



Policy Solutions to Safeguard and Strengthen the U.S. Asylum System

Our immigration system requires smart, practical solutions that allow people to seek asylum and access legal humanitarian protections. Below are the [#WelcomeWithDignity Campaign](#)'s recommended solutions for the U.S. government:

1. [Restore full and equitable access to asylum for people seeking safety at the U.S.-Mexico border, regardless of the manner of entry.](#)
2. [Support existing systems and launch new ones to meet the immediate and long-term needs of people seeking safety.](#)
3. [Create a more fair, effective, and timely immigration system to reduce backlogs, improve fairness, and increase efficiency.](#)
4. [Strengthen existing pathways and create new pathways to the United States.](#)

This approach upholds the legal right to seek asylum, increases safety at the southern border, and recognizes the growing number of [globally displaced people](#) and urgent humanitarian needs.

1. Restore full and equitable access to asylum for people seeking safety at the U.S.-Mexico border regardless of the manner of entry.

HOW: The U.S. government needs to invest in increased access to asylum at U.S. ports of entry. This includes:

- **Adequately staffing Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO).** OFO must have the resources to expeditiously and equitably process people exercising their legal right to seek asylum at all ports, including people unable to book an appointment via the CBP One smartphone app.
- **Increasing the accessibility of the CBP One smartphone app, increasing the number of CBP One appointments, and expanding the locations at which appointments are available.** People seeking asylum, including children with and without their families, frequently wait six months or more in perilous conditions to enter through U.S. ports of entry due to a lack of availability of appointments and extremely long wait times.

WHY: Our restricted capacity to process people seeking asylum is woefully inadequate in the midst of [unprecedented global displacement](#). The U.S. government has the ability to increase processing capacity in line with humanitarian and operational needs and demonstrate humanitarian leadership.

Policies designed to “deter” and punish migration fail to address the very real challenges at the border. They only create chaos while returning people to danger, retraumatizing vulnerable people—including many who are fleeing persecution—and separating families. Policies like [asylum bans](#), Title 42 (or other expulsion policies), or “Remain in Mexico,” as well

as state efforts like Texas's Operation Lone Star and the SB 4 law, [exacerbate disorder](#) and inflict [massive human rights abuses](#). Detention and blanket surveillance programs are also physically and psychologically harmful for people seeking safety in the United States, and do not address the very real challenges at the border.

2. Support existing systems and launch new support systems to meet the immediate and long-term needs of people seeking safety.

HOW: Congress needs to robustly and sustainably fund local governments and community organizations welcoming newcomers and providing essential humanitarian services that help offer stability and support to people as they navigate the U.S. immigration process.

Resources need to include the existing FEMA Shelter and Services Program (SSP) that supports immediate reception; the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Case Management Pilot Program (CMPP) that supports organizations providing longer-term case management; the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Refugee Entrant Assistance Account (REA); as well as additional funding to communities and organizations providing medium- and long-term housing and other support. All programming needs to, wherever possible, engage nonprofit humanitarian specialists with firsthand experience in leadership and oversight. Some of this can be achieved through legislation like the Destination Reception Assistance Act ([S. 4861](#) / [H.R. 9217](#)) introduced in July 2024.

Additionally, reception and integration systems should include **culturally appropriate services**, including:

- Initial shelter, food, acute medical care, clothing, and other basic essential needs;
- Transportation support to final destinations;
- Equitable access to safe, affordable housing through sustainable means, which Congress needs to support through [funding](#) and [policy reforms](#) to increase the affordable housing supply for all communities, including newcomers;
- Access to fair and timely labor opportunities, education and child care, medical and mental health care, Indigenous and rare language access through interpretation, safety planning, and other critical services to meet basic needs.

The U.S. government needs to create a clear and whole-of-government approach to supporting communities and organizations with the reception of people seeking asylum. A centralized office in the White House that works across agencies, states, localities, and non-governmental organizations needs to be established to coordinate these humane reception and integration systems. The office also needs to ensure that volunteers, organizations, and communities welcoming migrants are not targeted by adversarial officials or agitators.



