

Refugee Shabbat Dinner: Facilitator's Guide



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

PLANNING THE DINNER

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in hosting a Shabbat dinner to engage your friends and community in the Jewish response to the global refugee crisis. This guide will equip you with content for an enriching discussion and for timely, important follow-up actions, so your guests can make an impact long after the challah is gone.

Ready to move forward? Please let us know if you're planning to hold a refugee Shabbat dinner by filling out this [quick form](#). If you have questions or would like to talk anything through, please contact Sarah Beller, HIAS' community engagement director for greater Washington D.C., at sarah.beller@hias.org.

By organizing a refugee Shabbat dinner, you are educating your community and empowering them to respond to one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of our time. Thank you for stepping up!

The Big Picture

Over the last year, America's longstanding commitment to welcoming refugees has been in danger. In light of the current global refugee crisis – with over 65 million people displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution – the United States must continue its legacy of providing safe haven to refugees. As members of the Jewish community, many of us have family members who were refugees or we were refugees ourselves, and we have a unique voice to contribute to the public conversation. To impact our elected officials, we need to continue building a strong movement of people who are equipped with facts and are ready to act. This requires bringing our friends, colleagues, and family members into conversation about the global refugee crisis in a way that fosters a sense of connection, understanding, and empowerment to action.

These Shabbat dinners are one way you can concretely help build this movement. Hosting a dinner will educate and mobilize your friends and community to learn about, support, and speak out for refugees.

Nuts and Bolts

Because this initiative is geared towards activating those who are concerned about refugees, we recommend that you focus your invitations on people who you think would be receptive to this issue and would appreciate the opportunity to learn more, but may or may not have in-depth knowledge yet. (If you prefer a conversation with wide differences of opinion on refugees, think through how to facilitate the conversation in a way that encourages listening and understanding. Helpful resources include: [Resetting the Table](#) and [HIAS' Conversational Guide](#).)

Plan the dinner by: setting a date, time, and location; inviting friends and community members; letting them know what to expect; planning the menu or potluck; reviewing the facilitator guide; and printing the handouts. We are happy to hop on the phone with you to give any guidance needed. Please contact Sarah Beller at sarah.beller@hias.org with any questions.

Unfortunately, at this time, HIAS cannot provide introductions to local refugees, but we encourage you to read refugee stories as part of the dinner, if you are interested. You can find stories of contemporary refugees on [HIAS' blog](#) or through [the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' \(UNHCR\) website](#).

There is an organization, OneTable, that helps millennials host and attend unique Shabbat dinners and provides coaching and modest funding to approved hosts. If you are interested in hosting your dinner through OneTable's online platform, we encourage you to learn more and [apply here](#).

Once again, please let us know you're planning to hold a refugee Shabbat dinner by filling out this [quick form](#). We can send you stickers and buttons that say "My People Were Refugees Too." Please request these through the form at least two weeks before the date of your dinner.

Of course, let us know how your dinner goes! Please give us your feedback through [this quick form](#).

THE DINNER

Setting the Table

Begin with introductions. You can start by welcoming everyone and sharing a bit about why discussing the global refugee crisis is important to you and why you have chosen to host this dinner. Reflect on your family's story of coming to the United States and/or the Jewish values and history that undergird your support for contemporary refugees. Then, invite your guests to introduce themselves by sharing a sentence or two about why they chose to come to your dinner.

If you're planning to recite Shabbat blessings, now would be the time to do that.

Over challah and appetizers, ground your dinner guests in a shared understanding of the global refugee crisis by reviewing HIAS' "[Helpful Definitions and Top 5 Facts](#)" handout. Take turns reading the definitions and facts aloud. Highlight who refugees are: men, women, and children forced to flee for their lives due to violence and persecution.

Core Content Options

After you have reviewed the definitions and facts about the global refugee crisis, choose from one of the core content options below. Choose your core content option based on who's sitting around your table and their level of engagement with refugee issues. Options 1 and 2 work best for groups who may just be starting to think about this issue. Option 3 works best for groups that may have already started to advocate for refugees.

