

Planning for Welcome



Assisting with Refugee Resettlement is one way to live out the Jewish value of welcome - *hachnasat orchim*. Below is a short guide for assessing whether your congregation is ready to take on this kind of role in your local area. We suggest that congregations conduct this research over the summer, and if it seems viable to explore further, discuss more substantively with your congregational leadership after the High Holidays at the beginning of October.

There are many options for customizing a community's level of engagement with refugee resettlement. After delving into some research, you will likely have a clear idea about the level of commitment your community has the capacity to take on. If formal co-sponsorship¹ is not the right avenue to pursue, we suggest scheduling a meeting with your local resettlement agency to talk through other volunteer needs they may have, to determine if your community can help fill those gaps.

Explore Refugee Resettlement Opportunities in your Area

- Research the Refugee Resettlement Agencies (RAs) that operate in your geographical area. You may find that HIAS does not have an affiliate in your area, however there are [eight other national RAs that also resettle through local partnerships](#) which may or may not have the same name. Check the [Refugee Council USA \(RCUSA\) map](#) for community sponsorship² opportunities. It is also possible that you'll discover that refugee resettlement is not happening in your local area; if this is the case, check [here](#) for other opportunities to contribute.
- Explore whether there are other local organizations to partner with, or existing coalitions with whom to join forces.

Assess Capacity

There are many aspects of resettlement: finding and securing affordable housing, connecting clients to employment opportunities and mental health care; career mentorship; educational access; accompanying them to appointments and familiarizing them with local public transportation, to name a few. Congregations and communities that assist with resettlement can contribute to all of these, and assessing your resources and capacities in these areas is essential.

Assess Capacity in your Region or Wider Community

- Language - what language skills do people in your congregation and community hold?
- Social workers - are there social workers in your congregation/community?
- Housing - what connections do you have? Is the housing located in an area that is accessible?
- Public transportation - is there public transportation available that the resettled family can take to get around independently?
- Employment - availability of local entry-level jobs that do not require a high level of English e.g., factory work, cleaning, service industry.

¹ Co-sponsorship is when community groups accept –in a non-legally binding written agreement with a resettlement agency –the responsibility to provide, or ensure the provision of, reception and placement services to certain refugees sponsored by the agency.

² Umbrella term for the pairing of refugees with groups of individuals who commit to providing clearly defined financial and/or in-kind contributions and volunteer services to support their welcome and integration.

- ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) availability.
- Schools - are you in or close to a district that provides support resources for English language learners?

Assess Congregational Capacity

Before proceeding further, it is essential to know whether there is true willingness in your congregation to commit the financial and volunteer resources needed to assist an RA in resettling refugees to your community.

- **Willingness:**
 - Ability to commit the time necessary to supporting this person/family while being able to maintain appropriate boundaries that enables them to become independent.
 - Ensure that your congregation is prepared to support a person or family resettled in your area regardless of nation of origin, family composition, religion, sexual orientation.

- **Financial:**

Resettled people receive a one-time, per person US government disbursement of \$1225 to be used for all their resettlement costs. Supplementary financial support to help during the first 6 to 12 months can make all the difference for successful resettlement. Sponsorship and community support varies significantly from one agency or area to another. These costs might be far higher or lower depending on the sponsorship model of your local RA:

- Can your congregation raise \$7,000-\$20,000 for rental assistance? (depending on where you are and how long the support is for).
- Can you fund additional household and furniture items needed for setting up the house?
- There is ample evidence that your congregation could create a strong, well-organized team of volunteers with the time, skills and contacts necessary to help refugees access social services.

- **Volunteer capacity**

Survey your community to understand if:

- There is an able, committed individual who can serve as a volunteer team coordinator, liaising with the local resettlement partner, assist with healthcare coordination, education, and employment in partnership and coordination with the local resettlement partner. For full cosponsorship it is recommended that for the first two months there are at least 30 volunteers who can, as a group, devote a total of 40hrs/week.

One way of making this more realistic would be by working in partnership with another congregation or organization. In this arrangement, one might have more financial capacity while the other might have more volunteer capacity.

Build Support and Commitment from the Wider Community and Congregational Leadership

HIAS can help provide educational resources, advice and support during this process. Please do reach out to isabel.burton@hias.org for help thinking this through in more detail.