



WAYNE STATE
School of Social Work

policy & practice brief

How Social Workers Can Create Immigrant-Friendly Communities

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Richard Smith, Associate Professor, is the chair of the Innovation in Community, Policy & Leadership concentration at Wayne State University's School of Social Work. He studies the intersection of sustainable community development, inequality, and migration. He also serves as co-Editor of the Journal of Community Practice and core advisor for the International Ecocity Standards project of Ecocity Builders, Inc. Dr. Smith received his Doctorate of Social Welfare from the University of California, Berkeley, before which, he earned a Master's of Social Work from the University of Michigan and a professional certificate in economic development finance from the National Development Council.



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Fatou-Seydi Sarr is founder of the African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs (ABISA), whose main goal is to help resolve the gap between African immigrants in Metro Detroit and the resources they need to clear the path to economic mobility, civic integration, and social and cultural inclusion. They do this by advocating for mentor programs in education, teaching English as a Second Language classes, running immigration clinics, providing free legal aid, and working to educate immigrants on societal needs and civic engagement opportunities. Ms. Sarr is a graduate of Wayne State University's School of Social Work and the Marygrove College Master's of Social Justice.

ABOUT THE BRIEF

The Policy and Practice brief disseminates information of interest to researchers and practitioners, and highlights faculty expertise in the School of Social Work. For more information and a complete list of references, visit the Center website: www.research.socialwork.wayne.edu

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ABSTRACT: The Trump administration has signaled a change in immigration policy to increase enforcement as well as reduce numbers of legal immigrants. However, local governments and community-based organizations have been working to create immigrant-friendly communities. This is consistent with social work values and ethics around non-discrimination and cultural competence. We present an overview of changes to immigration policy at the national level, an overview of immigrant-friendly community initiatives, and close with ways social workers can practice cultural competence around immigration.

Conflicting Values of Social Work and Civic Nationalism

This past year, immigration has once again risen as a controversial issue. Nation states confer social benefits based on citizenship, thus citizens have rights and privileges that non-citizens do not. However, social work values and ethics embrace cultural competence and prohibit discrimination because of immigration status (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Daily, social workers face an ethical dilemma because many programs require citizenship or legal permanent residence.

Social workers should understand different degrees of immigration status. Anyone born in the United States or born to parents who are US citizens have a right to citizenship and may not be deported, but can still be detained and searched at borders. At the other end of the spectrum, people who enter in the United States without inspection may have unlawful status, as do those who overstay a visa. In contrast to temporary workers, students, or tourists, immigrants are people from another country who live in the United States on a permanent basis. Immigration law is under the jurisdiction of the federal government and part of civil law, as opposed to criminal law, which is the jurisdiction of the states. Thus, an immigration violation is a civil infraction, much like a parking ticket. For example, short periods of unlawful presence may not be penalized, but longer ones may result in a three-year or ten-year bar on entering the United States (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2009). This could be marked on a passport, which could result in other countries denying entry to the individual. Immigrants in the US on a valid visa, can apply for legal permanent residence through employment, family ties, refugee status, or the diversity lottery. However, those with legal permanent residence can be deported or disqualified from citizenship if they commit to any violation of criminal law (i.e., misdemeanors and felonies).

New Executive Actions and Proposed Legislation on Immigration

President Trump issued several executive actions with regards to immigration, refugee resettlement, and routine travel that have been reviewed by the courts (E.O. 13767 of Jan 25, 2017; E.O. 13780 of Mar 6, 2017). This has the impact of globally reducing student visas even from countries that were not listed on the travel ban. Pres. Trump also relaxed constraints on how border patrol agents conduct business (E.O. 13768 of Jan 25, 2017); they may detain anyone and ask for documentation, including US citizens. As a result, there has been a 37% increase in immigration related arrests (Sacchetti, 2017). The White House has also proposed the RAISE act to cut immigration and shift policy focus from family reunification to skilled immigration.

The US has a backlog of deportable immigrants because there are costs as well as human rights considerations. If a deportable immigrant does not voluntarily return to their country of origin, they will be supervised by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) until there is budget to involuntarily deport them. The United States does not deport immigrants to a country of origin if it is not safe. Further, the immigrant must have current travel documents (i.e., a passport). President Trump noted in his second travel ban that Iraq was removed from the list of restricted countries because they agreed to issue travel documents (E.O. 13780 of Mar 6, 2017).

This was one of the necessary conditions that lead to the arrest of Chaldean immigrants in Metro Detroit (Anderson & Warikoo, 2017). However, immigrant groups from African countries do not always receive the same press coverage. Indeed, Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean constitute 10.6% of deportations even though they are only 5.4% of the undocumented population (Morgan-Trostle & Zheng, 2016, p. 20).



Consequently, ABSIA has been in contact with Embassies and Consulates from various countries and have determined that federal agents have arrested and deported about 200 Senegalese and up to 200 immigrants from Guinea are expected to be deported this summer. In one instance 80 people from Guinea were deported on a single plane before the winter 2017 holiday.

An overview of Welcoming Initiatives / Sanctuary Cities / Immigrant-Friendly Initiatives

Since the 1980s, state and local governments have taken different approaches to cooperation with immigration authorities. During the Sanctuary Cities movement of the 1980s, various religious organizations collaborated to provide housing for asylum seekers and had local governments pass resolutions acknowledging their efforts (Carro, 1988). Some localities execute cooperative agreements with federal agencies regarding immigration enforcement, yet others choose not to collect immigration status from people because they want all residents to feel comfortable contacting them for help (Marrow, 2009). Pres. Trump pledged withholding federal funds for “sanctuary cities” (E.O. 13768 of Jan 25, 2017), which he defines as a state or local government that has a policy that prohibits exchange of information with a federal agent regarding immigration status. The Michigan Legislature introduced two bills to prohibit “sanctuary cities” (Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, 2017). Others, like the Center for Immigration Studies, use the term “sanctuary cities” in a different way: for example, jurisdictions that do not share release dates of immigrant detainees from a local jail (Griffith & Vaughan, 2015).

