



Background on Syrian Refugee Crisis

Talking Points About Refugees in Your Conversations with Church, Family, & Neighbors

We are facing a global refugee crisis that requires a global response. 60 million people are displaced, the largest number since World War II. This includes 4 million Syrian refugees and 8 million Syrians who are internally displaced. The global outpouring of public support for Syrian refugees has inspired countries around the world to welcome more refugees, and the U.S. must do our part. In proportion to each country's population, Germany's welcome of one million Syrians would be akin to the United States accepting more than 3 million Syrian refugees.

The U.S. has traditionally been a leader in refugee protection and resettlement, and needs to show bold leadership now. The United States can and should resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees this coming fiscal year, in addition to increasing our total resettlement commitment from 70,000 to 100,000 refugees from all parts of the world. The administration's initial announcement about resettling 10,000 is far from what is needed.

It's been done before, and needs to be done now. After the fall of Saigon and in response to public outcry about individuals losing their lives as they fled for safety, the U.S. airlifted more than 200,000 refugees in 1980 alone and welcomed a total of 759,482 Vietnamese refugees. These individuals are now our friends, neighbors, family and community members. History shows us that where there's a will, there's a way.

Refugee resettlement saves lives and enriches communities. Our community is committed to welcoming more refugees. Share a story from a refugee in your community, and examples of your community's support and involvement in resettlement!

Information to Help Answer Questions About Syrian and Other Refugees:

1. The United States decides which refugees to admit.

Several anti-refugee videos suggest that the United States has ceded its control over who is admitted to the country to the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, or other organizations. This is simply false. While the UN Refugee Agency helps to present applications for resettlement to the United States, every application is presented to a U.S. Department of Homeland Security officer for approval, or denial. Refugees must also pass a rigorous set of background checks conducted by multiple federal agencies before being finally approved to travel to the United States.

2. Communities Are Essential to the Resettlement Process.

Some anti-refugee activists have claimed communities are not consulted in the process of resettlement. Quite the contrary is true: Communities are the backbone of resettlement in the United States, and extensive consultations are conducted each year with local schools, churches, hospitals, and officials to ensure we place refugees in welcoming communities. For every person who supports anti-refugee efforts, there are numerous more who volunteer with our local offices each day, many who are members of local churches that have supported and sponsored refugees for decades.

3. Refugees Help Local Economies by Creating Jobs and Paying Taxes.

Newly arriving refugees have been the driving force behind the rejuvenation of many cities across the United States. Refugee families have helped create jobs and opportunities in once-strained rust belt communities. Over 80% of refugees are employed within 90 days of arriving in the United States – they start immediately to give back to the community by paying taxes and supporting their families without public assistance.

4. We Aim to Resettle Refugees from All Vulnerable Groups.

Anti-refugee activists have claimed we don't resettle Christians, but that is not true. We in fact do resettle many Christians each year, including many persecuted groups throughout the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The savage acts perpetrated by ISIS and other extremist groups today inflict pain and suffering on Christians, Muslims, and people of various faiths. We exist to provide peace and justice for all, and as a humanitarian agency look to support not only persecuted Christians, but all vulnerable groups.

5. Refugees Must Complete Several Levels of Screening Before Coming to the U.S.: Anti-refugee activists use the cynical argument that refugees pose a security threat to appeal to the public's worst instincts. Refugees are in fact the most scrutinized group of migrants to the United States, undergoing intense background checks, medical screenings and interviews. On average, the process can take over 1,000 days for refugees to be screened by U.S. federal agencies and approved for travel to the U.S. Security and screening are taken extremely seriously within the refugee resettlement program to ensure the program is used for those who need protection.

For more information, contact Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, sstanley@dhm.disciples.org, or 202-957-7826.