

WORLD *Refugee Day*

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

2011 Edition



**Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service**

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Introduction: Tell the Story, Be the Voice

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been drastically underfunded for decades, to the detriment of refugees and the agencies that serve them. The current economic crisis has made more evident the need for more government support. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is antiquated and in urgent need of structural reform and increases in funding.

While everyone's voice is needed, organizations that provide refugee resettlement and community integration services can play a particularly powerful role in advocating for change. Resettlement organizations represent hundreds or thousands of refugees, staff, and supportive community members who are directly affected by refugee policies and who can best tell the story of what refugees need and what they contribute to your community.

This toolkit will help you tell the story of refugee resettlement in the United States, be the voice that will bring about change in our nation's refugee policies, and invite others to join you in advocating for just and compassionate reform.

Advocacy Ideas for Your World Refugee Day Event

Invite your members of Congress to attend your event.

- Find representatives' addresses at house.gov. Find senators' addresses at senate.gov.
- If any officials cannot attend, invite their local staff to attend.
- Arrange for refugees to meet with officials at the event.
- *See page 5 for a sample invitation letter.*

Organize visits to members of Congress.

- Recruit a small group of resettlement professionals and former refugees.
- Meet to plan what you will say to your senator or representative.
- Contact the member's local office to schedule the meeting.
- *See page 8 for more information on visiting members of Congress.*

Organize calls to members of Congress.

- Create a flyer inviting community members to call their elected officials about refugee issues.
- List talking points for the call.
- Provide members' local phone numbers or the Capitol switchboard number: 202-224-3121.
- Distribute the flyer at your World Refugee Day event or in your congregation or community.
- *See page 9 for more information on calling members of Congress.*

Organize postcards or letters to members of Congress.

- Provide sample letters (page 11) for staff of resettlement agencies to use as a guide.
- Print postcards (page 12) on cardstock of any color for participants to fill out at your World Refugee Day event. Ask them to write to both of their senators and their representative.
- Collect the postcards and letters and either deliver them to senators' and representatives' local offices, or mail them to LIRS Advocacy Office, 122 C Street NW, Suite 125, Washington, D.C. 20001 so LIRS staff can deliver them to their Washington offices.
- *See page 11 for more information on writing to members of Congress.*

Collect refugee stories.

Refugee voices have a powerful effect on listeners. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's advocacy staff in Washington, D.C., can help relay those voices to decision-makers in our nation's halls of power.

- Ask former refugees in your community to write their stories, or record (audio or video) their stories.
- If you work with refugees, write or record your story about the challenges and triumphs you experience in your work.
- Send all stories with signed release forms (page 14) to LIRS Advocacy Office, 122 C Street NW, Suite 125, Washington, D.C. 20001.
- *See page 13 for more information on collecting refugee stories.*

Inviting Members of Congress to Attend Your World Refugee Day Event

Sample Letter

[Date]

The Honorable [full name of Senator/Representative]
[U.S. Senate/U.S. House of Representatives]
[room number] [name of congressional office building]
Washington DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

I write to invite you to invite you to take part in [name of the event], a celebration of World Refugee Day sponsored by [agency name]. Our celebration of refugees will take place on [date, time] at [location]. World Refugee Day, observed June 20 each year, is dedicated to honor the contributions of refugees resettled in our communities and to remember refugees in camps and settlements around the world who still await a permanent home.

Would you join us in celebrating the contributions of refugees in [city]? [Describe the event].

Thousands of refugees are brought to the United States every year because they cannot return to their home countries and do not enjoy basic rights in the country where they sought refuge. Hundreds are resettled in [state]. [Agency name] helps these refugees integrate quickly into our community by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, clothing, medical attention, education, English-language classes, and community orientation.

