



Date Tuesday, August 18, 2025
Time 10:30am to 12:00pm

Location Virtual (Zoom)

Minutes

Attendance:

1. Afrah Abdulkader, Community Health Worker- County of San Diego-DSCE-OIRA office
2. Amy Ramirez, American Red Cross International Services amy.ramirez@redcross.org
3. Andrea Frost, La Mesa Spring Valley School District - District Counselor on Community School Initiative
4. April Moo, Karen Organization of San Diego.
5. Arsalan
6. Assmaa Elayyat
7. Besma Coda, besma.coda@syhealth.org, Research Health Promotion Project Manager at San Ysidro Health
8. Brit Ochira (Brittney Ochira), Brit Ochira with National Conflict Resolution Center, bochira@ncrconline.com
9. Brittney Johnson
10. Christiana Lawrence
11. Dilkhwaz Ahmed
12. Dorah Anono, Alliance for African Assistance
13. Elissa Hill, Somali Family Service of San Diego
14. Erika Hernandez
15. Farhat Popal, UC San Diego Center for Community Health/Refugee and Immigrant Health Unit. flpopal@health.ucsd.edu
16. Ferdaws Fayege, Program Analyst- Refugee Program Bureau/CDSS
17. Hajar Rochdi/ Kind Hearts San Diego, kindhearts100@gmail.com
18. Hawi Abdulkadir, Somali Family Service
19. Henok Getaneh, Survivor of Torture International. hgetaneh@notorture.org
20. Hodayoun Nabizadeh, San Diego Police Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office hnabizadeh@pd.sandiego.gov (619)876-9050
21. Ilona Borunova, Vice Chair of the Forum/ Career Counselor at Somali Family Service
22. Ismael Avilez, Support Services Coordinator, Casa Cornelia Law Center, iavilez@casacornelia.org
23. Janie Burke - SURVIVORS
24. Jason Bercovitch - Rep Scott Peters
25. Jawan Jalili, Alliance for African Assistance
26. Jesus Aguilera, Resource and Data Specialist, 211 San Diego
27. JFSSD Refugee Resettlement
28. Juan Estrada, Molina Healthcare-Juan.Estrada@Molinahealthcare.com
29. Justine Kozo, Co-Chief, County Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, Justine.Kozo@sdcounty.ca.gov



30. Karrie Schoettler, Instructional Coordinator, San Diego Unified School District Newcomer Welcome Center
31. Krzel Manansala-Tan, UCSD Moores Cancer Center
32. Lina Alsaegh, License to Freedom
33. Lorie Lopez, Southern California Immigration Project - loriescip@gmail.com
34. Lucia Gonzales, SAY SD Crawford Community Connection, lgonzales@saysandiego.org
35. Lucy Estrada
36. Mary Joy Cunningham, SDRF Secretary
37. Melissa Vazquez, Program Specialist II, County of San Diego CalWORKs/Employment Services.
Melissa.Vazquez@sdcounty.ca.gov
38. Michele Vakili CCDS Managing Attorney
39. Naimo Ali, Community Health Worker, Department of Strategy and Community Engagement
40. Neil Hovland. San Diego Unified School District's Family Engagement Department. nhovland@sandi.net
41. Nooria Esmaelzade, San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition (SDRCC)
42. OIRA
43. Patty Baker - San Diego
44. Prisci Quijada, Refugee Health Coordinator for the County of San Diego HHSA
prisci.quijada@sdcounty.ca.gov
45. Rayan Kaskos- IRC SD Workforce and Integration Program Manager
46. Renee Nasori with Grossmont College, Career Services: renee.nasori@gcccd.edu
47. Robin Joy Maxson, SD County SSAB Member, robinjoymaxson@gmail.com
48. Sabrina Smadi, CRC for Dr. Tala Al-Rousan at UC San Diego sabrinasmadis@gmail.com
49. Shanta Kingham, Alliance for African Assistance
50. Shlyn Guarian, Community Outreach Liaison, Child & Family Well-Being - Office of Child Safety,
Shlyn.Guarian@sdcounty.ca.gov
51. Vivian Saphthavee (vivian.saphthavee@gmail.com), Court of Appeal Attorney, also President of newly-formed Afghan Refugee Empowerment Fund (formerly SDARRF) and a volunteer with a variety of orgs!
52. Zuri W.

