Opportunities and Challenges for Maine Immigrants and Refugees

November 3 2015

MEJP 10th Annual Advocacy Conference
The Big Picture

- More than 230 million people live outside the country they were born – that’s about 3% of the world’s global population.

- There were an estimated 14.2 million refugees in the world at the end of 2013.

- 10 million people across the world are “stateless” - no country recognizes them as a national.
Syrian Crisis

There are now four million Syrians scattered throughout the region, making them the world's largest refugee population under the United Nations' mandate. The U.N. predicts there could be 4.27 million Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 — the worst exodus since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago.

The majority of Syrian refugees are living in Jordan and Lebanon. An increasing number of Syrian refugees are fleeing across the border into Turkey. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are also attempting the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Greece, hoping to find a better future in Europe.

The current official estimate for the number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany this year - mainly fleeing conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan - is 800,000, but many expect the figure to rise well above 1 million, a massive jump from just over 200,000 in 2014.
Regardless of how they arrive in a country and for what purpose, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers’ rights are protected by international law:

• The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (Article 14), states that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries.

• The 1951 **UN Refugee Convention** protects refugees from being returned to countries where they risk persecution.
While these protections exist, countries vary with respect to the support they provide to refugees, asylees and other immigrants

**Germany:**
- About seven months to rule on asylum applications
- Applicants spend their first 3 months living in collective housing. Get some financial assistance
- After 3 months, applicants are relocated to cities and housed in apartments. They may then seek work, but a business can hire them only if it proves to authorities that the position cannot be filled by a qualified German citizen or other EU national

**United States:**
- At least 2-3 years to rule on asylum applications
- Applicants are given no assistance from federal government and are forbidden from working for first 6 months from time of application
Immigrants and refugees in Maine

- Roughly 3,500 Somali migrants came to Lewiston between 2001 and 2007, and now comprise 10% of the town’s population—the highest concentration of Somalis in America, according to a report by the United Nations Development Program.

- The Latino share of Maine’s population grew from 0.7% in 2000 to 1.4% (or 18,432 people) in 2013. The Asian share of the population grew from 0.7% in 2000 to 1.1% (or 14,059 people) in 2013, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 2,711 new immigrant business owners in Maine. These businesses had total net business income of $120 million (3.3% of all net business income in the state), according to Robert Fairlie of the University of California, Santa Cruz.

- Over the last decade, Maine has seen a significant influx of people seeking asylum from central African counties. Many of these individuals have settled in the Greater Portland area and are starting to settle in other parts of the state. Many asylum seekers come with extensive educational and work experience.
Recent Program Changes

✓ General Assistance

✓ TANF and Food Supplement Benefits

✓ State-funded SSI

✓ Health Care
  ▪ MaineCare
  ▪ Health Insurance Marketplace (ObamaCare)
  ▪ Free Care
General Assistance

- AG said rule 17P was illegal – Spring 2014
- Mandate from Governor to the towns
- MMA et al vs. Mayhew
- The Legislative Session 2015
- Municipal dispute over new state law
- DHHS rule (still to come)
- 2016 Referendum question
The following groups are now eligible for GA for up to 24 months:

- People who are “lawfully present” in the U.S.; and

- People who are “pursuing a lawful process to apply for immigration relief”.

This should include people who are pursuing asylum (even if they have not yet applied, as long as they are pursuing that application process) as well as others who are pursuing a lawful process for immigration relief (like someone applying for protection under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)).
Who Can Access GA for help?

1. Family from Somalia?

2. Family from Burundi?

3. Family from Honduras?
TANF and Food Supplement (FS) Benefits

- Recent attempts to eliminate the state-funded TANF and FS Programs failed

- TANF helps families with dependent children meet basic needs

- Food Supplement benefits provide help paying for food
TANF and Food Supplement (FS) Benefits

- Qualified Groups are eligible for the federal program
- Non-qualified groups are only eligible for the state-funded program if they meet certain hardship criteria:
  - Elderly or disabled;
  - Domestic Violence survivor;
  - Waiting for Work Authorization; or
  - Has Work Authorization but not yet employed (DHHS does not follow this one)
Who Can Access TANF and FS for help?

1. Family from Somalia?

2. Family from Burundi?

3. Family from Honduras?
State-Funded SSI

- State-funded SSI (sometimes called the Super Supp program) provides income support to lawfully present immigrants who do not qualify for the federal SSI program.

- Must be 65 and older OR have a disability to qualify

- 80-90 people in Maine currently get this help

- Over the last 5 years, there have been multiple attempts by the Administration to eliminate this program. They have all failed.
Who Can Access State-Funded SSI for help?

1. Family from Somalia?

2. Family from Burundi?

3. Family from Honduras?
MaineCare is only available to some immigrant populations

Immigrants Must Answer YES to both of these questions to qualify:

1. Do you qualify for MaineCare based on your circumstances and income?

Depending on income, you may qualify for MaineCare if you are in one of the following groups: (1) children (under age 21); (2) pregnant women; (3) parents; (4) adults with disabilities; and (5) seniors age 65 and older.