Since 1939, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has resettled over 372,000 refugees in communities across the country, including over 10,000 in 2010. [Agency name] partnered with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to welcome [X number] refugees to [city or region] last year. Since we began resettling refugees in [year], over [X number] refugees from [X number] countries have embarked on a path to reach their full potential and enjoy safety, security, and a second chance in life.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program was established by an Act of Congress in 1980 and is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy that is rooted in communities. The program is a highly successful public-private partnership in which federal assistance is augmented by funds raised by communities across the country. Refugees have given back by starting businesses, revitalizing towns, and becoming productive members of the communities that welcomed them. Many become American citizens and see their children graduate from U.S. schools.

We would be honored if you attend our event to celebrate and share time with refugees resettled in our community. Refugees are a testament to the United States' long, proud history as a sanctuary for those who seek lives free from violence and oppression. Join us celebrating this great tradition!

Regards,
[your signature]
[your printed name]
[title, affiliation]
[contact information]

The Reforms We Want

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service fights vigorously for meaningful reforms to the U.S. refugee and asylum systems. Protecting those who have been persecuted is a proud American tradition and a cornerstone of U.S. humanitarian policy.

Reforming Refugee Policy

Since the 1970s, the United States has welcomed over 2.8 million refugees, and that is worth celebrating. But the Refugee Act of 1980 is antiquated and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is in crisis. The program's mandate has grown without corresponding financial support. The changing needs of a more diverse refugee population and the challenges of an economic downturn have left newly arrived refugees with almost no safety net.

LIRS calls for a greater investment in the program that will give refugees the tools they need to rebuild their lives and contribute invaluable resources to the U.S. economy and culture. We want the following reforms:

- **Address the needs of the current diverse population.** A one-size-fits-all approach to resettlement no longer meets the needs of diverse populations in all the migrant categories now served by the admissions program.
- **Increase funding for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.** Funding levels have not kept up with the cost of living, and transition support has dropped from 18 months to eight months.
- **Improve coordination.** The admissions program has become increasingly complex. Better coordination and information-sharing about refugee arrivals among all actors—federal, state, and voluntary agencies—are needed to bring the program into the 21st century.
- **Prioritize family unity.** It has become increasingly difficult for resettled refugees to reunite with family members overseas.
- **Improve services.** Find ways to more holistically address refugee needs including community integration, health and mental health, cultural orientation, and language acquisition.

Reforming Asylum Policy

The Refugee Act of 1980 also established the legal status of “asylum.” But over the years new laws, policies and legal interpretations have undermined the institution of asylum and led the United States to deny protection to victims of persecution.

LIRS calls for a greater commitment to a humane and just asylum system. We want the following reforms:

- **Create basic due process safeguards for asylum seekers.**
- **Remove barriers to asylum including unnecessary filing deadlines, expedited screening procedures, and maritime interdiction polices.**
- **Stop defining victims of terrorism as terrorists in overly broad interpretations of the law.**
- **Prioritize the reunification of asylees with vulnerable family members.**
- **Ensure fair and efficient procedures for arriving asylum seekers.**

Advocating with Members of Congress

Close relationships with members of Congress is a key factor in getting the policy reforms we want. Direct advocacy can make the difference in votes for more funding for refugee programs. While all constituents are encouraged to let their elected officials hear their voices, refugee resettlement professionals and former refugees themselves are in an especially good position to educate lawmakers on the challenges and triumphs that new arrivals face.

The goals of advocacy with members of Congress include

- understanding their interests and their position on the issues,
- helping them understand what their constituents think and want,
- adding your voice to that of other advocates for a stronger impact,
- getting a commitment of support for refugee resettlement, and
- building relationships with public officials whose decisions influence your community.

