

## Interfaith Migration FY25 Funding Priorities

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC) consists of over 50 national faith-based organizations brought together by a common call to seek just policies that lift up the God-given dignity of every individual. With Congress turning to the task of funding the federal government, we seek to partner with federal legislators to pass appropriations legislation that reflects our collective national priorities and values. How leaders respond to the challenges and opportunities of modern migration will be a defining moment in the history of the United States.

At the end of 2023, 114 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, including millions of refugees and asylum seekers, as a result of conflict, persecution, human rights violations, and climate disasters.<sup>1</sup> The extreme vulnerability and widespread insecurity experienced by migrants and refugees, while in transit, at borders, when reaching their destination, and upon return, reinforces the importance of international protection and just and humane immigration policies.

The United States has historically provided hope for people facing persecution or otherwise in need of protection, working with faith communities across the country and the globe to welcome with dignity and protect persons on the move. In furtherance of these goals, the U.S. government endorsed the vision of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration at the end of 2021.<sup>2</sup> The Global Compact is based on international human rights law and upholds the principles of non-regression and non-discrimination.

As Congress begins work on FY 2025 appropriations bills, now is the time to invest in refugee protection and resettlement and an asylum system that is humane and just. The government's immigration spending decisions provide a key opportunity to make sound investments that increase our nation's collective capacity, adequately meet the needs of frontline responders and communities, and enhance coordination at all levels. In addition to fully funding the government and responding to any emergency requests, we strongly oppose changes to asylum policy that would have negative repercussions on individuals, children, and families seeking safety or deprive them of their right to seek asylum. In 2022, the U.S.-Mexico border was named the world's deadliest land migration route due to the high number of deaths and disappearances.<sup>3</sup> Policies of deterrence have not made a meaningful difference on irregular migration. On the contrary, the false promises of deterrence have instead put more children, women, families, and other vulnerable and at-risk people who are fleeing in danger at greater risk.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that unequal access to safe, orderly, and legal paths drives up smuggling and redirects people traveling irregularly to more dangerous routes where they may have less access to humanitarian assistance.<sup>5</sup>

As President Biden stated in his 2021 Executive Order on creating a comprehensive regional framework on migration: "Securing our borders does not require us to ignore the humanity of those who seek to cross them. The opposite is true."<sup>6</sup>

"Securing our borders does not require us to ignore the humanity of those who seek to cross them. The opposite is true." –President Joseph R. Biden

We are called by our sacred texts to love our neighbor, accompany people forced to migrate, and welcome the sojourner. Our places of worship have historically played key roles in assisting migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. For people of faith, no matter where someone came from or how they arrived in the United States, their life is inherently holy and valuable, and they should be treated with dignity and respect. Faith communities continue to stand ready to welcome all who seek safety in the U.S.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/six-humanitarian-crises-that-impacted-refugees-and-displaced-communities-in-2023/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/GCM.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/us-mexico-border-worlds-deadliest-migration-land-route>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.jrsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/04/Final\\_JRS\\_2024\\_Policy-Brief\\_Navigating-U.S.-Mexico-Border-JU2.pdf](https://www.jrsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/04/Final_JRS_2024_Policy-Brief_Navigating-U.S.-Mexico-Border-JU2.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Sanchez, Gabriella and Luigi Achilli. "Stranded: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Irregular Migration and Migrant Smuggling". Migration Policy Centre, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute. [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67069/PB\\_2020\\_20\\_MPC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67069/PB_2020_20_MPC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/02/executive-order-creating-a-comprehensive-regional-framework-to-address-the-causes-of-migration-to-manage-migration-throughout-north-and-central-america-and-to-provide-safe-and-orderly-processing/>

We reiterate the importance of addressing the factors driving forced migrations such as violence, environmental catastrophe, persecution, and extreme poverty and inequality around the world. We look forward to faithful partnership with Congress to continue our work to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of all immigrants, refugees, and migrants.

## Safety & Dignity for Asylum Seekers

The right to seek asylum is the rule of law in the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) 8 USC 1158(a)(1) states: “Any alien who is physically present in the United States or who arrives in the United States (whether or not at a designated port of arrival and including an alien who is brought to the United States after having been interdicted in international or United States waters), irrespective of such alien’s status, may apply for asylum in accordance with this section or, where applicable, section 1225(b) of this title.”<sup>7</sup> The nation has a clear legal and moral imperative to uphold the right to seek refuge. The U.S. government should invest in practices that ensure the safety and dignity of those arriving at its borders seeking asylum, establish orderly and safe border processing, reception, and onward transition frameworks, and provide the necessary resources to have a fair and efficient adjudication of cases.<sup>8</sup>

For people of faith, no matter where someone came from or how they arrived in the United States, their life is inherently holy and valuable, and they should be treated with dignity and respect.

