



CATHOLIC LEGAL
IMMIGRATION
NETWORK, INC.

CLINIC Transition Paper: Promoting and Encouraging Immigrant Integration

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The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., CLINIC, promotes the dignity and protects the rights of immigrants in partnership with our network of immigration legal services providers. Visit us at cliniclegal.org/transition.

“Integration is not an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity.

Rather, contact with others leads to discovering their ‘secret’, to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better. This is a lengthy process that aims to shape societies and cultures, making them more and more a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings.”

— [Message of Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2018](#)

“My name is Susan. I am a U.S. citizen. I was born in El Paso, Texas. I moved to Colorado because my husband was offered a job in Grand Junction. My husband Tom was assisted by Catholic Charities of Pueblo to fill out his citizenship application. He is now a U.S. citizen. I have been contributing in my community in different ways.

I volunteer in high school by teaching in the ESL (English as a Second Language) class. We also have a program in Grand Junction called a Spanish Club. We raise money for educational trips for students so they can learn more about college and plan their career as soon as they finish high school. In the Spanish Club, we also gather Latino families in the meetings so they can learn more about their kids and how they are doing in school. I also help translating for the parents in school conferences to remove that language barrier and help to build a relationship between the teachers and families. Having a translator helps the Spanish speaking families understand how they can help their children when it comes to their education.

I also helped the District paint the word “WELCOME” on a door in more than 100 languages for all the families that came here from the around the world. It felt so good to be part of this project because all the families felt welcomed and were very thankful. Now that I know that immigrant integration is so important in our community, I am going to encourage more people in the community to be more involved and be welcoming to our new Americans.”

— Susan, volunteer at CLINIC affiliate, Catholic Charities Pueblo

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Why immigrant integration matters

Immigrant Integration results from an equal partnership between newcomers and the receiving community who work together to make their community more inclusive. While faith and community-based organizations have always worked on the front lines to address many of the most critical issues that affect immigrants, government at all levels generally overlooks or even ignores the importance of actively promoting immigrant integration as a policy priority. Scarce resources, lack of support and a misunderstanding of the active role all community members must play in integration efforts are all contributing factors. However, the importance of integration cannot be overstated. The integration of immigrants into their receiving communities directly affects the overall well-being of families for generations. Communities and the nation as a whole benefit from engaging in this important work.

Number of people impacted

With 44.8 million foreign-born residents — nearly 14 percent of the population — the United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world.¹ Investing — or not — in immigrant integration affects every corner of our country and every person in it. By dedicating resources to this vital work, the Biden administration can build a stronger, more unified America aligned with stated goals.

Previous administration's policy and the human consequences

Under the Trump administration, federal leadership on immigrant integration disappeared. Instead of guiding the country in efforts to create inclusive communities that reflect and honor all residents, this administration chose to emphasize and promote assimilation, a process by which the immigrant is required to surrender his or her native language, traditions and cultural practices in order to become more “American.” This change in emphasis was a conscious and deliberate choice. As a result, the country moved away from its tradition of celebrating immigration to our country as a form of renewal and rejuvenation. Furthermore, the Trump administration sought to denigrate this aspect of our nation's history, delay and impede our growth as an inclusive society, and promote unwelcoming rhetoric and policy.² The Biden administration can begin to unravel this inhospitable and damaging legacy by following the below four recommendations within the first 100 days of office.

In order to promote integration at the federal level and encourage its development at the local level, the Biden administration should do the following in the first 100 days:

Recommendation 1:

Reinstate USCIS' Former Mission Statement, and Replace the Word 'Assimilation' With 'Integration' on Federal Government Agency Webpages

In 2018, USCIS changed its mission statement and deleted the phrase, “secures America’s promise as a nation of immigrants.”³ Throughout the Trump administration, ‘assimilation’ has replaced ‘integration’ in various places across USCIS’ webpages. This includes, for example, the long-standing Citizenship and Integration Grant Program, which began in 2009, that underwent a name change to Citizenship and Assimilation Grant Program in 2017.⁴ Both of these decisions were deliberate choices made to signal a change of emphasis away from celebrating our nation’s foundational history of welcoming immigrants.⁵ Language matters. By restoring the word “integration,” the Biden administration will send a clear message that our nation welcomes the stranger by working together to create a community inclusive of all its residents, long-standing and new.