Proper preparation will make your advocacy efforts more effective:

- **Do basic research on your members of Congress.** Do they sit on committees that oversee funding for refugee programs? For instance, the Labor/Health and Human Services Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee funds ORR; the State Foreign Operations Subcommittee funds PRM. What has been their stance on previous refugee and immigration issues? Their websites and other online sources will be good resources for this research.
- **Share information about yourself.** Be prepared to give your mailing address or ZIP code so they can ensure you are a constituent. If your office is not in the district of the member you are calling, explain that you serve refugee clients in or near the district. Share specific facts and figures about your office, services your agency provides, and a brief and compelling story about a refugee you have assisted.
- **Review the issues and your message.** Make sure you have a firm grasp of the issues and current legislation so you can speak articulately about them. For instance, Refugee Council USA has background materials on funding for Migration and Refugee Assistance (tinyurl.com/6ec48rv) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (tinyurl.com/6z8wwzk).
- **Have pen and paper on hand.** For phone calls and in-person meetings, be prepared to write down staffer names, contact information, and any relevant notes from the contact.

The next few pages provide specific guidance on advocacy in person, by phone, and in writing.

Advocacy in Person

Be sure you have read the general information on advocating with members of Congress on page 7.

Close relationships with members of Congress is a key factor in getting the policy reforms we want. Taking the time to meet with elected officials in their home-district offices communicates a significant level of serious commitment to the issues you care about.

In-person lobbying visits are part of a larger process of gathering information, building relationships, and developing advocacy strategies. If your members of Congress are not available to meet in person, meeting with their staff members is still a valuable way of building relationships and conveying your concerns.

What process should you follow for your meeting?

1. **The pre-meeting meeting.** Meet ahead of time to assign roles for the meeting, including introducing the group, explaining any materials you will bring, taking the lead on discussing each issue, making the ask, and redirecting the conversation if it goes off course. Follow the plan, allowing for some flexibility so participants can supplement what others say.
2. **The meeting.**
 - **Introduce yourselves.** You have important credentials: First, you are constituents. Second, as refugee service providers and former refugees, you are experts on the issues you are meeting to discuss. Third, you represent other constituents and will be reporting back to them the outcomes of the meeting.
 - **Present the issues.** Explain how important it is for migrants and refugees who have fled violence and persecution to find a safe home, stable employment, and a quality education. Explain how current legislation would help or harm former refugees.
 - **Listen.** Ask where your members of Congress stand on the issues. Get an understanding of their stand and their interests.
 - **Make the ask.** Don't just tell your members of Congress what you want, ask them to support you! "Can we count on your support on this measure?" Listen carefully for information about the member's specific position and concerns. Ask for clarification if what he or she says is vague.
3. **After the meeting.** Debrief with your group: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? How did we work together as a team? Send an e-mail to the member of Congress or the staffer, expressing your thanks for the meeting and sending any additional relevant materials and information. Also e-mail dc@lirs.org to let Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's advocacy staff know that you met with your members of Congress. When LIRS staff meet with your members' staff in D.C., they can remind them of your conversation.

Advocacy by Phone

Be sure you have read the general information on advocating with members of Congress on page 7.

Calling the offices of your members of Congress could make the difference in their support for refugee-related legislation. When you call your senator's or representative's office, ask to speak with a staffer who has expertise on immigration and refugee issues. While anyone can call, refugee resettlement professionals and former refugees themselves are in an especially good position to educate lawmakers on issues that new arrivals face and express constituent positions on current legislation.

Make sure to mention how important it is for those we serve who have fled violence and persecution, to find a safe home, stable employment, and a quality education. Ask the Member to help welcome refugees in your district by legislatively helping to ease their transition.

Making the call

The sample script on the following page will guide you in your phone call. Remember to be yourself! If you are prepared to share the story of your agency and community and the issues that concern you, your passion will be evident and you will establish a warm connection with the staffers you call.

After the call

Send a follow-up e-mail to the congressional staffers you spoke with. Provide additional materials and repeat your asks for their boss's support of refugee-related legislation. Respond to questions that came up during the call. Also e-mail dc@lirs.org to let Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's advocacy staff know that you contacted your members of Congress. When LIRS staff visit your representatives' and senators' offices in D.C., they can remind them of your conversation.

Sample Script

You: Hello, my name is [your name] and I'm calling from [name of town]. May I please speak to the staffer who handles refugee issues for [representative's or senator's name]?

