



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

2014 Year End Report

As we review all our accomplishments throughout 2014, we are grateful to each and every one of our donors. You can be proud of the important role you have played in the protection and assistance we have been able to offer to refugees all over the world with the funds you have donated.

With your generous support, we have touched tens of thousands of lives in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and right here in the United States. Your generosity fuels our ability to help refugees recover from their trauma and regain a degree of control over their lives.

We look toward 2015 with a renewed commitment to our collective goal of alleviating the suffering of refugees everywhere. With the assistance we give them together, these people can begin to rebuild their lives and think about their own futures. When reviewing this information, take pride in knowing you are helping us turn the memories of our Jewish history into positive action for today's refugees.



Photo Credit: Carlos Carrillo



Chad

In Chad, HIAS is the only Jewish organization working on the ground in 12 refugee camps. The vast majority of refugees in Chad are women and children who have fled genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, and 40% of the population is under the age of 5.

HIAS is focused on ensuring that the rights of all refugees are recognized and that they have the opportunity to create new lives, so that hope overcomes despair. These rights include preserving families in refuge, as well as the right to access medical attention, to obtain legal aid, and to secure an education for their children—all the things that help them to maintain their human dignity. We believe self-reliance is one of the best ways to rebuild a society, and the HIAS livelihood programs help refugees recover from trauma and take control of their lives. With such vulnerable refugees to protect, HIAS implemented a flagship program: Darfuri workers trained and supported by HIAS local staff create a protective environment for refugees. These workers establish public education programs to combat sexual and gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and harmful traditional practices that further exploit refugees, and they serve as conduits for these services in the community.

Finding a Fresh Start and Self-Sufficiency in a Refugee Camp



Amneh Yakum Abbakah, a 40-year-old grandmother, has been a resident of a refugee camp in Eastern Chad since it opened a decade ago to absorb refugees fleeing violence in Darfur. She, her husband, and five children narrowly escaped an invasion of her home village with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Refugee camps save lives, but day-to-day living presents unique struggles. The semi-permanent transience can leave people feeling they have no purpose, which is why we feel it's important to establish true communities that include opportunities for self-sufficiency. HIAS offers livelihoods training program to refugee women in 12 camps across eastern Chad.

As a participant in this program, Amneh learned to weave and soon began taking the baskets and mats she made to the market. As advised, each time she came back with some extra money she put it back into her business. Soon she'd saved enough to open her own shop, where best-sellers include sugar, tea, and millet. She is now able to supplement her family's meager food rations and get special additional things, like spices.

“Before we did not have enough food, but now we have plenty,” Amneh says. “When someone in the community suffers a loss, I can come and bring something to help. I am thankful for the program. It has helped me and the other women live again. Having skills gives us a new life.”

Kenya & Uganda

We also assist particularly vulnerable urban refugees in Kenya and Uganda, many of whom are survivors of torture and/or sexual or gender-based violence. There has been an influx of new arrivals in Kenya from neighboring countries including South Sudan, leading to an increase of people needing HIAS' assistance. In 2014, we served nearly 25,000 refugees in our Kenya offices. ►

In Uganda, we reached nearly 5,000 refugees through our psychosocial support services and provided protection to 350 refugees. Our new project in Uganda will seek to integrate overlooked and vulnerable refugees by providing protection, psychosocial and economic development opportunities. The program will raise awareness of these populations' needs among municipal authorities, local service providers and civil society.

Working closely with the UNHCR, we screen and refer some of the most vulnerable refugees whose lives are in imminent danger to resettlement in North America and Europe. We enable refugees to regain their dignity, recover from trauma, and develop a means of self-sufficiency so they can move forward from the struggles in their past.

Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama

HIAS works within several countries in Latin America to provide thousands of refugees and asylum seekers with legal orientation, psychosocial support to cope with trauma, activities to aid in social interaction, and tools to become self-sufficient through sustainable livelihoods. A majority of refugees will stay in the countries where they have sought refuge, and many are dealing with the aftermath of violence and persecution. In Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela, we are committed to a long-term goal of helping them build their new lives. Additionally in Ecuador, we provide humanitarian assistance for medicine, rent, food and shelter to support the largest refugee population in Ecuador. In all the countries where we work, we seek opportunities to support these individuals and families as they try to build lives in countries where it is challenging to make a new start.

Coping with a Tragic Past to Move Forward

Wilson and Ines lived as farmers in Colombia with two daughters: Caroline, 16 and Isabela, 1. When they helped a woman who came to their door asking for food, they unknowingly established a connection with the violent Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The woman later returned with a message from the group requesting that Carolina serve as their secretary, but Ines declined the offer on behalf of her daughter.

One day Carolina left to run an errand, and Wilson and Ines never saw her again. They soon learned she had been murdered, hearing gunshots as the FARC went from house to house. They became refugees that terrible night, hiding in fear and trying to flee the FARC. Despite moving from place to place, the FARC continued to make threats. Finally, the family entered Venezuela in 2012, but they had a tough time finding a place to live or work.

The family learned about HIAS one year ago, and our work in Venezuela has given them hope. The family received orientation from a HIAS legal advisor to assist them with the progress of their asylum request. HIAS also facilitated the start of their new business through entrepreneurial workshops and responded to their proposal for a sweets business with a grant. With psychosocial support, HIAS has helped Ines and Wilson both grieve for Carolina and finally process the remorse and sadness they felt. **Wilson expresses it best, saying, "The problem is battled by removing it from the jar. Only then is when you can get a little tranquility...HIAS has taught me good ways to move forward."**

Israel

The State of Israel is responding to the influx of more than 50,000 migrants seeking refuge from conflict zones. According to UNHCR, there are roughly 36,000 from Eritrea, 15,000 from Sudan, and 4,000 from other African countries.

