

Refugees, asylees, and survivors of domestic violence

Core values

- **Ensure that those fleeing persecution have access to asylum and resettlement in the U.S.**
- **Enhance protections for non-citizen survivors of domestic violence and crimes**
- **Support robust funding for the U.S. refugee resettlement program**
- **Eliminate the 1-year filing deadline for asylum and other barriers to protection**
- **Protect persecuted religious minorities**

Millions of refugees around the world are forced to flee their homes due to violence and persecution but less than one percent of refugees are ever resettled in a third country. Following World War II, the U.S. became the world leader in welcoming refugees who seek safety from persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Over time the system has evolved to have a strong infrastructure centered on public-private partnerships, where communities across the U.S. have recognized the important economic and social benefits of resettling refugees, and are active in helping them start their new lives.

Among communities of faith, our shared call “welcome the stranger” has brought us together in support of this life-saving program and the protection of those who seek peace and refuge within our borders. When provided the resources and support they need to rebuild their lives, refugees have opened businesses, revitalized towns, and contribute economically, socially, and spiritually to our communities. Many refugees become American citizens and see their children graduate from U.S. schools.

Since the program’s inception in 1980, however, its changing mandate has not been accompanied by commensurate changes in funding or statute. The program has expanded to include not only refugees and asylees but also victims of human trafficking and torture, Cuban-Haitian entrants, Special Immigrant Visa holders, unaccompanied alien children (UACs), and unaccompanied refugee minors (URM). In addition to these expansions in the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s mandate, the diversity of those

The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 19:34

The face of immigration

Hana

Hana* is a Somali refugee who arrived in 1987, bearing only a hand-written sign with the name of her uncle living in Brooklyn. She eventually made her way and set roots in Charlotte, North Carolina. Hana speaks Somali, English, and American Sign Language, which she learned because her youngest son became deaf at age 2. The devoted mother works as a custodian/summer program assistant/tri-lingual aid for the public school system.

When her son became a high school senior, he urged her to become a U.S. citizen. Despite the extensive studying involved, she agreed—and last summer she endured long, hot workdays, followed by classes at the Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency (CRRRA) in Charlotte. “This is my country,” she insisted without hesitation, as she diligently attended the civics and history education classes that she believed would help her “become an American” by helping her navigate the citizenship process and prepare for the naturalization exam.

Hana’s classes were part of a model citizenship program created by HIAS after receiving two successive Citizenship, Integration, and National Capacity Building grants from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). It is crucial that the U.S. government fix our country’s broken immigration system in a way that honors our interfaith and American values of “welcoming the stranger” and includes a fair and inclusive pathway to citizenship for immigrants and refugees who aspire to become U.S. citizens.



resettled to the United States has also increased dramatically in terms of native languages spoken, ethnicities, and countries of origin since the program's inception. Unfortunately, appropriations have not kept pace with this expanded mandate, threatening the United States' ability to welcome new waves of refugees and the road to self-sufficiency and integration for vulnerable populations already here.

Refugees and other vulnerable populations suffer under the inhumane backlog of our family immigration system. Under our current system, only family visas of unmarried minor children, spouses or parents of U.S. citizens have no numerical cap per year, which can already result in years-long family separation. Because of the violence and persecution refugees have faced in their countries of origin many refugee families do not fit our traditional definition of "nuclear" family. Refugee families have often experienced the loss of a spouse, the loss of parents, and decades-long separation from children and grandchildren. These divided families in particular could face permanent separation if our nation's definition of family were to be narrowed or family visa categories eliminated.

Non-citizen survivors of domestic violence and other crimes are another vulnerable population that Congress has taken significant steps to protect, via the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). These protections should be strengthened through any reauthorization, guaranteeing safety for survivors and their children and enhancing tools for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes.

What current pieces of legislation uphold these principles?

Refugee Protection Act (H.R. 1365, S. 645)

- Makes refugee and asylum case processing more timely and efficient.
- Better assists torture-survivors and others suffering from trauma.
- Extends the period of support services to help refugees access education, advance their careers and participate fully in their new communities.

Domestic Refugee Resettlement and Modernization Act (H.R. 1784, S. 883)

- Strengthens the Office of Refugee Resettlement.
- Improves the formula for state funding.

Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act (H.R. 651)

- Increases refugees' access to English and job training programs.
- Provides green cards to refugees immediately rather than making after one year.
- Ensures access to Supplemental Security Income benefits for refugees who are elderly or disabled.
- Increases initial assistance for refugees and extends from 8 to 12 months, expands the successful Matching Grant Program, improves case management services, and creates a fund to better respond to secondary migration.

Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744/H.R. 15)

- Removes the 1-year filing deadline for asylum.
- Removes statutory barriers to some refugee families currently unable to reunite.
- Preserves protection for religious minorities while creating new opportunities for other persecuted groups.
- Recognizes stateless individuals for the first time under U.S. law and offers them access to citizenship.
- Improves the efficiency of the Iraqi and Afghan special immigrant visa application process.
- Provides citizenship to Haitians with Temporary Protected Status and Liberians with Deferred Enforced Departure.

15.4 million

UNHCR estimate of the number of refugees worldwide (on the rise)

69,630

Number of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2013

1%

Percentage of refugees who will ever be resettled

50%

Percentage of refugees who are women and children

"In opening our communities to refugees from persecution in other lands, our nation shows forth our core values of respecting human rights and dignity. As bishop of a community who has welcomed as friend and neighbor refugees from places as diverse as Sudan, Iraq, and Myanmar, I know first-hand the gift of life that we provide as well as the great gift we receive from those who come to live among us."

Bishop James Mathes, The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, California



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