Receptionist: Sure, that's [staffer's name]. I'll connect you. (NOTE: If they do not have a staff member who specializes in refugee issues, ask for someone who handles appropriations, immigration, or international issues for the member. Write down the name. If you are transferred to voicemail, see the "Sample Voicemail" script below.)

You: Hello, my name is [your name] and I am the [position title] at [name of resettlement agency] in [name of city]. I am calling to ask for your boss's support of refugees in communities like ours by supporting legislative initiatives that would better welcome refugees. My agency resettles and provides services to refugees in [name towns/cities in the member's district]. [Describe your agency's resettlement program and discuss positive impact refugees have on communities in or near the member's district.]

(NOTE: If you are speaking with a **senator's** staffer, say this.) Bills like Senator Leahy's Refugee Protection Act 2010, which was introduced last year as S.3113, would provide additional protections for asylum seekers and refugees. Please also support adequate funding for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement.

(NOTE: If you are speaking with a **representative's** staffer, say this.) Please support H.R. 1475, the Domestic Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act. The bill would help refugees' self-sufficiency and integration into our communities. Please also support adequate funding for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement.

When do you think you will be able to speak with your boss about this? When can I follow up with you? (Note response and make plans to follow up.)

Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to contact me at [your phone number] if you have any questions about these refugee accounts or the U.S. refugee resettlement program in general.

Sample Voicemail Message

Hello, my name is [your name] and I am the [position title] at [name of resettlement agency] in [name of city]. We help to resettle refugees in [name towns/cities in the member's district]. I am calling to ask for [representative's or senator's name]'s support of legislation that would help refugees.

(NOTE: If you are calling a **senator's** office, say this.) Bills like Senator Leahy's Refugee Protection Act 2010, which was introduced last year as S.3113, would provide additional protections for asylum seekers and refugees. Please also support adequate funding for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement.

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[Describe your agency's resettlement program and discuss positive impact refugees have on communities in or near the member's district.] Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact me at [your phone number] if you have any questions. I look forward to your boss's leadership on these important issues!

Advocacy in Writing

Be sure you have read the general information on advocating with members of Congress on page 7.

Use the sample letter below as the basis for advocacy letters or print the postcards on the following page to allow event participants to write brief messages. Collect the postcards and letters and either deliver them to senators' and representatives' local offices, or mail them to *LIRS Advocacy Office, 122 C Street NW, Suite 125, Washington, D.C. 20001* so LIRS staff can deliver them by hand to D.C. congressional offices.

Sample Letter

[Date]

The Honorable [full name of Senator/Representative]
[U.S. Senate/U.S. House of Representatives]
[room number] [name of congressional office building]
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

On behalf of [agency name] and the refugees we welcome to our community, I am writing to urge you to support robust funding for the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. Refugees are often of special humanitarian concern to the United States and are a testament to our nation's long, proud history as a sanctuary for those who seek lives free from violence and oppression. To be admitted to the United States, refugees must demonstrate that they fear persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

[Agency name] helps these refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, clothing, medical attention, education, English-language classes, and community orientation. We help refugees integrate quickly into our community. [Describe positive impact refugees have on your community.]

(NOTE: If you are writing to a **senator**, say this.) I urge you to support legislation such as Sen. Leahy's Refugee Protection Act 2010, which was introduced last year as S.3113, would provide additional protections for asylum seekers and refugees. Please also support adequate funding for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement.

(NOTE: If you are writing to a **representative**, say this.) I urge you to support H.R. 1475, the Domestic Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act. The bill would help refugees' self-sufficiency and integration into our communities. Please also support adequate funding for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement.

