

#RefugeesWelcome Overview of Resources

As we face the largest number of displaced people since the end of World War II, there are many ways that people can help. As the United States works to resettle additional refugees, including many Syrian refugees, we are asking communities to take part in Welcome Weekend, host a #RefugeesWelcome dinner, volunteer with a local refugee resettlement agency, and help educate communities about the life-saving role of refugee resettlement. Especially as Congress must allocate funds to government agencies by December 11th, these actions are timely and vital to urging the United States to help displaced persons and refugee-hosting countries, resettle more refugees, and ensure that communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate and thrive as they rebuild their lives.

Background

60 million people are displaced globally, the highest numbers since World War II. This includes 4 million Syrian refugees and nearly 8 million individuals displaced within Syria. As we witness the desperation of people fleeing their homes to seek safety, the refusal of many countries to accept refugees, the unwelcoming attitudes and anti-Muslim sentiment of some, and the growing attention and public support for refugee resettlement we have a responsibility to act now to show that our communities welcome refugees.

Welcome Weekend: November 13-15

Congregations of all traditions lean on their faiths to encourage one another and share in welcoming refugees through their weekly service prayers, worship and sermons on November 13-15 and beyond. See resources [here](#) and make sure to sign up [here](#)!

#RefugeesWelcome Dinners

In the spirit of breaking bread together, building relationships, and walking together, faith and community groups can invite refugees to a Welcome Dinner, starting around Thanksgiving and moving beyond, to cross divides and build bridges of trust in the formation of creating welcoming communities. See resources [here](#).

Mapping Welcoming Activities

Please sign up [here](#) for Welcome Weekend and #RefugeesWelcome Dinners so we can show the power of communities throughout the country that are welcoming and standing in solidarity with refugees.

Elevate the Story

Share the stories of refugees' contributions to their communities in your local newspaper, TV station and via social media, as well as how community members are welcoming refugees. See resources [here](#).

Call and Meet with your Members of Congress

We all need to call and meet with our Senators and Representatives to urge them to support creative solutions to resettle Syrian refugees, as well as increased funding to assist refugees around the world and ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate and thrive as they rebuild their lives. See action alert [here](#) and local congressional visit toolkit at <http://bit.ly/localcongressionalvisits>.

Background on Syrian Refugee Crisis

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 nearly 8 million Syrians who are displaced within their country. The global outpouring of public support for Syrian refugees has inspired countries around the world to welcome more refugees, and the United States 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; so far, however, less than 2,000 Syrian refugees have been resettled in the United States.

The U.S. has traditionally been a leader in refugee protection and resettlement, and needs to show bold leadership 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. The United States can and should resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees this coming fiscal year, in addition to the 85,000 refugees that will be admitted from all parts of the world.

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!

We call on Congress to increase funding for life-saving assistance to internally displaced persons in Syria and Syrian refugees and for to communities that are welcoming refugees in the United States, to make sure refugees have the opportunity to integrate and thrive as they rebuild their lives.

Sample Responses to Questions:

U.S. Communities Are Essential to the Resettlement Process. The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and the U.S. Department of State identify candidates for resettlement, and a U.S. Department of Homeland Security officer reviews every refugee for approval or denial. 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.

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.

We Aim to Resettle Refugees from All Vulnerable Groups. The savage acts perpetrated by ISIS and other extremist groups today inflict pain and suffering on Christians, Muslims, and people of various faiths. We must provide safety and welcome for vulnerable people of all faiths and backgrounds.

Refugees Must Complete Several Levels of Screening Before Coming to the United States. Refugees are the most scrutinized individuals to travel to the United States, undergoing intense background checks, medical screenings and interviews. The process can take over 1,000 days for refugees to be screened by U.S. federal agencies and approved for travel. Security screenings are taken extremely seriously to ensure access to resettlement for refugees who genuinely need protection.

#RefugeesWelcome Dinners **Breaking Bread, Building Relationships and Walking Together**

Breaking Bread and Sharing a Meal

Sitting down together to share a meal is a timeless tradition that cuts across all cultures and religions. The act of communities inviting recently arrived immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers holds immense meaning, offering a welcoming space to build relationships and learn from one another. This is a great way to show hospitality and to urge Members of Congress to support refugee resettlement. This holiday season is an especially meaningful time to participate in an event, but it is still a powerful event anytime of the year. Many civic groups and congregations have hosted welcome dinners that also double as a fundraising event to collect donations and funds to help refugees rebuild their lives in the United States. See the documentary, *Welcome to Shelbyville*, for examples of how sharing a dinner can break down barriers and transform communities. (www.welcometoshelbyvillefilm.com/)