### *The Interfaith Immigration Coalition Recommends:*

- Increasing funds in the FY25 Homeland Security Appropriations bill to aid the processing, coordination, and continuum of care for asylum seekers and migrants through the Shelter and Services Program (SSP), the Destination Reception Fund (DRF), and the Case Management Pilot Program (CMPP) by:
  - Providing sufficient funding for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) Office of Field Operations to process asylum seekers at ports of entry.<sup>9</sup>
  - Providing **\$4.5 billion for SSP grants** under CBP/the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist the immediate reception of new arrivals led by localities, non-governmental organizations, and many faith organizations. Without additional funding, recipients of SSP will not be able to carry out a coordinated and sustainable welcome. Notably, Congress appropriated \$650 million in FY24 for SSP.
  - Providing **\$500 million for the DRF**—reactivating an emergency fund from the 1990’s—under CBP/FEMA would continue the original fund’s purpose to reimburse interior cities receiving asylum seekers.<sup>10</sup>
  - Allocating **\$100 million for CMPP** under the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (FY24 funding levels equal \$15 million) will contribute to a continuum of structured and effective services to facilitate the transition to self-sufficiency for new arrivals. Community-based case management programs like CMPP are cost-effective, and early results from the program show a nearly 100% compliance rate with immigration court proceedings.<sup>11</sup>
- Increasing funding for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in the Homeland Security appropriations bill for FY25 including by:
  - Providing \$500 million in funding for USCIS to address the employment authorization document backlog and the affirmative asylum backlog, as well as allocating an additional \$100 million to enhance electronic processing at USCIS for a total of **\$600 million**.
- Funding the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Department of Justice (CJS) and Homeland Security appropriations bills for FY25 including:
  - Providing the necessary funding for the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to provide fair and efficient adjudications through the hiring of additional judge teams.
  - Providing **\$755 million to hire an additional 1,600 USCIS asylum officers** and support staff, aligned with the President’s FY25 request.

Asylum seekers make up an increasing share of our communities. As our newest neighbors, we believe they can contribute greatly to the prosperity of this country if granted an earlier opportunity to support themselves, families, and wider communities.

<sup>7</sup> 8 U.S. Code § 1158

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/sustainable-orderly-and-safe-reception-at-the-us-mexico-border-recommendations-for-the-shelter-and-services-program/>

<sup>9</sup> The administration began requiring CBP One appointments for asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry. While access to asylum should not be contingent on an app, and is, in fact, not required under current law, it is important that processing at ports of entry scales up to meet needs. See:

<https://www.strauscenter.org/publications/asylum-processing-at-the-u-s-mexico-border-august-2023/>

<sup>10</sup> Public Law 101-649 Sec. 404(b)(2)(A) of the Immigration Act of 1990

<sup>11</sup> Furnished from internal data reviewed by Church World Service.

- Eliminating regulatory barriers, particularly the 180-day asylum clock, currently hindering asylum seekers from obtaining work authorization in a timely manner.

## Humane Immigration Practices

Federal immigration enforcement practices must be responsible, humane, and just. Individuals often have to navigate the complexities of the immigration system without assistance. We believe in facilitating access to legal information to keep families and communities together, and are troubled by the rapid expansion of immigration detention.

### *The Interfaith Immigration Coalition Recommends:*

- Matching the President’s FY25 request of **\$179 million for Legal Access Programs** under the FY25 CJS bill to increase legal representation rates, and allocating an additional **\$150 million to expand programs to asylum seekers, families, people who speak rare languages, and those deprived of their liberty while awaiting their court hearings.**
- Correcting action on the harmful, costly, and morally alarming expansion of immigration detention to 41,500 single adult beds in the FY24 Homeland Security Appropriations Act. Community-based solutions that support community safety at a reduced cost to American tax-payers, such as the noted CMPP, are more humane, efficient, and cost-effective alternatives to detention.
- Continuing to eliminate any funding for family detention.

