

Moving from Exclusion to Belonging

Immigrant Rights in Minnesota Today

The Advocates for Human Rights
March 2014



The Advocates for Human Rights' new groundbreaking report *Moving from Exclusion to Belonging: Immigrants Rights in Minnesota Today* is the result of more than 200 interviews and 25 community conversations held throughout Minnesota in the past two years.

Why did we produce this report?

The purpose of the report is to measure the extent to which Minnesota respects, protects, and fulfills the human rights of refugees and immigrants in our state. The discussion about immigration often focuses on the actions of immigrants; this report examines how well Minnesota fulfills the responsibility to ensure that every person is treated with dignity and enjoys freedom, justice, equality, and peace.

What did we find?

Although Minnesota is a welcoming place, many policies, laws, and practices exclude immigrants and refugees from full participation and inclusion in the community, violating their human rights. Immigrants and refugees face barriers to belonging in Minnesota communities because of discrimination and social distance. Racial disparities in employment, education, health care, and civic engagement limit the opportunities for immigrants and refugees. Immigrants and refugees face additional barriers in realizing their human rights due to language, culture, and immigration status. In addition, thousands of undocumented Minnesotans and their families live excluded from the community and in constant fear of deportation, leaving them vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses in Minnesota.

Who can use this report and how can they use it?

Policy makers can review the findings and recommendations to direct and support changes in policies, practices, laws and regulations that are currently not fulfilling our promise of respecting and protecting the rights of immigrants in the areas of public safety, the court system, employment, housing, public benefits, education, civic participation and immigration.

Local governments should consider many of the recommendations for policy changes at the local level. For those interested in fostering a more inclusive community and better connecting long term residents and newer immigrants, there are examples of effective strategies used by Minnesota communities.

Community organizations can use the findings and recommendations to support advocacy work, community engagement and outreach efforts targeting immigrant and refugee groups.

Individuals can learn about violations of human rights in Minnesota and advocate for change, including making personal efforts to welcome and include immigrants and refugees.

What should readers take away from this report?

As Minnesotans, we need to consider how our actions, laws, and policies impact the human rights of all residents. When we are aware of gaps or failings in the system, we need to address those in a way to ensure all residents' rights are fulfilled. There are successful initiatives in many communities which are promoting integration and success for immigrants and refugees which we can build on to create a state where everyone shares a sense of belonging.

Download the full report at: <http://www.energyofanation.org/belonging.html>

Because every person matters.

Moving from Exclusion to Belonging: Immigrant Rights in Minnesota Today

KEY FINDINGS

PUBLIC SAFETY

Immigrants' ability to enjoy safety and security suffers because of fear and mistrust of law enforcement and cooperation by law enforcement with federal immigration authorities.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Immigrants and refugees in Minnesota face serious barriers to accessing justice that are compounded by lack of immigration status, language, and lack of familiarity with the U.S. legal system.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

While many individual immigrants reported enjoying economic opportunity, immigrants and refugees reported barriers to employment, exploitation by employers who prey on fear of deportation or job loss, and discrimination based on race, religion, and national origin.

EDUCATION

While Minnesota has seen overall improvements in academic outcomes, persisting disparities highlight inequities within the system. Interviewees pointed to poverty and segregation, the need for policy change to reduce bullying and mitigate negative effects of school discipline policies on immigrant and refugee students, better school readiness, preparedness of content staff to work with immigrant students, improved funding and staffing levels, and greater hiring and retention of staff of color. Participants also identified the need for increased attention and resources accorded to English learner (EL) services.

HOUSING

Immigrants in Minnesota struggle to find safe and well-maintained housing, a problem fueled by a shortage of affordable housing, restrictions on public benefits, immigration status, exploitation by landlords, and outright discrimination in renting and buying. The systems that protect people from exploitative and discriminatory landlords, realtors, and mortgage lenders are not working for immigrants.

BASIC NEEDS

The United States makes scant public benefit provisions for refugees. Asylum seekers receive no support upon their arrival in the United States and face a waiting period for work authorization after applying for asylum. Low-income immigrants cannot meet their basic needs, primarily because public assistance programs are designed to exclude certain people from consideration, regardless of their needs.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Active religious discrimination prevents Muslim immigrants from fully enjoying their rights. Civic engagement by refugees and immigrants is strongest within ethnically-based organizations and weakest when it comes to holding decision-making power in government or as leaders of large organizations that serve the broader community. English language classes and volunteering provide connection to the larger community.

IMMIGRATION

Immigrants and refugees face long waits for application processing, difficulties communicating with immigration officials, and discrimination based on religion and country of origin.

BUILDING A MINNESOTA BEYOND "NICE"

Participants noted that while Minnesota is welcoming, the welcome does not extend very far. Newcomers face discrimination and exclusion from social networks and by extension, exclusion from the economic opportunities and political power such networks bring.

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