Logistics:

1. Contact your [local refugee resettlement office](#) to build a relationship. Ask them if you can be helpful with any events they might be planning. Ask them if the idea of a community dinner is one that will work for their office, and if so, if they know of refugees who might be interested.
2. Meet one-to-one with key leaders in your congregation or community who are interested in helping.
3. Once you have the resettlement office and community leaders committed to assisting with the event, sign your event up on the #RefugeesWelcome Dinners page at bit.ly/WelcomeWeekendReg.
4. Understand the issues being discussed in your community around refugee resettlement.
5. Identify the best space for the event: a home, church, temple or community center.
6. Divide tasks for outreach, cooking, taking pictures and other logistics.
7. Consider translation needs and ways to ensure the meal includes options for everyone.
8. Invite your Representative, Senator, or their staff to be part of the dinner
9. Contact Megan Cagle with Church World Service at mcagle@cwsglobal.org for assistance with media outreach so your dinner can help urge Congress to support refugee resettlement!

Building Relationships

As you share your meal, take time to get to know one another and build a relationship that will go beyond this one meal. Discuss where you come from and your family traditions. Sample discussion topics include:

1. Identify common core values, passions and tastes. Have a few icebreaker questions ahead of time like: What is your favorite food? What do you like most about the town we live in?

2. Story of self: Have everyone tell their story in 2-3 minutes about what transforming events in their lives shaped them. Be respectful if someone does not want to share details about painful experiences, and find ways to focus on commonalities and sharing different cultural traditions.
<http://billmoyers.com/content/how-to-tell-your-story-of-self/>
3. Ask refugees how you can support them and identify ways to work together in the future.

Walking Together

Think together about what the next steps in the relationship could be as you continue to walk together on this journey. There are multiple possible opportunities and outcomes.

1. Invite refugees to speak at your congregation's weekly service or education classes.
2. Host another larger dinner with more people from ally and newcomer communities.
3. Set a time to meet with your local, state and national policymakers about the importance of policies that support refugee resettlement and address conflicts around the world that force people to flee their homes.
4. Share pictures and stories on social media. Make sure refugees provide consent and feel comfortable with their stories being shared publicly, since identifying information could impact family members back in their home countries.
5. Write an Opinion Editorial about the dinner or contact a local media outlet to run a story about the shared meal together.

Contact information for refugee resettlement organizations

While it's best to build relationships directly with a refugee resettlement office near you (see list: bit.ly/RefugeeResettlementSites), you can also contact national resettlement agency staff:

- Church World Service: Jen Smyers, jsmyers@cwsglobal.org
- Episcopal Migration Ministries: Lacy Broemel, lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org
- HIAS: Elizabeth Mandelman, elizabeth.mandelman@hias.org
- International Rescue Committee: Anna Greene, anna.greene@rescue.org
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: Brittney Nystrom, bnystrom@lirs.org
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: Matt Wilch, mwilch@usccb.org
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants: Esmeralda Lopez, elopez@uscridc.org
- Ethiopian Community Development Council: Lucy Negash - lnegash@ecdcus.org
- World Relief: Jenny Yang, jgyang@worldrelief.org
- Refugee Council USA: Shaina Ward, sward@rcusa.org

Media Outreach

If you have planned an event such as a dinner, panel discussion, project, or interfaith service, we encourage you to invite members of the media. Look online at the local publications or outlets you would like in attendance and search for past articles on immigration or refugees. Consider pitching your event to reporters who frequently cover those issues or other community issues if there is not a designated immigration or refugee reporter. If you host a dinner, consider inviting the editorial director at your local newspaper. By inviting members of the press, you will be able to further share our message of welcoming to a larger audience and also inspire local media to cover refugee issues more frequently.

To invite multiple members of the press, send a media advisory at least two full business days ahead of the event. Ideally, send the media advisory one week and then the day before your event. Please see the draft media advisory below:

*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

DATE

For Immediate Release

Contact:

NAME, ORGANIZATION

PHONE, EMAIL

Local Faith Community Hosts Dinner/Interfaith Service to Welcome Refugees

WHAT: As the (City/Town Name) community responds to the global refugee crisis, leaders from (Organization/Congregation) will host (event type). They will be joined by refugees from (country) and (list other special guests). Participants will discuss refugee resettlement, how it positively impacts the community, and what local organizations and individuals can do to welcome newly resettled refugees. All participants will be available for interview before and after the event.

WHERE: Address of event

WHEN: Date and time of event

SPEAKERS: List of all speakers and their titles

DETAILS: Add event details such as security (if applicable), special visuals (religious symbols, art pieces, etc), or any other important event information.