Because the term “sanctuary city” is controversial, some cities use the “welcoming city” moniker, and restrict outreach to legal immigrants. For example, the City of Detroit is part of Welcoming America, a network of immigrant-friendly communities that agree to pass a resolution affirming that they are welcoming to immigrant workers, investors, or students and have a plan to promote integration (Huang & Liu, 2016).

In July 2015, there were 54 cities and counties in the network. Today, there are 98 cities and counties and 107 non-profit organizations (Welcoming America, 2017). Governor Snyder established a Michigan Office of New Americans that works to promote citizenship and provide funding for English as a Second Language, but only for immigrants with status (Office of New Americans, 2016). As part of Detroit’s immigrant-friendly work, the City launched a municipal identification program for use to access city services (e.g., libraries, recreation centers, payment of bills). The ID may be obtained by any resident of the city without regard to immigration status. Police will accept this as valid identification.

To learn more about the specific activities of immigrant-welcoming initiatives, the Wayne State School of Social Work reviewed content on over 14,000 local government websites and came up with four levels of immigrant-friendly practices:

	Municipalities with Population 500 Persons or Greater				Counties			
	No.	Pct	Pop 1000	Pct. Pop.	No.	Pct	Pop 1000	Pct. Pop.
Rhetorical	163	1.18%	33,222	17.43%	47	1.52%	37,852	12.44%
Outreach	326	2.35%	55,769	29.22%	103	3.34%	66,012	21.69%
Integration	757	5.46%	82,804	43.32%	141	4.57%	83,701	27.50%
Facilitation	52	0.37%	23,472	12.30%	18	0.58%	15,375	5.05%
Any Policy	1,024	7.38%	95,915	50.20%	189	6.12%	112,865	37.09%
No Policy	12,847	92.62%	94,779	49.80%	2,898	93.88%	191,453	62.91%
Grand Total	13,871		190,694		3,087		304,318	

Figure 1:
Number of Policies by Level of Government

rhetorical (e.g., a resolution or plan), outreach (e.g., bilingual flyers, multicultural events), integration (citizenship & English classes), and facilitation (e.g., municipal IDs, micro-finance, civic participation training). While these units of local government represent a small fraction of the total number of units of local government, because these governments tend to be larger, they occupy a greater proportion as a percentage of the US population (See Table 1). On average, immigrant-friendly municipalities have about 100,000 people, low poverty, 17% immigrant population, are majority white, and have about 24 Asian firms and 30 Hispanic firms per 10,000 people. Immigrant-friendly counties are similar and average half a million persons.

What Social Workers can do to Promote Immigrant-Friendly Communities

The central ethical obligations of social workers in terms of immigrants and immigrant communities are cultural competence, anti-oppressive practice, and non-discrimination. Cultural competence goes beyond communicating cultural norms and legal requirements of the host country to advocating for immigrant rights as well as exercising discretion when possible in the best interests of the client.

- Let all clients know how immigrant status, especially mixed-status families, can affect eligibility before they apply. This conversation can build rapport.
- When doing an in-home assessment of a client from a different culture than yours, seek training and supervision regarding norms. Assuming that behavior is normative for a culture, when it is not, can lead to inaccurate referrals. Assuming that behavior is not normative can lead to services that are not necessary.
- Language access is critical for access to services. Make a note about language in client file and schedule interpretation in advance. However, if in-person interpreters are not available, call the Language Line at (800) 752-6096 for interpretation over the phone.
- Community organizers and policy advocates who are speaking in front of legislative bodies or commissions should make sure that their delegation includes immigrant speakers. If speakers are pulled at random by the chair and you are a native-born citizen, yield your time so that an immigrant has a chance to speak.

- The State of Michigan requires proof of status to obtain a driver’s license (Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, 2016). Furthermore, driving without a license is a removable offense and if caught can permanently prevent citizenship. Keep that in mind for referrals and consider locating services near transit lines.

- ICE agents routinely attend court proceedings to identify those convicted of a removable offense. Social workers working with courts (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice) should be conscious of the ramifications of immigration status in court proceedings, especially for mixed-status families.

- Many organizations, such as workplaces and schools, have standards about hairstyles and dress that are written from the perspective of persons of European ancestry. For example, “combed” hair looks different depending on the ancestry of the person. Social workers need to ensure that these standards do not result in exclusionary treatment for those of African descent and other immigrant groups.

- Paramount, our clients have a right to the privacy and confidentiality of their records, especially those protected by HIPPA. Since customs agents have authority to seize and inspect luggage and electronic devices at any border (e.g., airports), make sure that client information is not at risk when you travel.

Because social workers have an ethical obligation to provide services without discrimination based on immigrant status, it is necessary to identify resources that are not restricted in this way while working with immigrant communities in order to advocate for changes in policy. Because the United States has committed to increasing deportations, social workers can not only work to ensure due process to those detained and scheduled for deportation, but also work internationally to develop reinsertion programs to protect the rights of returning migrants in their country of origin. Many immigrants no longer have ties in their country of origin, or if they came as children may not speak the language. Their work history and credentials gained in the US may not qualify them back home. In addition to advocating for changes in Michigan, ABISA is working with the Government of Senegal to ensure social protection for those recently deported from the US back to Senegal. ABISA is looking forward to working with Social workers in Detroit as well as those in other countries to address this growing social and human rights issue.