Meeting Facilitator: Christiana Lawrence, SDRF President

Meeting Notes:

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Christiana Lawrence, SDRF President

- **Resettlement Updates:**
State: [no one present from Refugee Programs Bureau (RPB) to share updates]

County of San Diego: Ghina Perez-Hall, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

- **For the month of June 2025, San Diego County resettled a total of 24.**
 - Primary Refugees (not including the Afghans) = 1



- Cuban/Haitian = 1
- Asylees = 2
- Total Afghans for June 2025 = 20.
 - Afghans with refugee status = 16
 - Afghans with SIV status = 4
- 11 out of the total 24 (or 46%) for June 2025 are the number of individuals eligible for CalWORKs including children.
- 13 out of the total 24 (or 54%) for June 2025 are the number of single adults/couples with no children under 18 eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA).
- [in chat] From OIRA to Everyone: The overall total resettled individuals from 10/1/24 - 06/30/25 is 1,516.
- [July numbers shared post-meeting:]
 - For the month of July 2025, San Diego County resettled a total of 37.
 - Primary Refugees (not including the Afghans) = 0
 - Cuban/Haitian = 1
 - Number of Trafficking = 0
 - Iraqi SIV = 0
 - Asylees = 1
 - Secondary Refugee = 0
 - Total Afghans for July 2025 = 35.
 - Afghans with refugee status = 24
 - Afghans with SIV status = 11
 - Afghans with Humanitarian Parolee (HP) status = 0
 - 32 out of the total 37 (or 86%) for July 2025 are the number of individuals eligible for CalWORKs including children.
 - 5 out of the total 37 (or 14%) for July 2025 are the number of single adults/couples with no children under 18 eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA).
- Prisci Quijada shared: as of July 11 they had to pause certain services [note-taker is unsure of name of services - possibly "RHAP"], but they were able to get funding expanded to September 30th
- **Agency Highlight: Renee Nasori, Supervisor at Grossmont Community College, Career Services**
 - Grossmont Community College has very diverse student body
 - lots of refugee students
 - Many languages
 - Renee thinks of career center like a "welcome center" - lots of the students are new to college, still deciding their area of study, etc.



- Their department tries to help all feel welcome
- They walk with students through what's available, how processes work
- Career counselors and ambassadors try to help align student's interest, values, strengths with education paths
- They offer resources about careers; ex. presentations about careers, informational interview opportunities, etc.
 - They try to help students learn about the field they're entering
- Pathways to Work
 - Don't need to be an enrolled student to go to their workshops
- Their department has a monthly newsletter and Instagram where they share events and opportunities
- Handshake - job board account
 - Renee recommends that organizations looking to hire people should join
- Best way to connect: service request form:
<https://www.grossmont.edu/student-support/career-center/services.php>
- Open House this Thursday 11am-1pm
- October 14th Job Fair:
https://app.joinhandshake.com/career_fairs/c7fcd036-4bdc-44e0-8e6f-960f83349e97/employer_preview
- Fall 2025 - CTE Courses <https://app.box.com/s/d84we1mhrrdoxojusexjznrsqfutfbud>
- [in chat] From Rayan Kaskos- IRC SD Workforce and Integration Program Manager to Everyone: Shout-out to Renee and her team for being instrumental in the success of our refugee job fairs—this year we celebrated four years of these events. From securing accessible space and actively engaging and coordinating with employers to providing end-to-end, day-of support, they've turned these fairs into a dependable pathway to employment for our community.
- **Presentation:** [today's presenter cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances - no presentation today]
- **Task Force Updates:**
 - **Advocacy and Asylum Task Force:** [no one on call to share today]
 - **Domestic Violence Task Force:** [no one on call to share today]
 - **Education:** Hovland Neil (SDUSD)
 - Task force met last week
 - Working on spreadsheet about ESL classes, and another on tutoring and mentoring services
 - Discussed impacts on funding and services - ex. decreases in numbers of teachers assistants



- **Employment:** Renee Nasori (Grossmont College)
 - Yesterday had first task force meeting for Fall
 - Next meeting: Sept 15 at 1pm
 - Job fair in October; will share flyers (and translations)
 - If want to join as employer, reach out to Renee
 - Encourages anyone interested to join task force
 - Their task force discusses what refugees are needing/looking for, barriers and challenges, and provides updates
 - Still an influx of people needing their services
- **Health:** Prisci Quijada
 - No meetings; task force is not too active - invites others to join
- Christiana reminded task forces to use their funds

