

# HOW REFORM CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES CAN RESPOND TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

With over 60 million people displaced from their homes, the world is facing a refugee crisis worse than any since WWII. Urgent action is needed to bring awareness to this issue, and to ensure the protection and dignity of refugees worldwide. Because of both our history and values, many American Jews are deeply moved to help today's refugees.

Many synagogues and organizations have contacted HIAS and the Religious Action Center seeking to learn about, support, and advocate for the protection of refugees. This document provides information about several ways that your congregation and community can help. HIAS and RAC staff are available for consultation on all of the opportunities below, and we encourage you to visit [rac.org/refugeecrisis](http://rac.org/refugeecrisis) or email us at [rac@rac.org](mailto:rac@rac.org) with any questions.

## Initial Steps

Sign-up and sign-on to signal your congregation's commitment to refugees, and to receive critical information and updates.

- 1. Sign-On:** Join HIAS' brand-new "Welcome Campaign" of congregations and communities across the United States who are engaging with refugee issues. The campaign has two simple components: signing a statement that indicates general support for refugees and making a commitment to address the refugee issue by doing at least one action or program. Adding your synagogue's name to the list will also ensure that you are among the first to receive new resources and breaking updates. Together, this list of congregations will indicate a powerful show of unity from the Jewish community in support of welcoming refugees to the United States. If you are interested in signing-on, please contact Rebecca Kirzner, Director of Campaigns ([rebecca.kirzner@hias.org](mailto:rebecca.kirzner@hias.org)).
- 2. Receiving Updates:** Sign up for the HIAS listserv at [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org), which is one of the primary ways that you can receive updates on new developments internationally and here in the U.S., action alerts about pending legislation, invitations to events and briefing calls, and information about the Jewish response to the refugee crisis. You can also follow HIAS and the RAC on Facebook or on Twitter (@HIASRefugees and @theRAC).

## GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS RESOURCES

Visit the Religious Action Center's Refugee Crisis Response Page ([rac.org/refugeecrisis](http://rac.org/refugeecrisis)) to find RAC and HIAS' resources including:

1. Frequently Asked Questions on the Refugee Crisis
2. Jewish texts that teach us to welcome the stranger
3. Myths and Facts about Syrian Refugee Resettlement
4. HIAS Guide to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Programs
5. Updates and refugee stories from the RAC and HIAS blogs

## EDUCATE YOUR COMMUNITY

Given the vastness and complexity of the global refugee crisis, one of the most important steps is developing a deeper understanding of refugee issues - both the "facts and figures" of the crisis and the interplay between refugee issues and Jewish history and values. There are several ways HIAS and the RAC can help you educate your community:

- 1. Educational Program:** Request HIAS' interactive and creative do-it-yourself educational program about the refugee crisis. The program includes an introduction to the global refugee crisis, an opportunity for participants to share their own stories and connections to this critical social justice issue, a Jewish text and values component, and several advocacy activities to move participants to action. The program comes with a detailed facilitator's guide and all relevant handouts so that it can be meaningfully implemented by professional staff or lay leaders in any congregation or community.
- 2. Speaker or Educator:** HIAS is able to provide a speaker or educator to a limited number of congregations and communities in select cities.
- 3. Briefing Calls:** Publicize and join HIAS' briefing calls. Held every two months, briefing calls are a great source of up-to-the-minute information from HIAS staff experts on refugee issues around the globe. They are also a good opportunity to have your most pressing questions answered. You can receive invitations to all HIAS briefing calls by signing up for our listserv at [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org).

## MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

One of the ways that the American Jewish community can have a significant impact on refugee issues is through directly advocating for the U.S. government to take bold and immediate action. Make the Reform Jewish Community's voice heard on this important issue by contacting your representatives through the methods below. It remains critical that the Jewish community continue to powerfully advocate for the protection and dignity of refugees.