Recommendation 2:

Create a Federal Office of New Americans, Situated at the White House

Supported by CLINIC as far back as 2015, a federal Office of New Americans⁶ would provide training and resources on integration programming options, technical support and funding opportunities. The Office of New Americans would develop a federal definition of integration and promote it nationwide. It would create standard performance measures and outcomes that will guide immigrant integration programming and decision-making by cities, states and other entities working towards this goal. The Office of New Americans would develop a web-based portal for all available government resources and funding for integration initiatives. It would support the creation of new Mayors’ Offices of New Americans and other local and state-level government initiatives. This Office would be integral in building a country that celebrates and invests in the strength of our diversity.

Recommendation 3:

Reconvene the Task Force for New Americans

In November 2014, President Barack Obama created the White House Task Force for New Americans, recognizing the importance of dedicated resources and widespread vision for immigrant integration.⁷ The

Taskforce sought to “develop a coordinated federal strategy to better integrate new Americans into communities and support state and local efforts to do the same.”⁸ The Trump administration abandoned this Task Force and ignored its recommendations. As such, the Federal Strategic Action Plan on Immigrant and Refugee Integration should be revisited, the status report updated and new recommendations created.⁹ As religious institutions are often the first responders to immigrants and refugees across the nation, faith-based groups should be intimately engaged in the Task Force’s work. Immigrants and refugees should be included on this Task Force and provided opportunities to engage in the work of the Task Force in a meaningful way.

Recommendation 4:

Implement Education on the Importance of Immigrant Integration

On Sept. 22, 2020, President Trump issued an Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping.¹⁰ We recommend that the Biden administration issue its own Executive Order which promotes education and bias training at the federal level, and which broadens the scope of the trainings to include issues like xenophobia – as this has become such a point of divide in this nation. These trainings would promote the federal definition of integration and the standard performance measures mentioned in Recommendation 2.

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Endnotes:

¹ Abby Budiman, Christine Tamir, Lauren Mora and Luis Noe-Bustamante, *Facts on U.S. immigrants, 2018 Statistical portrait of the foreign-born population in the United States*, Pew Research (Aug. 20, 2020), pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/.

² Josh Lowe, *American Values: Under Trump, Federal Immigration Program Switches Focus From 'Integration' to 'Assimilation'*, Newsweek (July 27, 2007), [newsweek.com/immigration-us-trump-integration-assimilation-642790](https://www.newsweek.com/immigration-us-trump-integration-assimilation-642790).

³ Ryan Devereaux, *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Will Remove “Nation of Immigrants” From Mission Statement*, The Intercept (Feb. 22, 2018), theintercept.com/2018/02/22/u-s-citizenship-and-immigration-services-will-remove-nation-of-immigrants-from-mission-statement/.

⁴ Civic Assimilation, uscis.gov/citizenship/civic-assimilation (last visited on Nov. 11, 2020).

⁵ León Rodríguez, *I ran USCIS. This is a nation of immigrants, no matter what mission statements say*, Washington Post (Feb. 26, 2018), [washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/02/26/i-ran-uscis-this-is-a-nation-of-immigrants-no-matter-what-mission-statements-say/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/02/26/i-ran-uscis-this-is-a-nation-of-immigrants-no-matter-what-mission-statements-say/).

⁶ Jeanne Atkinson, *President's Task Force on New Americans*, CLINIC (Feb. 4, 2015), [cliniclegal.org/resources/presidents-task-force-new-americans](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/presidents-task-force-new-americans).

⁷ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Presidential Memorandum Creating Welcoming Communities and Fully Integrating Immigrants and Refugees*, (Nov. 21, 2014), obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/21/presidential-memorandum-creating-welcoming-communities-and-fully-integra.

⁸ White House Task Force on New Americans, *White House Task Force on New Americans: One Year Progress Report*, (Dec. 2015), obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/image/tfna_progress_report_final_12_15_15.pdf.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping*, The White House (Sept. 22, 2020), [whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/).