled the question. The New York State Bar Association, the Government Law Center at Albany Law School, and the Rockefeller Institute of Government invited 30 authorities to assemble data and provide perspectives. Drawn from academia, the business community, service organizations, and statisticians and largely using economic and demographic analysis, their findings were consistent. Helping offset the demographic and economic decline in Upstate New York communities, refugees pay taxes, rebuild housing stock, open stores, and take unfilled jobs. Their contributions are so important that an increasing number of localities are seeking to lure refugees who have settled in other parts of the country. As the contributors to this book have noted, it takes time, support, and patience, but in relatively short order, refugees are helping to rejuvenate Upstate communities. The contributors' research embodied in this book demolishes

old myths and replaces them with an array of facts that are compelling, persuasive, and overwhelmingly positive.

To our contributors and those who helped edit the material, in particular Michele Monforte of the Government Law Center, Kathryn Calista, Howard Healy and Dan McMahon of the New York State Bar Association, and Annie Curto of Whiteman Osterman and Hanna, and our publishers, the New York State Bar Association, the Government Law Center at Albany Law School, and the Rockefeller Institute of Government, a heartfelt thanks.

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