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Writing & Pitching an Opinion Editorial

When drafting an opinion piece, research the outlet you are submitting to. Many have a word limit between 750-1200, though some can be as low as 500. Please feel free to use the points in the draft op-ed below as you write your own opinion article.

When pitching your event, op-ed, or other project, it is important to keep your pitch short and on message. You can pitch either in person, over the phone, or via email. It is important to keep your pitch as short as possible, as reporters are often on a deadline and receive many story pitches every day. Open your pitch with an interesting first line and relate the pitch back to another story the reporter has recently written to increase the likelihood of the reporter picking up your story. Please see the draft pitch below:

Hello,

As the global community faces the largest refugee crisis since the end of World War II, our community is preparing to resettle refugees and do our part to create a welcoming community. Serving as a community leader with ORGANIZATION, I had the unique opportunity to host/attend EVENT, (include brief details).

The event inspired me to author the attached op-ed, detailing my experience and reaffirming the need for us all to work together and create an inclusive community. In light of recent anti-Muslim rhetoric in particular, this piece offers a timely response and highlights the urgent need to create a welcoming place for all people.

Please feel free to contact me at EMAIL or over the phone at PHONE NUMBER if you have any questions or would like to discuss the piece in greater detail. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

*Sincerely,
NAME*

Draft Op-Ed

TITLE

Last week, I joined a group of strangers for dinner. Abandoning my usual routine of eating in my own home, I accepted the invitation to dine with an incredible group of refugees, faith, and community leaders. Though we met as strangers, we left as friends, united in our dream to make our community one that welcomes people from all backgrounds.

While some have protested the recent resettlement of refugees from backgrounds that may be different than theirs, my experience has shown me that our differences are what make us a stronger and more diverse as a community. (Details about event/dinner/service should be around 250-400 words. Include stories, lessons learned, and your thoughts/experience).

As a community leader, I urge every member of our community to participate in similar events and challenge the growing Islamaphobia and xenophobia in our country. As residents of a country founded on the hard work, determination, and skills of generations of immigrants from all countries, religions, and backgrounds, we must not let our differences divide us, but instead strengthen us. Exclusionary mindsets will only lead to fear and hostility, neither of which have any place in our community.

Love will always overcome hate and as a member of this community, I am ready to stand alongside people of all backgrounds and faith traditions so that we can build communities of acceptance, inclusivity and welcome.

Social Media

Social media is a great way to spread the word about these issues and to get your friends, family, and other community members involved. Using popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we encourage you to post a picture of your event utilizing the signs found at americawelcomes.us and using #RefugeesWelcome.

If you are not able to take a group photo of all people participating in your event, take individual photos with the America Welcomes sign and use #RefugeesWelcome – any and all posts are welcome!

Sample posts:

- The Congregation/Family Name is ready to welcome #refugees! #RefugeesWelcome #WelcomeTogether (photo)
- To welcome is to be whole. We are committed to welcoming #refugees in our community! #RefugeesWelcome #WelcomeTogether (photo)
- Visited @REPNAME's office to tell him/her to vote NO on anti-refugee legislation. #WelcomeTogether #RefugeesWelcome (picture)
- Visited @REPNAME's office to tell him/her to support legislation that will welcome #refugees and assist their new communities. #WelcomeTogether #RefugeesWelcome (picture)
- ORGANIZATION NAME stands with our neighbors of all faiths. @REPNAME, say NO to anti-Muslim rhetoric! #WelcomeTogether (picture)
- Our refugee brothers and sisters make our communities stronger. @REPNAME, vote NO on anti-refugee legislation! #WelcomeTogether #RefugeesWelcome

There is also already an incredible awareness on social media around refugee issues. Starting in September 2015, many international campaigns were launched to urge communities around the world to welcome refugees. Building off of those existing campaigns will allow us to connect with an already engaged audience, also providing us with an established platform to issue new talking points, news clips, events, and social media graphics to further our message. Existing campaigns and hashtags include:

- #RefugeesWelcome
- #OpentoSyria
- #WelcomeWorld
- #refugeecrisis

In addition to utilizing existing social media campaigns and hashtags, creating a unique hashtag for our campaign will allow us to engage a new audience and track how many people are engaged online with our campaign specifically. Suggested unique hashtags for our campaign are:

- #United4Refugees
- #Together4Refugees/TogetherforRefugees
- #WorkingtoWelcome

Through the use of both unique and existing hashtags, our campaign can engage and mobilize both existing and new community partners. Additionally, providing a unique hashtag will provide members of the media to track our campaign's online presence.