WHY: Without support systems in place, many newcomers would be left on the streets without resources or connections to their loved ones in the United States. When people seeking asylum can support themselves and have their basic needs met, they are far better equipped to comply with immigration requirements and see their cases through with the support of their communities. For Indigenous Peoples—women and children in particular—when their right to identify as Indigenous is not respected, it sets the stage for a slew of human rights violations of [international law standards](#).

3. Create a more fair, effective, and timely immigration system to reduce backlogs, improve fairness, and increase efficiency.

HOW: Congress and the administration need to take urgent action to ensure our immigration system is efficient *and* fair. This can be done by:

- **Prioritizing funding to increase capacity for the adjudication of asylum claims**, clear the backlogs, and decide new cases in a timely manner. Capacity needs include immigration court staff, interpreters, immigration judges, and asylum officers.
- **Securing funding for counsel for all indigent people navigating the U.S. immigration system**, and in the absence of congressional action, support existing legal orientation and representation programs to the greatest extent possible. Currently, legal representation is [inaccessible](#) to the vast majority of people seeking asylum in the United States.
- **Funding USCIS to ensure timely processing of all work permit applications**, both for initial applicants and renewals, to help migrants and their families become more self-sufficient. Timely provision of work authorization also reduces the risks of continuing and new victimization for survivors of domestic violence, and reduces the risk of worker exploitation. The U.S. government should (i) expand pilot programs for work authorization applications at border shelters and clinics in destination cities; (ii) establish one accessible, centralized process through USCIS by which individuals of all nationalities may apply to extend or re-designate their parole status and associated work authorization without associated fees or unreasonable delays; and (iii) make the process of applying for work authorization easier and more accessible. To that end, the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act ([S.255/H.R.1325](#)) would reduce the waiting period for work authorization from 180 days to 30 days after applying for asylum.
- **Rejecting unjust and counterproductive laws and policies**, such as fast-track deportation programs, including the “enhanced expedited removal” program that pushes people through rushed asylum screenings while in CBP custody and the “[Family Expedited Removal Management Program](#)” that applies blanket surveillance mechanisms for families undergoing rushed asylum screenings. These policies create numerous [barriers](#) to due process in the asylum process.

WHY: Immigration courts and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) have faced years of significant underfunding and understaffing, especially compared to immigration enforcement funding. This, combined with counterproductive and harmful policy and systems changes, has resulted in unprecedented [asylum processing backlogs](#), with many community members waiting in limbo for years for their cases to be determined. Legal representation [helps](#) the immigration system function more fairly and efficiently while protecting due process rights. Access to legal counsel helps to ensure that the government is not sending refugees—including children—back to danger for failure to adequately hear their claims for protection.

4. Strengthen existing pathways and create new pathways to the United States.

HOW: The U.S. government must continue to [support refugee resettlement and humanitarian parole programs, as well as to build regular, equitable pathways](#) in the United States. This includes [investing](#) in overseas and domestic refugee infrastructure. **Expanding and creating new pathways should complement - never replace - robust asylum access at the U.S. border.** In addition, the U.S. government needs to:

- Expand eligibility for refugee resettlement and expand legal pathways offered through Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) in various countries, while maintaining speed in processing.
- Complete processing of all Obama-era Central American Minors (CAM) Program cases and streamline processing of all pending CAM applications.
- Expand the use of the family reunification parole programs by (i) issuing more invitations to eligible petitioners; (ii) expanding the program to cover applicants from all countries, particularly family members facing significant [delays](#) in visa backlogs; and (iii) including refugee family reunification applicants.
- Double down on support and diplomatic advocacy for refugee reception and protection capacities in other countries, while setting a strong example by upholding asylum at the US borders.

WHY: Many people seek safety at the U.S.-Mexico border because *there are no viable alternatives* to obtain meaningful protection. [Punishing](#) asylum seekers to deter them from seeking safety, causes disparate harm to Black, Indigenous, Brown, women, and LGBTQ+ people, and undermines the United States' humanitarian and legal obligations. Furthermore, these policies fail to meet the forced migration caused by climate change, conflict, persecution, and economic uncertainty around the world.

Conclusion

There are a number of smart, practical solutions that can help the United States live up to its ideals of championing human rights and protecting refugees. This requires creative thinking to make the most of limited resources, adherence to refugee law, and a departure from failed asylum restrictions and bans, which exacerbate humanitarian and operational challenges.