- **Approval of May 2025 Meeting Minutes:** Mary Joy Cunningham, Secretary
 - Approved by: Christiana

- **Community Announcements and Questions:** Christiana Lawrence, SDRF President
 - Question from Naimo Ali: looking for resources for helping individuals with degrees from other countries transfer their qualifications for employment in the US
 - Renee Nasori (Grossmont College) shared that resettlement agencies and adult schools can help
 - Officer Homayoun Nabizadeh shared that sometimes it depends on the employer and the field of work
 - [in chat] From Farhat Popal to Everyone: Sharing one organization I'm aware of that provides credential evaluation services: <https://www.wes.org/credential-evaluations/>
 - [in chat] From Renee Nasori to Everyone: Evaluation of Foreign Transcripts: <https://www.grossmont.edu/admissions/how-to-graduate-with-a-degree-or-certificate/evaluation-of-foreign-transcripts.php>
 - Question from Shlyn Guarian: looking for resources for families with household needs (ex. beds, furniture, etc.)
 - [in chat] From Afrah Abdulkader to Everyone: Bridge of Hope -City Heights
 - [in chat] From Brit Ochira to Everyone: Also, I encourage people to join the Buy Nothing facebook group for their neighborhood - there are a lot of free furniture and other items offered by neighbors
Sharia's Closet for clothing
I believe Bridge Builders Network community center in El Cajon (works primarily with Afghan and Syrian refugees) sometimes has items to share or can put the request out to their network



- [in chat] From Hajar/Kind Hearts SD to Everyone: We offer essential home goods to new arrivals as much as possible but we have a long list for furniture as we rely on clean donations from the community and volunteers to transport.
- o Andrea Frost, La Mesa Spring Valley School District - District Counselor on Community School Initiative, shared about what she sees in school district:
 - They also see needs for housing items, degree transfer help, help reading documents...
 - They can meet some needs - ex. backpacks and school supplies, and can help families connect with Cox
 - Link to LMSV Community Schools events:
[https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/embed?src=c_34aab2282a833051f9bdf86e99b989a4cf1a9c8853ea5228676761844a819199@group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America/Los Angeles](https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/embed?src=c_34aab2282a833051f9bdf86e99b989a4cf1a9c8853ea5228676761844a819199@group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America/Los_Angeles)
 - Looking to connect with Haitian community more
 - Christiana Lawrence suggested that Mid-City Church of Nazarene can be a good resource for Haitian community
 - [in chat] From Homayoun Nabizadeh to Everyone: Haitian Community Resource: Pastor Johnny Oxeda from First Baptist Church 4100 Fairmount Ave SD CA 92105 (619)586-2068
- o Naimo Ali:
 - East County Community Talks focussing on stress management - Aug 30 at 1:30-2:30 in Farsi - led by someone from that community
 - Housing for All resource fair - Sept. 6 at 10am-2pm
- o [in chat] From Jesus Aguilera 211 San Diego to Everyone:
 - Click here to see if your listed services are up-to-date in our 211 San Diego/Imperial Database. <https://211.my.site.com/s/>
 - Resource Department: (858) 300-1200
 - Resourcecenter@211sandiego.org
- o [in chat] From Shlyn Guarian to Everyone: Good morning everyone! I hope everyone is well. If you need a direct connection to Child & Family Well-Being - Office of Child Safety, please reach out to me, Shlyn Guarian, Community Outreach Liaison, Shlyn.Guarian@sdcounty.ca.gov or call me directly at 619.917.5481.
- o [in chat] From Renee Nasori to Everyone: Career EXPO/ Job Fair on October 14th from 11-2PM at Grossmont College: <http://tinyurl.com/msweyb>
- **Adjournment:** Christiana Lawrence, SDRF President
 - o Next meeting will be in-person - the topic will be related to immigration updates, and Red Cross will share too
 - o Encouraged people to think about officer nominations for 2026



San Diego Refugee Forum

Serving all who seek refuge in San Diego

Refugee Forum Officers:

Chair	Christiana Lawrence	Community Volunteer	ccoul3@gmail.com
Vice Chair	Ilona Borunova	Somali Family Service	borunova.ilona@gmail.com
Secretary	Mary Joy Cunningham	Community Volunteer	mjcunningham1221@gmail.com
Treasurer	Camille Zombro	Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College	camille.zombro@gcccd.edu
Ex Officio	Assmaa Elayyat	Deputy Director Self-Sufficiency Service	assmaa.Elayyat@sdcounty.ca.gov