

Refugee Shabbat Dinner Discussion Guide – 5785/2025



Welcome to Refugee Shabbat 2025!

Thank you for volunteering to host a Shabbat dinner in honor of Refugee Shabbat. We know that in the aftermath of October 7, the world feels different. We have mourned, we have questioned our certainties, we have been angry, and we have been scared. And, we have drawn upon deep wells of resilience to affirm Jewish joy and continue the important work we are doing on behalf of and in solidarity with the more than 120 million forcibly displaced people in the world. This year’s Refugee Shabbat is an expression of our core values of welcoming the stranger and caring for the most vulnerable. It is a moment for congregations, organizations, and individuals to rest and reflect, to celebrate our accomplishments, and recommit ourselves to the creation of a more just, welcoming, and compassionate world.

In this toolkit, you will find instructions on how to prepare for your dinner, including “prereading” to share with your guests in advance and guidance on how to structure your dinner and lead a meaningful conversation about today’s refugees. Please note that this tool kit was designed so that hosts should not need to print anything out. If you do have access to a printer, however, you may wish to print the prayers and discussion questions so guests can follow along.

Preparation Checklist

Plan the food

- Will you provide dinner as the host? Will it be home-cooked or catered? Will you ask your guests to contribute potluck style? Know how you plan to feed your guests before you draft your invitation.
- Ordering in? Consider catering from a refugee or immigrant-owned restaurant. Cooking yourself? Try a recipe from a refugee or immigrant kitchen! Check out *At the Immigrants Table*, *Refugee Kitchen*, *The Immigrant Cookbook*, or *The Kitchen Without Borders*, to name a few.
- If you are in your 20’s or 30’s, you may wish to check out [OneTable](#), which provides this particular age demographic with the tools and resources to create meaningful Shabbat experiences, from ritual guides to financial support for hosting.

Plan the Discussion

As the host, you will be leading your guests in a meaningful and informed dinner conversation on the global displacement crisis. Before your dinner, send your guests the two links below, and ask that they read each of them (they are short!) in preparation. If you have access to a printer, you can also print a few copies to have available that night. You will want to have a facilitator for the conversation — if you are not comfortable doing this yourself, ask one of your guests to play this role and plan the evening together. Make sure to that the facilitator reads the articles in advance, taking note of any questions or points of interest that might enrich the conversation.

[Displacement 101: Background Facts and Figures](#)

[About Us | HIAS' Mission & Values | HIAS](#)

Shabbat Dinner Program Guide

Welcome and Intro to Refugee Shabbat

As you welcome your guests, share why you have chosen to host a Refugee Shabbat dinner.

Ice Breaker (Optional)

Once you've welcomed everyone, if your guests don't already know each other, take a few minutes for an ice breaker. Ask guests to share their names, and a geographic location where one of their family members or ancestors lived that is not the city in which you are currently gathered. If they choose, they can also share the name of that relative and their relationship to them. In addition to giving guests the opportunity to hear a little of each other's stories and feel more connected to each other, this particular ice breaker highlights the idea that many of us, or those who came before us, are from another place, like refugees.

Prayer

Once everyone is seated at the table, it is traditionally time for Friday night blessings. If including, you can ask for volunteers or say the prayers yourself, according to your own practice.

Blessing for Lighting the Shabbat Candles

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שַׁבָּת

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech Ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

Blessed are You, Holy One our God, Ruler of the Universe. You hallow us with Your commandments and command us to kindle the lights of Shabbat.

Blessing Over the Wine or Grape Juice

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Holy One our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessing Over the Bread

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are You, Holy One our God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Dinner

Enjoy your meal!

Discussion

When you are ready to dive in, you can open by asking your guests to share anything that stood out to them from the pre-reading you asked them to do. Be ready to share what stood out to you!

Background for facilitator: The Displacement 101: Background Facts and Figures article explains different categories of displaced people: refugee, asylum seeker, internally displaced person, and stateless person. The category of displacement in which a person finds themselves profoundly impacts their access to aid, legal advocacy, and protection. The HIAS “Mission, Vision, and Values” page lays out some of the Jewish teachings and concepts that motivate HIAS and the Jewish movement for refugee protection and welcome.

Discussion Questions (these are designed as prompts to get conversation going and move it along. If your group is having a rich discussion, there is no need to ask them every question):

1. What, if anything, surprised you about the readings? Why do you think you were surprised?
2. Ask the group to name the differences between refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people. Keep going until they’ve got it right (use the article for reference). Ask – if you have displaced people in your family tree, into which of the categories would they have fallen? If the modern categories had been in place for them, how might their situations have changed?
3. Reflect on the list of HIAS values – which ones resonated with you the most? Which ones felt most distant from your own values and/or your own Jewish identity and practice?
4. Is caring about refugees part of your faith tradition? Is it part of your own identity? If so, how does it play out?
5. Think back to the categories of displaced people: do we as individuals have a different responsibility to people in each of those different categories? As a community? As a country? Why or why not?

Conclusion

Your dinner and discussion have officially come to an end. Before your guests leave, let them know you’ll be following up with advocacy, volunteer, and donation opportunities. Once you’ve thanked everyone and made any other announcements, you may choose to end your dinner with a prayer (find “A Blessing for Welcoming” linked [here](#)).

The Day After – Encourage Your Guests to Take Action

Within a few days of your dinner, reach out to your guests, thank them for coming, and reflect on any highlights or impactful moments of your conversation. Say that you hope that your time together inspired people to get more involved in this work and share HIAS’ [Take Action](#) page. If you are in the U.S., you can also share [this page](#) with them, which highlights some specific ways U.S. residents and citizens can build a culture of welcome and opportunity for refugees and other newcomers.