



Justice for Migrants and Refugees in U.S. Policy

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

See, Judge, Act for Peace and Social Justice

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

- **Talk with your family and friends about your own migration story.** How did you come to be where you live today? What's your family's story?
- **Share on social media your support for just immigration reform with a photo of yourself:** "My faith calls me to welcome the stranger by promoting the dignity and well-being of migrants and refugees in U.S. policy." Use the hashtag #JusticeforImmigrants
- **Send an email message to your Members of Congress** urging them to promote just and comprehensive immigration reform by visiting <https://bit.ly/ImmReformMOGC>
- **Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper** explaining your commitment to welcoming refugees and migrants in our communities. Find sample letters and instructions in the 2021 National Migration Week toolkit (Sept. 20-26) from the USCCB: <https://bit.ly/NMW2021USCCB>
- **Learn how your parish can welcome migrants and refugees** through the Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR) program. Email mrspowir@usccb.org

SEE

People trying to immigrate to the United States suffer from the failures of an **outdated immigration system** and **ongoing political gridlock** preventing reform. The patterns and landscape of immigration to the United States have greatly changed since the framework for our system was created in 1965, but it has been more than 30 years since the last significant reform. Experts across the board continue to call for **comprehensive immigration reform**, while some elected officials pursue attempts to block avenues to immigration, including through broad immigration bans, restriction of access to asylum, and other means many consider inhumane and illegal.

The highly complex U.S. immigration system is founded on principles of **family unification**, **economic need**, and **humanitarian protection**. The number of visas available under each of those categories per year is limited, and the demand far outpaces the supply, leading to huge backlogs in the system. Legal U.S. residents must often **wait decades for visas** for their immediate family members to be approved. Similarly, competition for work visas is fierce in subsets of industries, such as in agriculture, construction, and hospitality. Many employers in these industries claim they have no choice but to hire undocumented workers.

Despite **heightened border enforcement**, the **undocumented population** in the United States has grown to about **11 million**, largely due to the **absence of legal pathways** to immigration and **ongoing "push" factors** prompting people to leave Central America and Mexico, including gang and state-sponsored violence, poverty, and climate change. Data suggest that the increasing **militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border** and the efforts to deter undocumented immigrants from the U.S. have been largely ineffective in reducing the undocumented population. Deterrence efforts have instead contributed to several **humanitarian crises at the southwest border**, most egregiously the **family separation** crisis of 2018, in which at least 2,648 children were separated from their parents upon arrival, some of whom remain separated today.

The United States has historically granted visas for humanitarian reasons, such as for **asylum seekers**, but policy changes under the previous Administration made it effectively impossible to gain such protection. By law, asylum seekers are offered the same protection as **refugees** – permanent protection from persecution to due race, religion, nationality, or membership in a social or political group – but they must apply for asylum at a U.S. border or within one year of their arrival in the United States.

The United States has long been the world leader in offering **resettlement to refugees**. Under the Trump administration, the U.S. refugee program was greatly diminished, resulting in refugees remaining stranded in temporary shelters abroad. The number of refugees allowed to enter the United States annually shrank from an average of 95,000 to less than 18,000. Under the Biden administration, the number of refugees resettled in the U.S. is projected to rise and the funding for U.S. resettlement agencies, of which the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is the largest, is expected to increase dramatically in 2022.

The need for Christians to care for migrants and refugees and address the root causes of forced migration is greater than ever. The world is facing a staggering number of people who have been forcibly displaced and the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

JUDGE

Pope Francis reminds us that, based on the **inherent dignity of each person** as created in the image of God and our biblical call to “**welcome the stranger,**” nations must act toward **refugees and migrants** with “generosity, enthusiasm, wisdom, and far-sightedness.” To wealthy nations, he has said that ungenerosity toward refugees is “an alarm bell warning of the moral decline we will face if we continue to give ground to the **throw-away culture.**”

The **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops** (USCCB) has a long history of advocating on behalf of immigrants and in favor of **just, comprehensive immigration reform**, motivated particularly by the large percentage of U.S. Catholics who are, and historically have been, immigrants.

The USCCB explains that, according to Catholic social teaching principles, while nations have a right to enforce their laws and borders, the duty of Christians to “**welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person**” is paramount. Any efforts to enforce the law must **respect the dignity of migrants, the importance of family unity, and the right of persons to migrate** when they are unable to support themselves or their families at home. Catholic social teaching also asserts the **duty of wealthy nations** to accommodate migration flows and work to address the causes of forced migration, including violent conflict, inequality, poverty, and climate change.

In addition, Pope Francis and theologians of migration remind us of our individual duty to “**welcome the stranger**” and that the experience of being strangers in a foreign land is deeply woven into the history of our faith. Pope Francis explains that in the migrant we are called to **see the face of Christ.**

ACT

Ask your Members of Congress to support comprehensive immigration reform that achieves the following:

- **Expands access to the legal immigration system**, most urgently for long-term undocumented U.S. residents, especially DACA recipients;
- **Restores and strengthens systems for the fair processing of asylum seekers** and the protection of their human rights and dignity during the process;
- **Revitalizes the refugee resettlement program** to levels appropriate for addressing the current global refugee crisis;
- **Establishes a humane immigration enforcement system**, including by investing in alternatives to detention and prioritizing family unity
- **Enhances U.S. contributions to addressing the root causes** of migration in impoverished and struggling nations.

Visit <https://bit.ly/ImmReformMOGC> to send your message.

Maryknoll Experience



“Parents with children, and young adults, **were waiting for days, even weeks**, on the bridges [between the U.S. and Mexico], sleeping on their belongings or cardboard boxes spread out on the sidewalks... during their unusually long waits to be processed...”

[M]any of those seeking asylum are **fleeing violence** in the northern triangle of Central America due to gangs that threaten their lives and livelihoods, and due to domestic abuse.

The often-corrupt governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, long supported by the United States, ignore the **alarming growth of violence** against poor families, and especially women, in their countries.”

- Maryknoll Sr. Ann Hayden, Peñitas, Texas, 2018

Pray

Merciful God... Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters. May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand.

May we recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

– **Pope Francis**

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR EMAILS about ways you can take action for refugees and migrants. Go to www.maryknollogc.org and click on “Join our email list.”