We suggest discussing this content as you eat your main course.

Option 1: Refugee Poetry and Art

This core content option allows you to introduce the stories of refugees to your guests using their own words about and illustrations of their experiences.

Start by passing out a printed copy of spoken word artist and Somali refugee Abdi “Phenomenal” Farah’s piece “[More than Heroes](#).” Take turns reading. If it is convenient and consistent with your Shabbat practice, you could also watch [this YouTube clip](#) of the piece.

After you read the handout and/or watch the clip, discuss the following question about his first piece, “More than Heroes”:

What themes did you notice were the focus of Farah’s spoken word piece? Did this surprise you?

Next, distribute copies of the “[Refugee Voices: An Exploration of Refugee Art](#)” handout, ask guests to find a *chevruta* (study partner), look at the art and poetry, and discuss the questions on the handout with their *chevruta*.

If you’re interested in bringing in some more resources, take a look at this additional poetry and spoken word created by refugees:

1. “[Home](#)” by Warsan Shire
2. “[The Icebreaker](#)” by Yovanka Perdigao
3. [Collected poetry by child refugees](#)
4. “[Refuge](#)” by JJ Bola

Option 2: Text Study – “What Is Our Obligation To The Stranger?”

This core content option takes guests through a fully guided text study on the Jewish values that undergird our responsibility to welcome the stranger. It also incorporates secular texts and can be done regardless of your group’s Jewish text study experience.

Begin by explaining that you are going to spend the next half hour exploring some texts that illuminate the Jewish responsibility to welcome the stranger. Next, ask guests to find a *chevruta* (study partner). Hand out the [source sheet](#). Instruct everyone to use the text navigator on the front page to move through the text study, beginning with the pink source in the middle from Genesis 18:1-8 and then choosing and focusing on 1-2 of the blue commentaries using the prompt questions as a guide for conversation. The text navigator suggests that *chevrutot* spend 5 minutes on the main text, 3-5 minutes skimming the commentaries, and 10 minutes discussing the commentaries they selected.

This text study is meant to be a jumping off point. Depending on how much time you want to spend on this, you can encourage *chevrutot* to discuss fewer or more of the commentaries, as the questions for

each commentary text are printed for everyone to see. Certainly encourage your guests to take the text study with them and to return to it to continue deepening their learning on this topic.

After 20 minutes, wrap up the discussion by bringing everyone back together and asking them to reflect together on the following question for 5-10 minutes, referencing the texts they have just studied.

Given what you have read about the Jewish responsibility to welcome the stranger, how might you act on the values or concepts communicated by these texts?

Strongly encourage your guests to reference specific texts and the values and concepts in those sources.

Option 3: How to Talk about Refugees with Family and Friends

This core content option works best for a group that is already energized about and engaged in helping refugees.

Acknowledge to your guests that it can be quite difficult to approach certain friends and family about U.S. policy towards refugees. Sometimes people express concerns about the impact of welcoming refugees to the United States, and others may even make disparaging remarks. Offer that we can be advocates for refugees not only through our political activism but also in our closest relationships when we take a few minutes to listen to another person's perspective, provide basic facts about the global refugee crisis, address prejudice, and talk about the issue in a Jewish context. Explain that tonight you will address how to have these conversations and practice with one another.

Ask guests to share about a difficult conversation they have had about refugee policy or a remark they have heard about refugees to which they were unsure how to respond. Next, hand out the [Guide to How To Talk about Refugees with Family and Friends](#) and read aloud from the front side with the four building blocks for crafting these conversations.

Next, ask guests to pair up, skim the questions on the back of the guide, and choose one question that they want to practice answering for a total of 10 minutes – 5 minutes per partner. As the host, you may want to alert your guests at the 5-minute mark so they can switch roles. Encourage them to actually do a role play, rather than indicate what they might say in a hypothetical conversation.

Finish up by debriefing how the practice conversations went and ask a couple of people to share personal stories of tools they have found useful in difficult conversations, particularly about refugees.