With this unique situation, HIAS plays an important role in Israel — one that continues to be critical in light of recent events. In September, the Israeli Supreme Court upheld the fundamental right of persecuted people to seek and be granted safe haven. The High Court ruled that it is a violation of human rights and the basic laws of Israel for the government to use detention as a tool to pressure asylum seekers into returning to countries where they would face persecution. As the government attempts to respond to this ruling, HIAS continues to advocate for the treatment of asylum seekers in a way that honors the Jewish traditions of celebrating freedom, welcoming the stranger, and defending human dignity.

Within this new system, HIAS is also working to build a solid foundation that will ensure more refugees will realize their rights and find protection. Through development of a pro bono legal representation program, plus education about refugee law for government officials and lawyers, HIAS is leading a concerted effort to fulfill the Jewish values of justice and fairness.

In addition, HIAS provided higher education assistance to 65 olim in Israel, many of whom were born in Ethiopia or left other countries to start a new life in Israel.

Spotlight on One Family's Journey

Gabriel and Sara are no strangers to the struggles that asylum seekers face. The highly oppressive regime in their home country of Eritrea made life extremely difficult — both Gabriel and Sara were forced to remain in service to the military. Eritreans enter compulsory military service prior to their twelfth year of school, which amounts to forced labor, religious persecution and, for many women, sexual exploitation. Punishment results in lengthy periods of detention without trial, beatings and torture.

Both Gabriel and Sara independently fled the harsh treatment and oppression of their home country. In Israel they met, married and started a family of their own with two children.

But in Israel, Eritreans are not granted basic social rights including a formal work permit and the right to non-emergency medical services. They may submit an asylum application, but these are usually rejected. The family was referred to HIAS at the start of 2014 to explore the possibility of leaving Israel. Through our intervention, Gabriel and Sara received refugee recognition from UNHCR, enabling them to continue with an application for immigration to Canada. This will give them the chance to lead normal lives, pursue their educational goals and live life to the fullest as a young family should.

“I want to be able to promise my children a future...I want my children to study, to grow and to be happy.” -Gabriel

Ukraine

Despite serving as a gateway to Europe, Ukraine does not offer a safe and secure environment to refugees. Recent political unrest has worsened conditions for refugees, with authorities further limiting refugees' access to protection.

HIAS has been offering legal protective services to refugees in Kiev for 11 years. Our legal counseling and translation services have continued to be critical for refugees applying for asylum. We intervene with local immigration and police authorities, and represent those seeking asylum in Ukraine's court system. On April 1, we launched a two-year project designed to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons.

As the result of the Russian incursion to Crimea and the ongoing armed conflict in the Southeast, more than 110,000 Ukrainian citizens have fled to the Ukrainian mainland and the number grows daily. In partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of Ukraine, HIAS is on the ground advocating to ensure the rights and safety of the displaced.

Austria

In Vienna, HIAS operates a Resettlement Support Center, which provides safe transit for Jews, Christians, Bahai and other religious minorities fleeing Iran to be resettled in freedom in the United States. Religious minorities in Iran face restrictions imposed by the government, business and the legal system that affect their access to marriage, employment and higher education. Imprisonment, harassment, and intimidation based on religious beliefs are common.

Roughly 1,500 Iranian religious minorities representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds with varying levels of education are approved for U.S. resettlement. HIAS provides technical assistance to both refugees and the U.S. government by processing their applications, ultimately allowing them to reunite with family and practice their religion without fear of harm. During the average 5.5 month wait for approval from the U.S., they are not allowed to work or attend school. To ease the impending transition to life as a resident of the U.S., HIAS provides cultural orientation training and classes to help them navigate the social and community services available to them, and to understand their rights and responsibilities.

United States

HIAS is the only national Jewish organization to resettle refugees in the United States. In 2014, the HIAS Resettlement Network assisted over 3,500 refugees from 32 different countries. With your help, we exceeded our annual target by nearly 20 percent. The HIAS Reception and Placement Program provided services for housing, support of basic needs, case management and orientation for refugees to help them achieve self-sufficiency. HIAS also provided legal assistance for asylum seekers.

HIAS has also taken a leadership role in responding to the nearly 60,000 Central American children who have fled across our southern border. Once here they need legal assistance to navigate our complex immigration system. The need for expert legal representation is wide-scale, immediate, and urgent. To help with this crisis, HIAS has expanded our Legal Services Program by offering targeted legal services for child refugees and their parents or guardians. With HIAS' expertise not only in legal representation but also in building a pro bono legal network, we will ensure these children will find safety, protection and the support they need in this country.

In addition to our direct service work, we continue to advance our advocacy efforts. HIAS has been working to secure an extension of the Lautenberg Amendment in Fiscal Year 2015, which will keep a door to freedom open for religious minorities in Iran and the former Soviet Union. We are urging Congress to increase funds for humanitarian aid, which will address a crucial need for resources from the international community and display our country's willingness to share the responsibility for refugees with host countries. We are advocating for an increase in the resettlement quota for our own country to help us rescue some of the most vulnerable refugees from Syria who remain at-risk even after having fled the immediate threat in their home country. To assist the unaccompanied children fleeing the violence of Latin America, HIAS is urging Congress to allocate appropriate funding for legal assistance and to keep important protections in place that will give these children a fair chance at seeking asylum here in the United States. With every advocacy effort, we seek to uphold the dignity and basic human rights of refugees, wherever they are.



Our programs rely on the generosity of friends like you to bring refugees the support and welcome they need to start a new life. Our support of both refugees and host communities ensures successful integration and the ability for the people we're helping to lead happy, productive lives. In doing so, we are bringing the lessons of Jewish history, ethics and experience to strengthen the quality of life for people around the world. Thank you for your loyal support of our work.