Feel free to also use photos, videos, or graphics from other supporting organizations. See the example graphic below. It is important to receive permission of all individuals in a photo or video before posting. Please see a draft media release below, or use one from your organization if available.



Sample Media Release Form

I give ORGANIZATION/INDIVIDUAL NAME and people acting for and with ORGANIZATION/INDIVIDUAL NAME permission to interview, photograph, video, and/or audio record me to use and to edit, without compensation to me, the items listed below in any medium, including print and electronic (web-based) material for educational, promotional and marketing purposes:

1. Photographs or video footage of me;
2. Spoken (written or recorded) interviews of me and quotes from me;
3. My full name in connection with the photographs, video footage, interviews, or quotes; and
4. My location in connection with the photograph(s), video footage, interviews or quotes.

I have crossed out any points above to which I, or my signatory, do not agree.

I will make no monetary or other claim in connection with the authorized use of my name or photos, video, interviews and quotes, and I now release ORGANIZATION/INDIVIDUAL and partner organizations and their employees and/or partners in education, promotion, publicity and marketing interviews from any claims, demands and liabilities in connection with the use authorized and agreed to here by me.

Date: _____

Printed name of subject:

Signature or thumbprint of subject (if over age 18)

Printed name and signature of a parent or responsible adult (if under age 18)

Call and Meet with Your Members of Congress

Please urge your networks to call their Members of Congress using the alert below. A resource for local congressional visits can be found at bit.ly/localcongressionalvisits.

URGENT: Tell Congress to Help & Welcome Refugees

Background: As we grapple with increasingly heartbreaking and tragic reports of Syrian refugees seeking safety in the region and in Europe, coupled with the over 60 million people displaced worldwide, it is clear that the United States must respond with leadership. President Obama recently announced that the United States will resettle 85,000 refugees in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017, increased from the 70,000 refugees resettled in 2015. While an improvement, this is a proportionally small increase in the context of the global need, and so we must continue to urge the United States to increase resettlement. It is critical that even this relatively small increase in refugee admissions is met with increased funds to ensure local communities have the resources they need to help refugees integrate as they rebuild their lives.

Congress must pass an appropriations bill to fund all government agencies by December 11th, so now is a perfect time to let your Senators and Representatives know that you care about displaced people overseas and refugees resettled in the United States. It is time to act with historic leadership and compassion and stand with those seeking safety and the opportunity to build a new life.

Take Action TODAY: Call 1-866-940-2439 to be connected with your Senators' and Representative's offices.

Call your Senators & Representative TODAY and every day until they pass a bill.

- Urge your Senators to co-sponsor *The Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act* (S.2145) introduced by Senators Graham (R-SC) and Leahy (D-VT).
- Urge your Representatives to sign onto a Dear Colleague Letter on refugee funding led by Representative Vargas (CA-51) by emailing Aaron.Allen@mail.house.gov.

Here's a sample of what to tell your Senator's staff when you call:

- Senate: *"I'm a constituent from [City/State] and I urge the Senator to CO-SPONSOR S.2145, the Graham-Leahy supplemental to provide help Syrian refugees abroad and ensure that refugees resettled in the U.S. have initial assistance to rebuild their lives."*
- House: *"I'm a constituent from [City/State] and I urge the Representative to SIGN the Dear Colleague letter led by Rep. Vargas calling for increased funding for refugee assistance, processing and resettlement by emailing Aaron.Allen@mail.house.gov."*

You can also tweet your [Members of Congress](#) and your network:

“.@SENATOR, show that #AmericaWelcomes and support funding for #refugees! Our community is ready to welcome. #RefugeesWelcome”

“.@REPRESENTATIVE, show that #AmericaWelcomes and support funding to help & resettle #refugees! Our district is ready to welcome. #RefugeesWelcome”

Follow [@InterfaithImm](#) on Twitter and “like” [Interfaith Immigration Coalition](#) on Facebook for up-to-date alerts.

Call-in recording reads: Thank you for urging Congress to support increased assistance for refugee assistance internationally and resettlement in the U.S. Both the Graham-Leahy supplemental in the Senate, and a Dear Colleague letter in the House of Representatives, led by Representative Vargas, would help increase funds for refugee assistance, processing and resettlement. Congress must pass an appropriations bill to fund all government agencies by December 11th, so now is a perfect time to make your voice heard. When you call, tell the receptionist your City, State and Congregation, and that as a person of faith you support an increase in funding for refugee assistance and resettlement. You will now be connected to your Member of Congress’s office. Please call this line 3 times to be connected with your Representative and two Senators. Please call every day until Congress passes an appropriations bill. For resources on these issues, go to www.interfaithimmigration.org. Thank you again!