



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Emergency Legal and Protection Support to Families Seeking Asylum in the U.S. HIAS Concept Note, June 2018

Context and Background

From the start of the Trump Administration, officials have prioritized radically changing the U.S. immigration and refugee protection systems. Their latest efforts placed targets on the backs of families who are attempting to seek asylum by entering the U.S. through the southern border. In mid-June, Attorney General Sessions announced a new “zero-tolerance” policy, meant to deter families from finding protection in the United States. This policy introduced the criminal prosecution of families who arrive in between official ports of entry, even though seeking asylum is not illegal. As a result of the criminal prosecutions, more than 2,000 children were separated from their families. Although separation occurred at the border, family members and children have been sent to locations all over the United States, and they will need legal help in reuniting and filing asylum claims all over the country.

After a tremendous outpouring of outrage, last week, President Trump issued a new Executive Order. The EO does not stop the misguided zero-tolerance policy and it seeks to ramp up family detention. Although, in theory, families will no longer be torn apart, they will instead be forced to endure detention for indeterminate periods of time. There is ample evidence that shows that family detention is extremely harmful to children, and it had been generally understood that it should only be used as a last resort in the most extreme circumstances. The details of the Administration’s policies seemingly change by the day, but one thing remains clear: that this Administration remains deeply committed to eliminating protection for asylum seekers and refugees, through the shrinking of the US refugee program as well as through curtailing asylum protections.

In addition to providing critical legal and integration services for refugees and asylum seekers, HIAS is leading advocacy at the national and grassroots levels with the goal of restoring the U.S. refugee admissions program and ensuring that asylum seekers have access to a fair, humane asylum process. HIAS is a founding and leading member of Refugee Council USA, the national coalition of refugee resettlement, asylum service, and advocacy organizations. We are on the front lines of advocacy in Washington, and Jewish community activism around the country, on refugee and asylum issues. It is our core mission, every day, and has been so for 137 years.

HIAS’ Pro Bono Legal Service Program for Asylum Seekers in the U.S.

HIAS has supported refugees and asylum seekers for over 135 years. HIAS’ expert pro bono legal teams currently provide wraparound legal services for asylum seekers in New York City and the D.C. metro area, inclusive of removal defense, asylum, withholding of removal, Convention Against Torture protection, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, T visas for victims of trafficking, and U visas for victims of crime in the U.S. who are also torture survivors. Once granted initial status, HIAS offers continuous legal representation through adjustment of status to lawful permanent residency and citizenship.

Over the last 18 months, HIAS has implemented a holistic volunteer-support model for asylum seekers, training volunteers to act as mentors in accessing social services, medical and mental health services, educational opportunities, job training, and English language learning. These wraparound legal services promote self-sufficiency and prevent isolation, supporting asylum seekers to become active community members that lead productive lives.

HIAS' Response to Urgent Protection Needs in the U.S. and at the Border

HIAS is urgently seeking \$1 million from public, private, and individuals donors to build upon and expand our U.S. legal services and volunteer support program for asylum seekers, especially for families seeking asylum along the U.S. borders. HIAS designed a multi-pronged approach to meet critical protection and legal assistance needs, working with local congregations and community partners. This includes:

Immediate (July-August 2018)

1. ***Protection Needs Assessment at US/ Mexico Border:*** This critically needed assessment will allow HIAS to analyze access to as asylum protection on the US/ Mexico border, evaluate and consider services for those deported. This activity will leverage HIAS' asylum expertise, as well as experience conducting global border monitoring, most recently in Costa Rica and Panama. The assessment is organized for July-August, with the aim of designing a program to meet any identified needs.
2. ***Mobilize Volunteer Attorneys at the Border:*** HIAS will organize a series of volunteer-led attorney trips to the border to provide legal services to families in detention and build our network of committed and effective advocacy leaders around the country.

Short-Medium Term (July 2018-July 2019)

3. ***Development of National Pro Bono Network:*** HIAS will build our existing legal services in New York, DC, San Diego, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and the San Francisco bay area and expand our network of legal service responders to additional locations around the country to provide direct services to asylum seekers and help with family reunification. This will also include implementing HIAS' unique model of wraparound services in each site, as well as the volunteer mentorship program. This is a huge value add for traumatized families.

HIAS provides critical assistance to vulnerable refugees in the US and around the world with high-quality protection, legal and resettlement services. HIAS invites you to help us expand our efforts to respond to the devastating protection crisis at the U.S. border.