



Justice for Immigrants and Refugees in U.S. Policy

Inspired by the Gospel and Maryknoll missionaries' commitment to stand with vulnerable communities around the world, we offer these two-page briefs as resources on the intersection of global policy and Catholic social thought.

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People trying to immigrate to the United States suffer from the [failures](#) of an outdated immigration system and ongoing political gridlock preventing reform.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 U.S. Immigration System

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.

Asylum and Refugees

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.

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