



October 14, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We are writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to express our shared concern about the serious plight of Syrian refugees. In order to assist those accepted into the United States, we request that you work with Congress to release emergency funds to support refugee mental health and enhance community integration. There are accessible, effective tools supported by psychological research that can help refugees integrate into new communities, enhancing their ability to contribute to American society.

APA is a scientific, educational, and professional association, with more than 123,000 members and affiliates. Our primary mission includes the application of psychological knowledge from science, education, and practice to address fundamental problems of human welfare, including the challenges experienced by immigrants and refugees, and the communities that host them.

The horrific humanitarian situation in Syria and the decreasing food rations in refugee camps have led to massive flows of refugees seeking sanctuary. Almost four million Syrians are registered as refugees, the vast majority of whom are women and children. Many have sought refuge in Europe, braving dangerous travel, and many more would like to come to the United States. A first step is ensuring adequate resources. Releasing emergency funds to the Department of State's Reception and Placement Program and the Department of Human Service's Office of Refugee Resettlement is essential and requires collaboration between Congress and the State Department. As you may know, funding for services for refugee populations has remained flat for nearly 25 years, despite clearly increasing need.¹ In addition to vital housing, employment, and language services, some of this funding should be used to train staff in mental health screening; provide access to mental health professionals either on staff or through contract to serve the refugee population in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way; and enhance community integration.

¹ Migration Policy Institute. (2015). *The integration outcomes of U.S. refugees: Successes and challenges*. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges>.

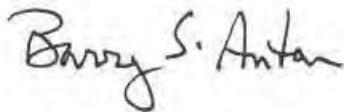
We are requesting that the Obama administration provide support for:

Refugee mental health. An abundance of psychological research shows how we can improve refugees' mental health. Refugees, particularly those displaced from war-zones, experience stress and trauma, and other serious mental health issues, which can interfere with their functioning.² However, they also demonstrate profound strength and resilience. Culturally-informed, evidence-based care can help them draw on these strengths as they begin their new lives. For example, [International Family, Adult, and Child Enhancement Services \(FACES\)](#)³ is a comprehensive, community-based mental health program that works with refugee children and their families, using a multidisciplinary and multiethnic team approach, providing services in homes, schools, and other community locations. For additional applicable psychological research, see the recent APA reports entitled, [Resilience and Recovery after War: Refugee Children and Families in the United States](#) and [Crossroads: The Psychology of Immigration in the New Century](#).

Community integration. Psychological science elucidates the processes underlying cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes, which can lead to community reluctance to integrate refugees. Stereotypes can be overcome by opportunities for contact and collaboration, as documented by decades of research by psychological scientists (see [Pettigrew and Tropp's 2006 meta-analysis](#)⁴) and supported by specific interventions. American communities can be provided the tools and resources to be more receptive to immigrants and refugees through engaged leadership, opportunities for contact, and programs in which hosts and refugees can work together to strengthen their communities. Groups like [Welcoming America](#)⁵ have developed simple, practical guidelines, based on psychological principles, to help local governments and non-profits embrace refugees and other newcomers.

As a global power, the United States has a responsibility to alleviate international suffering, and we applaud your efforts to help those refugees in need. APA stands ready to assist in providing knowledge about acculturation challenges and effective interventions based on well-established psychological science to address the needs of refugees and the communities that host them. For more information, please contact Gabriel Twose, Ph.D. (gtwose@apa.org) in APA's Public Interest Government Relations Office.

Sincerely,



Barry S. Anton, Ph.D., ABPP
President



Norman B. Anderson, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

² Porter, M. & Haslam, N. (2005). Predisplacement and postdisplacement factors associated with mental health of refugees and internally displaced persons. *JAMA*, 294(5), 602-612.

³ <http://www.heartlandalliance.org/whatwedo/our-programs/directory/faces.html>

⁴ Pettigrew, T. F. & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751-783.

⁵ <http://www.welcomingamerica.org/>