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Innovative San Diego Refugee Resettlement Program that Serves Broader Community Earns Award for Exceptional Immigrant Integration Initiatives

WASHINGTON – The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) on Wednesday announced that the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in San Diego is one of four recipients of its 2011 [*E Pluribus Unum*](#) Prize for exceptional immigrant integration initiatives. The national award honors the IRC in San Diego for its multi-faceted approach to helping refugees and their families become self-sufficient and successfully integrate into the local workforce and the larger U.S. society.

The IRC in San Diego and the other *E Pluribus Unum* Prizes winners will be honored tonight at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., featuring U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and other national policymakers. The national award is accompanied by a \$50,000 prize.

The *E Pluribus Unum* Prizes program, established in 2008 by MPI's [National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy](#) with generous support from the [J.M. Kaplan Fund](#), seeks to encourage the adoption of effective integration practices and inspire others to take on the important work of integrating immigrants and their children so they can join the mainstream of U.S. society.

The IRC in San Diego provides initial resettlement assistance to some 1,100 refugees annually — from countries including Burma, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq and Sudan — and serves an additional 5,000 community members through ongoing education programs. In resettling refugees with greatly divergent backgrounds — from Iraqi doctors to Burmese farmers who may not be literate in their own language — the IRC in San Diego has developed a wide range of services and multi-generational educational offerings. Among its services are employment and food security programs, parenting courses and after-school youth activities, financial literacy programs, community volunteering opportunities, citizenship assistance and a microenterprise program.

California received 41,220 refugees from 2005 to 2010, according to the California Department of Health and Human Services, with 12,310 resettled in San Diego. As federal and state budget tightening continues, the safety net that non-profit refugee resettlement programs provide has become increasingly important, as has the need for refugees to quickly achieve self-sufficiency.

In that journey to self-sufficiency, the IRC in San Diego helps refugees open businesses and obtain jobs, offers credit-building loans, spearheads community volunteering programs and assists refugees on the path to English literacy and citizenship.

“For refugees, whose lives have been disrupted by war or political turbulence, it is a great challenge to make the sudden transition to life in the United States,” said Margie McHugh, co-director of the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. “The IRC in San Diego is the first refugee program to win the *E Pluribus Unum* Prize. The agency did so because of its creative and effective approaches to addressing the myriad needs of newcomers, whether by providing opportunities for

Somali and Burmese refugees to farm through the New Roots Community Farm or by starting the First Things First program that provides pre-school instruction to refugee toddlers while building the English and literacy skills of their mothers and giving them strategies to prepare their children for success in U.S. schools.”

The IRC in San Diego also has recognized the need to foster relationships between refugees and the broader community. The non-profit engages in educational programs at schools, universities and civic groups, and encourages U.S.-born teens to learn about the refugees’ countries of origin and develop a spirit of volunteerism. The non-profit has more than 700 volunteers. The IRC’s services in San Diego are not reserved exclusively for refugees, but made available to others in the community as well.

“Integration is a two-way process, as the IRC in San Diego demonstrates so powerfully,” said MPI Senior Vice President Michael Fix, co-director of the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. “Just as San Diego’s refugees are gaining by becoming fuller participants in U.S. society, they also are sharing their knowledge and cultures with young Americans, expanding their horizons.”

The IRC in San Diego’s Citizenship & Immigration Program has also provided citizenship services to 7,000 immigrants and refugees since 2000.

“Refugees come to the United States determined to live full and successful lives here. While the support we provide in their early days is crucial, we recognize that to be truly self-sufficient, refugees need more than that first job. We provide services that focus on long-term success – such as understanding the U.S. financial system, starting a business or getting back into a profession,” said Bob Montgomery, the IRC in San Diego’s executive director. “We are proud that our program has seen strong success in accomplishing these targeted goals and is being recognized by the *E Pluribus Unum* Prizes for that work.”

The IRC in San Diego is part of the global International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian aid organization with offices worldwide and 22 branch offices in the United States.

The other 2011 *E Pluribus Unum* Prize winners, each receiving a \$50,000 award, are: Hispanic Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City (MO), Project SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders) at Temple University and San Francisco-based Welcome Back Initiative, which has Welcome Back Centers in San Diego and eight other U.S. locations. Marriott International received the first-ever *E Pluribus Unum* Corporate Leadership Award.

Winner highlights for the IRC in San Diego can be found at www.integrationawards.org/winners-IRC.cfm. For more information or to set up interviews, contact Michelle Mittelstadt at 202-266-1910, mmittelstadt@migrationpolicy.org; or Burke Speaker at 202-266-1920, bspeaker@migrationpolicy.org.

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The Migration Policy Institute is an independent, non-partisan think tank in Washington, D.C. dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national and international levels.