On June 20 we celebrate World Refugee Day. This year we also mark the 60th anniversary of the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. These are wonderful occasions for the United States to renew our commitment to welcome refugees and those in crisis, especially when humanitarian needs around the world are increasing. Thank you for your public service and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Regards,
[your signature]
[your printed name]
[title, affiliation]
[contact information]

Dear member of Congress,

In honor of World Refugee Day, June 20, we urge you to renew your commitment to welcoming refugees in your community. Please provide robust funding for refugee assistance and resettlement and support H.R. 1475, bipartisan legislation to reform and modernize refugee resettlement.

Personal note:

Sincerely,

Signature

Printed Name

E-Mail Address

Home Address

City, State ZIP

Church



Lutheran Immigration
& Refugee Service

www.lirs.org



Download this postcard and other resources at www.lirs.org/wrd

**DON'T
FORGET
POSTAGE**

Dear member of Congress,

In honor of World Refugee Day, June 20, we urge you to renew your commitment to welcoming refugees in your community. Please provide robust funding for refugee assistance and resettlement and support H.R. 1475, bipartisan legislation to reform and modernize refugee resettlement.

Personal note:

Sincerely,

Signature

Printed Name

E-Mail Address

Home Address

City, State ZIP

Church



Lutheran Immigration
& Refugee Service

www.lirs.org



Download this postcard and other resources for World Refugee Day at www.lirs.org/wrd

**DON'T
FORGET
POSTAGE**



Collecting Refugee Stories

Members of Congress need to learn about the experiences of refugees in the communities they represent in order to understand what is at stake as they consider legislation that affects refugees. When you share your stories with LIRS, we will use them to make a more effective case for why Congress should act to protect refugees and increase funding for the programs that serve refugees.

We welcome all stories via writing, audio, photography, and video. Whatever media you choose, please get signed release forms (see page 13) and send your stories to dc@lirs.org.

We need stories that illustrate the following:

- Refugees contribute to our economy by starting businesses, revitalizing neighborhoods, and pursuing education.
- Refugees participate in our communities by volunteering, helping other refugees, engaging in community services, and being active in churches.
- Refugee service providers face challenges and celebrate triumphs as they work to resettle refugees.
- Refugees face many challenges as they integrate into our communities and strive for self-sufficiency.
- Communities show their support for refugees and the agencies that serve them. Religious congregations, social organizations, and businesses all participate in welcoming refugees.

Feel free to also contact us if you have questions or suggestions.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication in bringing the impact of legislation to life.



I hereby grant an employee or other representative of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) permission to interview, photograph, and/or audiovisually record me or my minor dependent. I further authorize the use of any image, story, or recording thus obtained by LIRS in any print or electronic media, including current and future educational, editorial, or promotional publications by LIRS. I will make no monetary or other claim against LIRS for the use of such interviews, photographs or videos, and I understand that LIRS makes no promise to publish them.

For Adult Subjects (18 or Over)

Printed Name of Adult Subject

Signature of Adult Subject

Date

Address

City, State, ZIP Code

Phone Number with Area Code

For Minor Subjects (Under 18)

Printed Name of Minor Subject

Printed Name of Minor Subject's Parent or Guardian

Signature of Minor Subject's Parent or Guardian

Relation to Minor Subject

For LIRS Use Only

Name of Interviewer/Photographer/Videographer



I hereby grant an employee or other representative of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) permission to interview, photograph, and/or audiovisually record me or my minor dependent. I further authorize the use of any image, story, or recording thus obtained by LIRS in any print or electronic media, including current and future educational, editorial, or promotional publications by LIRS. I will make no monetary or other claim against LIRS for the use of such interviews, photographs or videos, and I understand that LIRS makes no promise to publish them.

For Adult Subjects (18 or Over)

Printed Name of Adult Subject

Signature of Adult Subject

Date

Address

City, State, ZIP Code

Phone Number with Area Code

For Minor Subjects (Under 18)

Printed Name of Minor Subject

Printed Name of Minor Subject's Parent or Guardian

Signature of Minor Subject's Parent or Guardian

Relation to Minor Subject

For LIRS Use Only

Name of Interviewer/Photographer/Videographer