- 1. Current Action Alerts:** Find up to date action alerts on the Religious Action Center Website ([rac.org/ActOnRefugees](http://rac.org/ActOnRefugees)). Share the RAC's most recent action alerts and petitions through your community's newsletters and e-mails, enabling congregants to take action on their own.
- 2. District Advocacy:** Make sure your Member of Congress knows where your synagogue stands by scheduling a meeting between your congressperson and synagogue representatives. Find up to date talking points at [rac.org/refugeecrisis](http://rac.org/refugeecrisis). HIAS and the RAC can provide support and resources for in-district meetings.
- 3. Local Interfaith Initiatives:** Join with faith groups in your community in interfaith and anti-Islamophobia initiatives. Download the [Children of Abraham Guide](#) to facilitate dialogue and study between Reform Jewish congregations and Muslim communities.
- 4. Get creative!** There are many tactics that you can use to make your support for refugees heard – from phone-banking events to letter-writing campaigns. Consult with HIAS and the RAC to design creative opportunities for your congregation and to receive up-to-date resources.

## ENGAGE WITH REFUGEES LOCALLY

Every year, thousands of refugees are resettled in communities around the United States. Jewish communities can help local resettlement agencies make arriving refugees feel more welcomed and supported. Arriving refugees are eager to start new lives and to provide for their families in a new country free from the terror, persecution, and violence that they fled. Once established in the U.S., refugees are (and have historically been) very strong assets to the towns and cities in which they live – working hard to give back and to contribute to the local economy and community.

Connect with a local organization that is resettling refugees in your area, and find out how your community can offer support. There are nine agencies authorized by the U.S. government to resettle refugees in the U.S. HIAS is the only Jewish organization among them. HIAS resettles refugees in communities around the country through our partners on the ground (largely Jewish Family Service agencies). In the areas where HIAS does not operate, it is highly likely that one of the other eight organizations does.

We encourage you to explore opportunities with HIAS partners where possible, and with our colleague agencies if you live in a region where HIAS does not work. Visit [rac.org/refugeecrisis](https://rac.org/refugeecrisis) to find the list of [350 resettlement affiliates](#), which is organized geographically. You can also find local organizations who help refugees by visiting the [White House Aid Refugees Map](#).

## BROADCAST YOUR INVOLVEMENT

In the current political climate, it is important that elected officials and the media understand how much the Jewish community cares about refugees. You can amplify the Jewish response to the refugee crisis with strategic engagement of the media and social media.

1. If your congregation is doing a program, event, volunteer opportunity, or advocacy action, make sure to tell your local media so that they can cover the event, and be sure to include Jewish media in your outreach.
2. If you see articles about refugees in local newspapers or local Jewish newspapers, write a letter to the editor expressing your support for welcoming refugees to the United States.
3. Tweet about your involvement using the hashtag #refugeeswelcome or the hashtag #mypeoplewererefugeestoo. Tag @HIASRefugees and @theRAC in your post, so that we can amplify your work.

## SAVE THE DATE

HIAS and the RAC will be developing materials for congregations to use around particular holidays.

1. Plan to weave refugee issues into your **Passover** celebrations. HIAS and the RAC will be producing supplemental materials for use in your personal and communal Seders, as well as other dynamic educational resources tying our story of moving from bondage to liberation to today's refugee crisis.
2. June 20 is **World Refugee Day**. Plan to highlight the global refugee crisis in your congregation throughout the month of June with materials and resources from HIAS and the RAC.
3. HIAS will be producing materials for congregations and communities to use throughout the **High Holidays and Sukkot**.

## GIVE TO SUPPORT HIAS' WORK

One of the best ways that your congregation can directly support refugees is by making a financial contribution to support HIAS' work both domestically and internationally. There are many options available to you from encouraging congregants to make individual contributions to organizing a synagogue-wide fundraising appeal. HIAS staff will work with you to provide materials, envelopes, or technology support if you want to set up a fundraising page on the HIAS website that will be unique to your synagogue. If you are interested in any of these options, please contact Riva Silverman, HIAS VP of External Affairs ([riva.silverman@hias.org](mailto:riva.silverman@hias.org)).

Whether inspired by our history as refugees, Judaism's call to welcome the stranger, or simply the humanitarian plight of people forced from their homelands, join HIAS and the RAC and become part of the American Jewish response to the refugee crisis.

## CONTACT US

For more information and to share your experience using this document, email [rac@rac.org](mailto:rac@rac.org).

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