



ECDC'S 16TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE

About the Conference

ECDC is a community-based, non-profit organization that is dedicated to resettling refugees, promoting cultural, educational, and socio-economic development in the refugee and immigrant community in the United States, and conducting humanitarian and development programs in the Horn of Africa. Since 1983, ECDC has worked to establish stronger and more culturally appropriate services for refugees and immigrants in the U.S. and continues to pursue programs that will help newcomers become productive members of their new American communities. ECDC is also one of the 11 national voluntary agencies authorized by the Department of State to resettle refugees in the United States.

This year's conference theme represents a year of progress and concern for African newcomers in the United States. While 9,670 African refugees were resettled last year, concern still remains about the annual admission number of African refugees, health and social service benefits, and prospects for employment and self-sufficiency. From the Democratic Republic of Congo to Somalia, South Africa to Zimbabwe, refugees are in vulnerable positions in Africa, and new ways of thinking about the future and enhancing their current situations are needed. There are changes being made in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program and in immigration. American communities are still facing economic challenges where refugees are resettled here in the U.S. Among the challenges and changes are the champions, the people and programs that succeed and excel; and there is a need to share such programs and refugee achievements with more people actively working with African newcomers.

This year's conference will include discussions on the current crises in Africa; policy updates from top government officials; breakout sessions on health and social services, best practices, employment and new ways of approaching community partnerships among other topics. We will also be focusing on African youth; looking at ways to improve their prospects and examining the various issues that they are dealing with, such as intergenerational problems with parents and teachers, feelings of anger and frustration, interactions with school and students, getting in trouble with the police, and turning to alternative life styles and beliefs.

The conference typically attracts over 200 people from African community-based organizations; federal, state, and local government agencies; refugee service providers; think tanks; academia; and African newcomers. Participants will engage in panels, workshops, and discussions in addressing ways to improve important services provided to newcomers from Africa. There will also be time to network and share experiences. This year's annual banquet will also feature a look at ECDC's 27 years of service to the community while celebrating the accomplishments and contributions that African newcomers bring to their new homeland.