## International Assistance

It is essential for any migration strategy to address the economic, social, environmental, and political factors compelling migration. Forced migration is a symptom of deeper human security issues, including oppression, violence, insecurity, and unequal social and economic conditions. The International Disaster Assistance (IDA) and Western Hemisphere accounts in the State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations (SFOPs) bill provide vital funding to programs that are the backbone of U.S. humanitarian assistance.

### *The Interfaith Immigration Coalition Recommends:*

- Funding the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account.
  - Allocating **\$4.85 billion for IDA** in the FY25 SFOPs bill. The IDA account is the largest source of funding for the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, with programs reaching hundreds of millions of people. IDA dollars save lives and prevent internally displaced people from needing to flee their home countries and become refugees.
- Funding bilateral assistance to Latin American and Caribbean countries in the FY25 SFOPs bill.
  - Providing economic funding for addressing forced migration in the Western Hemisphere by supporting community-led livelihood and good governance initiatives and, in part, supporting funding for diplomatic assistance for the Safe Mobility Offices initiative in the Americas to facilitate access to safe migration pathways. This funding should not come at the expense of efforts around the world to protect those in need. We do not support funding going towards assisting other governments with border enforcement and deportations that force migrants to journey through more dangerous routes. We also oppose funding restrictions for entities in the Latin American and Caribbean region offering critical humanitarian aid to migrants in transit.

## Refugee Protection

The world currently faces the greatest displacement crisis in history: conflict, climate disaster, and persecution are expected to displace over [130 million](#) people in 2024. Nearly half are minor children. To respond to this rising global need and support refugees, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolees, and other newcomers here in the U.S., Congress and the administration must work together to strengthen the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) with an emphasis on long-term resilience and sustainability. Key refugee accounts like the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account and the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account have faced sharp cuts in FY24 from enacted funding in previous fiscal years. In FY25—or additional supplemental appropriations efforts in FY24—Congress must robustly fund domestic and overseas programs that promote stability and human dignity and expand U.S. communities’ capacity to successfully welcome refugees and other newcomers.

### *The Interfaith Immigration Coalition Recommends:*

- Funding the Office of Refugee Resettlement by:
  - Providing the **Refugee and Entrant Assistance Account (REA) with \$11.795 billion.** REA funding goes directly to state and local communities who welcome newcomers, supporting the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in implementing integration services such as job training, English language classes, and

refugee School Impact Grants. ORR supports populations including refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, unaccompanied children, and survivors of torture.

- Funding Migration & Refugee Assistance (MRA) and the Emergency Migration and Refugee Assistance (ERMA) by:
  - Providing **\$4.447 billion<sup>12</sup> for the MRA account and \$100 million as a baseline level for ERMA** to support overseas refugee support and processing as well as humanitarian needs in the Western Hemisphere to promote access to regular pathways to migration and international protection, including support for integration and regularization.
- Restoring access to benefits to arriving Afghans and Ukrainians that the U.S. government has pledged to protect.
  - Congress authorized – and repeatedly extended – eligibility for certain ORR and mainstream benefits to Afghan and Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolees, but has failed to extend reauthorization of these benefits beyond September 30, 2023, causing a profound and increasingly disruptive pause in service provision for recent arrivals. The IIC urges Congress to include a retroactive extension in eligibility of benefits for Afghans and Ukrainians who arrive between October 1, 2023 and September 30, 2025.

***The Interfaith Immigration Coalition’s recommendations for specific programs include:***

Account	FY25 Request
<b><i>Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2025</i></b>	
Executive Office for Immigration Review	\$ 981,133,000
Legal Access Programs	\$229,000,000
- Increase representation rates of current and new populations	
<b><i>Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2025</i></b>	
Case Management Pilot Program	\$100,000,000
Destination Reception Fund	\$500,000,000
Shelter and Services Program	\$4,500,000,000
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	\$600,000,000
- Backlog reduction and application processing	
- Transition to an electronic filing system	
<b><i>Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Act, 2025</i></b>	
Refugee and Entrant Assistance	\$11,795,341,000
<b><i>State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2025</i></b>	
International Disaster Assistance	\$4,850,000,000
Emergency Migration and Refugee Assistance	\$100,000,000
Migration and Refugee Assistance	\$4,447,236,000

<sup>12</sup> This request relies on the encouraged passage of an FY24 supplemental bill that includes \$4.345b for MRA. Note, the October 20, 2023 supplemental request included 3.495 billion for MRA in Attachment 3 (“Humanitarian Assistance”) and 850 million for MRA in Attachment 5 (“Border Supplemental Request”) for a combined 4.345 billion, which was not included in the FY24 SFOPs legislation.