Call to Action

HIAS is always advocating to our elected officials on behalf of refugees, and we invite you to wrap up your dinner by offering your guests a quick update on our latest action campaign. Please contact Sarah Beller at Sarah.Beller@hias.org for more information, and [click here](#) for more information about our current action alert.

As you conclude the content-driven portion of the evening, over dessert, you can also offer a couple of additional suggestions for ways your guests might take further action. Here is some sample language:

1. Educate family and friends about the global refugee crisis using the resources on HIAS' resource page at www.hias.org/resources.
2. Volunteer locally to help refugees and asylum seekers in the D.C. area. More info at www.hias.org/volunteer.
3. Advocate for refugees by signing HIAS' latest action alert at www.hias.org/take-action.
4. *(If applicable)* Join HIAS' 20s and 30s action network in D.C. This is a chance to make an ongoing impact on U.S. refugee policy through timely, strategic advocacy led by you and your peers – and a way to connect with other values-driven Jewish millennials who care about the safety and dignity of people seeking safe haven from persecution and violence. To join the network, fill out the HIAS D.C. Involvement Form at www.hias.org/dcinvovement and be sure to check off “Advocacy.”
5. Donate to support refugees in the United States and around the world at www.hias.org/donate.
6. Join the [Jews for Refugees Facebook group](#).
7. Share what you experienced tonight by posting on social media with the hashtag #JewsForRefugees or #RefugeesWelcome to help amplify your support for refugees.

Because things change so quickly, and there are many ways to support refugees, please contact Sarah Beller at Sarah.Beller@hias.org the week before your dinner for the most up-to-date language.

Additionally, invite your guests to plug into the refugee response locally and nationally by filling out the HIAS D.C. Involvement Form at www.hias.org/dcinvovement.

Remind everyone that you will follow up by email in the coming days with links to the websites and resources you've mentioned.

Finally, read the “[Blessing for Welcoming](#)” together – if you have space, consider gathering in a circle – and thank everyone for taking the time to become engaged with the global refugee crisis.

FOLLOWING UP ON THE DINNER

Text for Follow-up Email

(Feel free to edit this text with your own greetings and reflections.)

Dear *[Guest's Name]*,

It was great to see you at our Shabbat dinner on the global refugee crisis. I hope you found it interesting and thought-provoking. I'd be happy to hear your feedback!

If you are inspired to take action, here are **a few things you can do right now:**

1. **Educate family and friends** about the global refugee crisis using the resources on [HIAS' resource page](#).
8. **Volunteer locally** to help refugees and asylum seekers in the D.C. area. More info at www.hias.org/volunteer.
2. **Advocate for refugees** by signing HIAS' latest [action alert](#).
3. **(If applicable) Join HIAS' 20s and 30s action network in D.C.** This is a chance to make an ongoing impact on U.S. refugee policy through timely, strategic advocacy led by you and your peers – and a way to connect with other values-driven Jewish millennials who care about the safety and dignity of people seeking safe haven from persecution and violence. To join the network, fill out the HIAS D.C. Involvement Form at www.hias.org/dcinvolvement and be sure to check off “Advocacy.”
4. **Donate** to [support refugees in the United States and around the world](#).
5. Join the [Jews for Refugees Facebook group](#).
6. Share what you experienced tonight by **posting on social media** with the hashtag #JewsForRefugees or #RefugeesWelcome to help amplify your support for refugees.

Fill out the [HIAS D.C. Involvement Form](#) to get more involved today.

[Possibly include save the date for an upcoming event or action – please contact sarah.beller@hias.org or check www.hias.org/events for the most up-to-date information.]

Thanks again for coming and being part of the national Jewish response to the refugee crisis. Your support matters so much at this critical time.

See you soon,
[Your Name]

P.S.: In case you're interested in looking over the handouts again, here are digital versions:

- [Helpful Definitions and Top 5 Facts](#)
- [Refugee Voices: An Exploration of Refugee Art, Text Study - What Is Our Obligation to the Stranger?](#), or [Guide to How To Talk about Refugees with Family and Friends](#)
- [Blessing for Welcoming](#)