

How Congregations and Communities Can Respond to the Refugee Crisis



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

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 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 staff are available for consultation on all of the opportunities below, and we encourage you to reach out to us. Specific contact information is listed at the end of this resource.

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 in 2016 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).
- 2) **Receiving Updates:** Sign up for the HIAS listserv at 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 on Facebook or on Twitter (@HIASRefugees).

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 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. Contact our HIAS Educator, Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer (Rachel.grant.meyer@hias.org), to receive the program complete with the most up-to-date materials and to receive support in executing the program.
- 2) Speaker or Educator: HIAS is able to provide a speaker or educator to a limited number of congregations and communities in select cities. If you are interested in having a HIAS speaker address the current refugee crisis in a Jewish context or if you would like a HIAS educator to lead an interactive learning session, please be in touch with HIAS Director of Community Engagement Programs, Merrill Zack (merrill.zack@hias.org).
- 3) Briefing Calls: Publicize and join HIAS’ briefing calls, held roughly every two months. Briefing calls are a great source of up-to-the-minute information from HIAS staff experts on refugee issues all 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 ww.hias.org. If you have questions, contact HIAS Director of Campaigns, Rebecca Kirzner (rebecca.kirzner@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. With the refugee issue so central in political discourse, it is critical that the Jewish community raise up a powerful voice.

- 1) Current Action Alerts: Share HIAS' most recent action alerts and petitions through your community's newsletters and e-mails, enabling congregants to take action on their own. You can also print these petitions and action alerts to have available at synagogue programming.
- 2) District Advocacy: Make sure your Member of Congress knows where your synagogue stands by scheduling a meeting between your congressperson and synagogue representatives. If you are interested in this important tactic, please contact HIAS Director of Campaigns, Rebecca Kirzner (rebecca.kirzner@hias.org), who can provide up-to-date talking points, as well as guidance on how to arrange this type of meeting.
- 3) Local Interfaith Initiatives: If you are joining together with faith groups in your community in interfaith and anti-Islamophobia initiatives, please let HIAS know. We may be able to connect you to other synagogues in your area who are working on similar initiatives.
- 4) Get creative! There are many tactics that you can use to make your support for refugees heard - from phone-banking evenings to letter-writing campaigns. Contact HIAS Director of Campaigns, Rebecca Kirzner (rebecca.kirzner@hias.org), if you are interested in organizing advocacy activities tailored to your congregation.

ENGAGE WITH REFUGEES LOCALLY

Every year, thousands of refugees are resettled in communities around the United States. Jewish communities can help local resettlement agencies to 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.

- 1) 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. Here is the [list of 350 resettlement affiliates](#), which is organized geographically.

- 2) Please let HIAS know if you volunteer with a HIAS partner or with one of the non-sectarian or Christian resettlement agencies. HIAS can connect you with additional learning and training opportunities and put you in touch with other congregations working with refugees to share best practices and experiences. You can become part of a growing network of American Jews who understand that it is our responsibility to act in response to the global refugee crisis – not because today’s refugees are Jewish, but because we are Jewish. If you volunteer with a local organization, please inform Merrill Zack, Director of Community Engagement Programs (merrill.zack@hias.org).

GIVE TO SUPPORT HIAS’ WORK

- 1) 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).

ACCESS INFORMATION ON THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS

HIAS can provide resources on the refugee crisis or direct you to additional resources.

- 1) The HIAS website has information about the global refugee crisis, facts and figures about refugees, first-person accounts of resettlement, and a rich collection of blog posts and articles. You can also find resources such as a HIAS Guide to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and Security, a HIAS Guide to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Text/Torah source sheets, and the recordings of recent briefing calls. New resources are being developed regularly.

- 2) If you would like printed HIAS materials including brochures, fact sheets about the countries where HIAS works, or postcards about how to get involved, please contact Janna Diamond (janna.diamond@hias.org).

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 Jewish media so that they can cover the event.
- 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. If you need tips and pointers about this tactic, contact Rebecca Kirzner, Director of Campaigns (rebecca.kirzner@hias.org).
- 3) Tweet about your involvement using the hashtag [#refugeeswelcome](#) or the hashtag [#mypeoplewererefugeestoo](#). Tag [@HIASRefugees](#) in your post, so that we can amplify your work.

SAVE THE DATE

HIAS will be developing materials for congregations to use around particular holidays in 2016. Please contact Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer, HIAS Educator (rachel.grant.meyer@hias.org) if you wish to receive them.

- 1) Plan to weave refugee issues into your **Passover** celebrations. HIAS 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**. Please consider having special programming about refugee issues on the Shabbat of June 17-18, integrating HIAS materials.

 - 3) HIAS will be producing materials for congregations and communities to use throughout the **High Holidays and Sukkot**.
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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 become part of the American Jewish response to the refugee crisis.

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