

Action Guide for Congregations and Communities



Revised January 23, 2025

People and communities of faith have a unique, powerful, and morally resonant role to play in advocating against unjust policies that target immigrants, mobilizing support for our neighbors, and protecting our communities. This Action Guide provides a selection of possible ways for committed groups of individuals and congregations to explore how they can stand in solidarity with vulnerable communities and respond to unjust policies.

This guide is not intended to provide legal advice on any matters including but not limited to:

- legal advice or counsel about the representation or legal assistance of individuals facing imminent deportation or apprehension by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the United States
- legal advice on how any organization, including synagogues and other houses of worship, can defend themselves against legal liability for providing sanctuary or assistance to these vulnerable populations.

We strongly advise you to speak with legal counsel to better understand any potential risks.

Inauguration Day and After: What is Anticipated and Who is at Risk?

On January 20th, the new administration immediately began to implement sweeping changes to immigration policy which will have grave impacts for immigrant communities in the U.S., and for people seeking safety around the world. They include:

- **Mass Deportation:** Through an executive order, the Trump administration has laid the groundwork for mass deportation of undocumented individuals, including many who have established roots and raised families in the United States for decades. The threat of deportation has instilled a deep sense of fear and uncertainty among many of the 11 million undocumented individuals living in the United States, raising profound concerns about the possibility of family separation, over-policing of communities, and racial profiling. The executive order requires all undocumented non-citizens to register with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), directs DHS to build more detention centers and includes negative consequences for organizations and cities who support immigrant communities. Mass deportation will force individuals to stay home from work and school, harming our economy, and tear apart communities across the country.
- **Refugee Resettlement Suspended:** The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) allows refugees to be vetted overseas and then be admitted to the United States. Each year, the USRAP provides thousands of refugees with the opportunity to seek safety, rebuild their lives, and contribute to their communities in the United States. On January 20th, President Trump signed an executive order suspending all refugee admissions. While the EO says that there will be case-by-case exceptions, the exceptions will be very hard to obtain, if at all. The suspension of the program will be re-evaluated every 90 days, raising concerns that it could be indefinite.
- **Border Closure:** President Trump signed multiple executive orders to restrict access to asylum on the U.S.-Mexico border, including the reinitiation of the Migration Protection Protocols, also known as “Remain in Mexico” and the declaration of migration as an “invasion” that purports to threaten national security and public health. The Department of Homeland Security will have wide discretion to

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apprehend and expel immigrants back to Mexico or their country of origin. Asylum seekers will be put directly in harm's way, with almost no ability to seek protection.

- **CBP One App No Longer Operational:** Individuals in Mexico are unable to schedule appointments to be processed at one of eight designated ports of entry on the U.S-Mexico border, and all existing appointments are canceled. CBP One was the only way an individual could schedule an appointment to lawfully enter the U.S. and seek asylum at the border. This forces asylum-seekers to wait for indefinite and extended periods of time in Mexico where they lack access to basic social services and face targeted violence.
- **All Humanitarian Parole Programs Terminated:** Individuals in need of humanitarian support will no longer have access to established and carefully monitored pathways into the U.S. This includes Afghans, Ukrainians, Cubans, Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Venezuelans. Parole programs are an orderly and safe way for people with U.S.-based sponsors to come to the U.S. on a temporary basis and legally work. Without parole, hundreds of thousands of people in the United States are left without legal status and unable to work. Individuals abroad who are waiting to come to the U.S. through parole are no longer able to do so.
- **Birthright Citizenship Denied:** Individuals born in the U.S. to parents without permanent U.S. citizenship or lawful resident status will no longer be recognized as U.S. citizens. The denial of birthright citizenship violates the U.S. Constitution and creates a generation of second-class citizens without the rights of full citizenship. Litigation to fight this has already been filed.

The Jewish Values Grounding Us

For thousands of years Jews have been forced to wander – fleeing persecution, searching for safety. From the ancient Exodus to modern-day persecution, it's a story every Jewish generation knows. This shared history is more than a memory. It's a guide. It's why HIAS was created: to serve those in danger because of their religion, identity, or beliefs. That's why today, we not only support Jews, but any inhabitant of this world forced to flee. Because our tradition teaches, because our history reminds us, because our experience demands that the right to welcome, to security, to dignity – is one that we all share.

Taking Action

While these policies are enacted at the federal level, we know that they affect our local communities. The harm to at-risk communities will depend on the cooperation of local officials and federal immigration enforcement as well as the priorities of the local administration. We believe that local efforts will be essential in protecting immigrant communities. There are many ways to take action; we encourage you to identify your local strengths, resources and needs in shaping your response.

Identify Your Information Sources

- **Nationally:** HIAS' website and social media provide updates, information, resources, and analysis on issues that affect immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and forcibly displaced people. Bookmark HIAS.org and our [resource page](#). Make sure to sign up for our [email list](#). Ensure that your congregation joins the [HIAS Welcome Campaign](#) for actions specific to congregations.
- **Locally:** HIAS recommends that you connect with local organizations that work with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to understand what is happening in your community, to learn about

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opportunities for action, and to become involved in their work as volunteers, activists, supporters and allies.

