
TREAT PEOPLE SEEKING U.S. REFUGE WITH DIGNITY, NOT AS POLITICAL PAWNS

Recommendations to Congress, the Biden Administration, State and Local Governments

In recent weeks, some state governors have used the transportation of migrants and asylum seekers to interior communities in an attempt to sow political discord. Highly concerning reports have emerged of fraudulent [promises](#) of assistance and [misrepresentations](#) of available services employed to induce recently arrived individuals to accept transportation. People seeking refuge in the United States must be treated with dignity and provided needed assistance as they navigate the U.S. asylum process—not shoved around the country like political pawns.

Volunteers in communities across the United States have stepped forward to welcome and support families and individuals coming to the United States in search of safety. Now is the time for constructive and principled action by states, cities, federal agencies, Congress, and the Biden administration to work with faith-based networks, mutual aid groups, and other organizations currently leading the response to create a truly welcoming process that also upholds U.S. law and treaty obligations to refugees.

Urgent recommendations on coordination and support

In implementing the following recommendations, officials at all levels must work in collaboration with one another and should consult and coordinate with faith- and community-based organizations, including Indigenous peoples' associations, shelters, mutual aid groups, legal services, refugee aid and other experienced non-governmental organizations welcoming asylum seekers.

To the U.S. Congress:

Arrivals of asylum seekers require a planned and sustained humanitarian effort, not a response limited to “emergency” measures or driven by “enforcement” priorities. Congress should establish a federal humanitarian and refugee protection agency—outside of the Department of Homeland Security—with an explicitly humanitarian mission and expertise, which Human Rights First has previously recommended. This agency should both plan for and coordinate support for people seeking asylum in the United States and be responsible for identifying and referring them to the asylum process. More immediately, Congress must strengthen community-based shelters and other housing and community support networks, including increased appropriations to the Emergency Food and Shelter Program as well as more sustainable, longer-term funding for these essential supports. In addition, Congress should enact case support programs, including funded legal counsel, and eliminate work authorization restrictions that leave asylum seekers unable to support themselves for months, or years.

To the White House:

Convene regular White House and interagency roundtables, including asylum seeker groups and services providers, to understand and address the needs of people seeking refuge. In addition, the administration should publicly call for the creation of a refugee protection agency, and press Congress to expand funding for humanitarian supports and the provision of legal representation to indigent asylum seekers.

To State and Local Leaders:

To prepare for and properly respond to arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers, governors, county executives, mayors, and other local officials should activate interagency coordination mechanisms, cooperate with jurisdictions within and outside of their states to maximize response efforts, and push to change eligibility requirements for state and local services to cover asylum seekers.

To the Department of Homeland Security:

To allow people seeking safety in the United States to become self-sufficient more rapidly, immigration officers should issue (and extend) authorized stay on parole to people seeking protection for a sufficient period to allow them to request work authorization during their first months in the country. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services should waive fees for and expeditiously process these applications. To prevent *in absentia* removal orders due to federal agency coordination failures, the Department must ensure asylum seekers are given information and instructions on release in a language they can understand and provided immigration court documents that do not contain inaccurate destination addresses. The Federal Emergency Management Agency should make necessary changes to its administration of funds to address the needs of migrant populations and ensure smaller providers of housing can access support.

More detailed recommendations on coordination, support, and funding can be found [here](#).