2. Do you qualify for MaineCare based on your immigration status?

You probably do qualify based on your immigration status if you are in one of these groups:

- Under age 21 and lawfully present in the U.S.;
- Pregnant and lawfully present in the U.S. (until 60 days following delivery);
- Came to United States as a Refugee;
- Granted Asylum (if you have an application pending for asylum you only qualify if you are under age 21 or pregnant); OR
- Lawful Permanent Resident (with a green card) for at least 5 years.
Emergency MaineCare

Non-citizens who do not qualify for full MaineCare benefits either because of their immigration status or because they are undocumented, do qualify for Emergency MaineCare for certain medical conditions. **THIS IS VERY LIMITED.**

Emergency MaineCare covers the cost of care when an immigrant receives care based on an “Emergency Medical Condition.”

An “Emergency Medical Condition” (EMC) is a medical condition characterized by sudden onset with acute symptoms of such severity, including severe pain, that without immediate medical attention,

- The person’s health is in serious jeopardy; or
- The person faces serious impairment to bodily function; or
- The person faces serious dysfunction of any body organ or part.
Increased Access to HealthCare Coverage through the Marketplace

“*Lawfully Present*” immigrants who are not eligible for MaineCare are eligible to buy health insurance through the Marketplace and may qualify for subsidies.

The following groups of immigrants are “Lawfully Present” and may qualify for help buying health insurance through the Marketplace:

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<th>Asylees</th>
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<td>Lawful Permanent Residents (green card)</td>
<td>Asylum applicants waiting for a decision (with work authorization)</td>
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<td>Immigrants paroled to the United States</td>
<td>Immigrants with U Visas who were victims of serious crimes</td>
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<td>Cuban and Haitian Entrants</td>
<td>Workers on temporary and seasonal H-2A and H-2B visas</td>
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<td>Battered Spouses and Children</td>
<td>Temporary Protected Status (TPS)</td>
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<td>Immigrants with Deferred Action (Except for DACA)</td>
<td>Other groups lawfully permitted to be in the U.S.</td>
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Low Income, Lawfully Present Immigrants Qualify for Subsidies

“Lawfully present” immigrants who cannot get Medicaid because of their immigration status can qualify for subsidies in the Marketplace even if their income is below 100% FPL.

- Lawfully present immigrants below 100% FPL will pay 2% of their income for their premiums with the tax credit. If an individual has no income, then they will not have to pay anything for their premium.
- Lawfully present immigrants with income below 100% of the poverty level will have the same cost sharing obligations as people at 100% of the poverty level.
It is important to think of each family member separately when determining eligibility. Some people in a family may be eligible for MaineCare or subsidies in the marketplace while others will not.

It’s safe for an ineligible family member to apply for those who are eligible.

Information provided will not be used to enforce immigration laws or for deportation.
Verification and Documentation

Verifying Identity:
HealthCare.gov uses Experian credit histories to verify identity. Without a credit history, applicants cannot submit the application online.

Current workaround: Immigrants can call the Marketplace Call Center - a representative should be able to submit the application without Experian verification of identity.

You can submit an application online but you will be asked to send in documentations for identity verification. This year the marketplace added a feature, you can upload your documents online instead of mailing them in.
Verification and Documentation

Verifying Immigration Status:
Agencies verify immigration status through the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program of U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

At times, SAVE cannot verify status quickly. Agencies cannot delay health insurance once an immigrant presents satisfactory documentation of status.
Systemic glitch preventing proper verification of status

Many lawfully present immigrants under the poverty level are improperly denied subsidies because of systemic glitches.
Free Care

Hospitals are required to provide free care to people under 150% of the poverty level. Some hospitals provide free care to more people (e.g. -200% FPL).

Free Care is not health insurance. It is limited in what it covers and does not provide reliable coverage of healthcare costs.
Removing Barriers to Health Care

- Provide free, competent interpretation services
- Learn whether there are local assistors in your area who provide assistance in multiple languages. Take advantage of these resources when they are available.
- Include organizations trusted by immigrant communities
- The Call Center (1-800-318-2596) can connect to language lines for immediate interpretation into 150 languages
- Identify appropriate referrals in the community, if needed, or other experts
Who Can Access Health Care Assistance?

1. Family from Somalia?
2. Family from Burundi?
3. Family from Honduras?
Resources

Community Resources in the Greater Portland area – MAIN website
• [http://main1.org/community-resources/](http://main1.org/community-resources/)

• Maine Equal Justice Partners – client ed on eligibility in multiple languages [www.mejp.org](http://www.mejp.org)

• Consumers for Affordable Health Care (CAHC) – hotline for healthcare questions
  Call 1-800-965-7476
Questions?

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