

Advocating for Refugee Protection and Resettlement The Episcopal Church

Overview

In the simplest terms, a refugee is someone who has had to flee their home to escape persecution, war, or other disaster and seeks refuge, or protection, elsewhere. The legal definition of refugee in the United States is based on international treaties and domestic U.S. law. Under the Refugee Act of 1980, a person is a refugee if they are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin because they have suffered or fear they will suffer persecution based on nationality, race, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees come from all over the world, depending on current crises and conflicts. Right now, there are 25.4 million individuals identified by UN Refugee Agency as refugees.

Episcopal Church Policy on Refugee Issues

The Episcopal Church has official policy from General Convention on protecting refugees dating back to the 1930s. Those policies have spanned from decrying discriminatory and restrictive immigration policies to affirming the importance of congregation-level engagement in welcoming refugees and immigrants. The Episcopal Church affirms the sanctity of asylum and condemns policies that aim to criminalize all migrants or weaken human rights protections for migrants. With a deep understanding of the dignity of every human being, The Episcopal Church strongly denounces the xenophobia that undergirds much of the anti-migrant and anti-refugee policies and treatment that exists around the world.

To address large-scale crises and to offer life-saving protections, the Episcopal Church has long supported a robust refugee resettlement program for those fleeing their countries to escape persecution, oppression, and war. Through the Episcopal Migration Ministries, our Church has worked in public-private partnership with the U.S. Government to resettle nearly 95,000 refugees since the 1980s. The Episcopal Church is committed to continuing this tradition of welcoming refugees to peaceful homes and hopeful futures in the United States.

Priority Issue Areas

Setting the refugee admissions number

Each year, the President, in consultation with Congress, sets an annual target for refugee admissions known as the Presidential Determination (PD). By law, the PD is meant to be based on the global humanitarian need and national interest. Since the U.S.'s refugee admissions program was formalized in 1980, the average PD has been 95,000, fluctuating at different points to respond to increased global need. On September 17, 2018, Secretary of State Pompeo announced the Administration will set the PD at 30,000 for FY19. Last year, the President set the PD for FY18 at 45,000, a historic low, and estimates indicate only around 21,000 refugees will be resettled by September 30th, less than 50% of the FY18 PD. The Episcopal Church has pushed back against these restrictions on refugees in the strongest possible terms through advocacy to Congress and the Administration.

Maintaining the infrastructure of the resettlement program

Services such as language and job training, mentorship, and healthcare assistance offered through Episcopal Migration Ministries' network of affiliate and community partners ensure refugees are able to have the tools they need to succeed in their new communities. To facilitate this delivery of services in the resettlement program, the State Department contracts with the nine national refugee resettlement agencies (RAs), called "Reception and Placement" (R&P) contracts, based on the RAs plans to serve refugees in the upcoming fiscal year. This year, the State Department has indicated that not all nine RAs will receive R&P contracts to resettle refugees in Fiscal Year 2019. The Office of Government Relations interfaces with the U.S. federal government and Congress to ensure that these programs and services provided to refugees are robustly funded and that this critical public-private partnership which has successfully helped resettled refugees integrate into communities across the U.S. for decades is preserved.

Protecting and supporting refugees globally

In 2016, the United Nations developed the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The New York Declaration was a critical commitment from member states of the UN to work toward safe, orderly, and regular migration for refugees and migrants and it set up the process for the development of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration. The Office of Government Relations and the Episcopal Church's liaison to the UN worked to influence this important benchmark. We continue to focus our work on ensuring that member states implement and uphold agreements made in the New York Declaration and the Global Compacts, long after the summits end.

Addressing root causes of migration through peacebuilding and international development

The Episcopal Church is committed to addressing extreme poverty, conflict and suffering around the world. We work in partnership with Episcopal congregations, companion dioceses, and the Anglican Communion to advance U.S. government policies that support the world's most vulnerable. We work to foster global reconciliation and ensure that all might eventually live safe, secure, prosperous lives. We address food insecurity by ensuring that federal programs, from child nutrition programs to international food assistance, serve those most in need and are efficiently administered. We support legislation and policies that aim to prevent domestic violence and gender-based violence in foreign countries, and that protect the human rights of LGBT persons. These efforts are aimed at preventing refugee crises from emerging in the first place and to uplift the dignity of every human being.

Take Action

Join the Episcopal Public Policy Network <https://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org> to advocate directly to your elected officials about protecting and supporting refugees.