Support Your Neighbors

- **Make sure immigrant communities in your area know their rights.** Community members and allies should be aware of their legal rights before Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Local mutual aid groups and [immigration legal service providers](#) can share resources specific to your city and state. National “Know Your Rights (KYR)” resources include [this guide](#) from the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), [this one](#) from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and [videos](#) produced by the “We Have Rights” campaign.
- **Refer potentially impacted individuals to known immigration legal service providers, nonprofits or private firms.** [Here](#) is a list of immigration legal service providers across the country where you can refer an individual seeking legal assistance to. Encourage lawyers in your congregation to connect with legal service organizations’ pro bono programs so they can support immigrants and receive guidance and mentorship. Find more about HIAS’ own pro-bono program [here](#).
- **Support the work of organizations that serve immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.** Local and national organizations work in an increasingly difficult environment and rely heavily on financial support. Giving *tzedakah* as a community cultivates shared pride and projects our Jewish values into the public sphere. When you [give to HIAS](#), we will always put your contributions to critical and important use to support immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the U.S. and around the world. Your local organizations that serve immigrant populations, such as legal service providers, mutual aid groups, and food pantries, will also be grateful for your financial support.
- **Support individuals and families.** Informed by HIAS’ private sponsorship work, we’ve created a DIY toolkit that provides advice and tools to support asylum seekers and other forcibly displaced people who you know in your local community. The DIY toolkit provides helpful information about recruiting a robust volunteer group, managing financial and in-kind donations, the wrap-around services immigrant communities need, the best practices to implement support services, and how to measure success. Since its inception in 2021, the HIAS private sponsorship program has helped nearly 250 sponsor groups welcome more than 800 refugees and humanitarian parolees to the United States. Email takeaction@hias.org with the subject: *DIY Action Toolkit* to receive a link to the resource.
- **Join rapid response networks.** Join local efforts to respond in real time to immigration enforcement actions by showing up on site and witnessing or video-recording raids. Local [organizations](#) working with immigrant populations and [interfaith coalitions](#) may be able to connect you to neighborhood and city rapid response groups. Hold vigils or prayer circles outside of ICE check-in locations and raid sites. Immigration officials may act with more caution when they know that a group of people are watching their actions vigilantly. It is important to know that interfering with or obstructing certain ICE enforcement activity is a crime and can result in prosecution. We recommend you consult with legal counsel before engaging in such activity.
- **Accompany impacted individuals to deportation hearings, ICE check-ins, and other appointments.** Several [immigrant rights organizations](#) have programs where you can accompany individuals to court hearings, ICE check-ins, and other appointments. Reach out to see how you can

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provide moral support to individuals as they navigate a complicated legal process. Accompaniment is particularly impactful if you speak Spanish, French, and other languages commonly spoken by immigrant populations in your community.

- **Make a statement.** [Join the HIAS Welcome Campaign](#) and publicly declare your congregation's support for the rights and dignity of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and other forcibly displaced people. With over 500 congregations heeding the call, the HIAS Welcome Campaign is a powerful demonstration of our communities' grassroots support for building a culture of welcome, security, and safety for immigrant communities. Joining the Welcome Campaign will also provide the opportunity for individuals in your community to receive emails from HIAS with the most up-to-date actions responding to the needs of the moment. If your congregation is already listed as a Welcome Campaign member, draw attention to this statement of support!
- **Reflect welcoming values in your organizational culture.** Adopt a nondiscrimination policy for your congregation that welcomes all people regardless of their immigration status. Adopt a policy that respects privacy by never asking members of the congregation or the public about their immigration status.
- **Advocate for local and national policies that support immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.** Meet with and encourage your local, state, and national elected officials to fight to protect immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in your community. HIAS offers a [guide on how to advocate with elected representatives](#). You may also find this [Quick Reference Guide](#) for a [Refugee Advocacy Toolkit](#) helpful – it contains information about the advocacy needs of the moment.
 - **Nationally:** It will be challenging but not impossible to impact national policy in the current political environment. Your elected representatives need to know that immigrant and refugee protection deeply matter to their constituents and how a strong U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and asylum system help the country. HIAS will identify and share the most strategic areas to leverage the Jewish communal voice at the national level. To obtain this guidance, please make sure that your congregation is part of the [Welcome Campaign](#) and that you have identified a leader to receive HIAS emails.
 - **Locally:** City and state advocacy is critically important. We encourage you to advocate for welcoming policies and oppose unjust enforcement policies. You can educate local officials about how your congregation welcomes immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees.
- **Show up in solidarity.** Stand up for impacted immigrant communities at risk of mass deportation. Organize a delegation from your congregation to attend local rallies and actions. Join local rapid response networks so you can be informed in real time about where people are needed
- **Encourage Jewish clergy to join the HIAS Clergy Council.** The HIAS Clergy Council of more than 500 American Jewish clergy is one of our fastest and most effective advocacy voices. This no-time, no-financial commitment council enables clergy to leverage their moral voices through public letters and statements quickly and collectively.

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Note on Sanctuary

Synagogues and other faith-based institutions have historically played a considerable and critical role in the [Sanctuary Movement](#) by sheltering and supporting people at risk of deportation. A 2011 policy mitigated the risk of these efforts by restricting Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) from entering designated “sensitive areas,” such as houses of worship, schools, and hospitals, to apprehend undocumented individuals.

On January 21, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the rescission of the 2011 policy. The rescission of this policy will provide unfettered discretion to ICE personnel to target spaces where individuals seek solace, education, healthcare, and other vital services that protect and strengthen our communities. This policy redirects vital and important resources from DHS and law enforcement personnel away from focusing on criminal activity and risks to public security.

The legal risks and implications for providing sanctuary are unknown. Different cities have different approaches and laws related to sanctuary – it is best to understand your local context and consult with legal counsel.

Disclaimer

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