

FAQ about the HIAS Welcome Campaign

In March 2019, the Beth El Congregation Board voted to join the HIAS Welcome Campaign. We did so after collecting input from the congregation—we received over 60 comments, with over 90% of comments enthusiastically supporting joining the campaign. Many congregants were interested in volunteering with this effort, and at least 5 members of our congregation cited a time that HIAS helped their own family resettle in the US. In response to questions and comments we received, we prepared this Q&A.

What is the HIAS Welcome Campaign?

The Welcome Campaign is a network of congregations across the United States who are responding to the largest refugee crisis in human history. Based in our Jewish values and history, Welcome Campaign congregations are advocating for refugees, raising awareness about the crisis, and welcoming refugees into their local communities.

Through the Welcome Campaign, HIAS seeks to demonstrate the widespread support for refugees in the American Jewish community by highlighting the involvement and engagement of congregations and communities around the country.

How will Beth El Participate in the Welcome Campaign?

Two steps must be taken to join the Welcome Campaign:

1) Sign the following affirmative statement in support of refugees

We, Jewish congregations and communities from around the country, are signing onto HIAS' Welcome Campaign as an affirmative statement in support of welcoming refugees to the United States.

With over 60 million people displaced from their homes worldwide, we see the plight of contemporary refugees as simultaneously an alarming global crisis and an issue that resonates very deeply with Jewish history and values. Throughout history, the Jewish people have been forced to flee persecution and seek safety in other lands. Throughout history, we have been refugees. Today, inspired by the biblical injunction to "welcome the stranger," our communities call upon the government of the United States to rise to the leadership that this crisis warrants.

Individually, we, the congregations on this list, are taking action in a variety of ways including: educating others about refugees, advocating with elected officials, holding events and programs, raising money to support refugees, building partnerships and helping refugees in our local communities.

Together, we, the congregations on this list, comprise a powerful Jewish voice in support of refugees worldwide.

Once, the Jewish community helped refugees because they were Jewish. Now we help refugees because we are Jewish.

2) *Commit to engage our congregation or community in refugee issues in at least one meaningful way (e.g., education, advocacy, volunteering).*

Our congregation or community commits to responding to the global refugee crisis in at least one way in the next year. Beth El will focus on education about refugees generally and locally, and will offer local volunteer support for local refugees in the Triangle. HIAS defines its three major categories of engagement as: educating our community; welcoming and supporting local, newly arrived refugees; and advocacy.

Beth El will not provide congregational funds to support HIAS work or participate in direct lobbying of officials on behalf of the congregation. These opportunities may be shared with congregants to do so individually.

What is HIAS' role in the campaign?

By joining the HIAS Welcome Campaign, HIAS will provide congregations ongoing support, resources, and access to a network of communities that support welcoming refugees to the U.S. and who are engaging in the response to the global refugee crisis.

Who else has joined HIAS's Welcome Campaign?

Beth El is joining a community of 400 + congregations locally, regionally and nationally who are working to support refugees and connect through HIAS.

Judea Reform, the Kehillah, and Beth Meyer, 3 other Triangle synagogues, have also signed on the HIAS Welcome Campaign. Several Beth El members have been and are currently involved in refugee issues and many indicated that they support HIAS directly.

I understand HIAS changed their name to an acronym, what is that about? Is it still a Jewish organization?

The Board was not sure how to define a Jewish or non-Jewish organization, but found ample inclusion of Jewish values and relationships in HIAS' materials. In its [press materials](#), HIAS says the following about its name—"A note about our name: while we were founded as the *Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society*, people have called us "HIAS" for as long as we can recall and that has been our legal name for many decades. We suggest reporters refer to us as *HIAS, the global Jewish nonprofit that protects refugees.*"

We also asked HIAS how they describe their work--they answered, "*HIAS is the international refugee agency of the Jewish community. For over a century, our organization rescued, resettled, and cared for 4.5 million Jewish refugees, from around the world, and we estimate that the families of over half of American Jews were helped by HIAS at some point. Today, we help refugees regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion based in our Jewish values and history.*"

[HIAS lists numerous resettlement partners](#), including 12 Jewish Family Service or Jewish Social Services organizations around the country.

[This article](#) also describes its name change and quotes Mark Hetfield as saying that “the word “Hebrew” is “exclusionary and outdated, much as the word ‘colored’ is to refer to African Americans.” This comment resonated with the Board, which noted that we refer to ourselves as “Jewish” or “Jews”, not “Hebrews”.

Finally, the Board reviewed HIAS’ mission and values, which are on its website:

Mission

HIAS rescues people whose lives are in danger for being who they are.

- *We protect the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reuniting them with their families in safety and freedom.*
- *We advocate for the protection of refugees and assure that displaced people are treated with the dignity they deserve.*

Guided by our Jewish values and history, we bring more than 130 years of expertise to our work with refugees.

Values

Impassioned by our mission, we bring the lessons of HIAS’ history and Jewish ethics and experience to our commitment to serve refugees and other displaced persons of concern around the world through the following values: Welcoming, Dignity and Respect, Empowerment, Excellence and Innovation, Collaboration and Teamwork, and Accountability.

Does HIAS partner with Linda Sarsour or organizations that support BDS?

We contacted HIAS with this question and they told us that “*HIAS has not directly engaged with Linda Sarsour, but HIAS’ President/CEO Mark Hetfield did sign a letter along with other Jewish leaders denouncing the threats to her life, as part of our commitment to speaking out against hate in its many forms.*” You can find a copy of the May 2017 [letter here](#). It condemns “*the recent attacks on and threats to Linda Sarsour*”, stating “*We may not agree with Sarsour on all matters. We do not offer our stamp of approval to every tweet or message she has ever posted....With Sarsour and others, we work as allies on issues of shared concern and respectfully disagree when our views diverge.*”

What is the scope of HIAS work with refugees, e.g. what countries do the refugees come from?

HIAS’ work spans multiple continents and multiple approaches, but all comes together with one clear purpose: to protect the rights of refugees. HIAS serves hundreds of thousands of refugees through international programs in places such as Kenya, Ecuador, Panama, Israel, Chad, and the Greek island of Lesbos. HIAS is one of the nine national resettlement agencies, resettling refugees in 20 communities in the US. Last year, HIAS resettled 1,633 refugees from countries including DRC, Myanmar, Bhutan, Ukraine and Eritrea. The NY and Silver Spring offices served 162 asylum seeker clients last year, which

truly represents a drop in the bucket of HIAS's work, given the rapid expansion of their legal team both in those cities and in multiple locations along the U.S./Mexico border.

In addition, HIAS advocates for the rights and protection of refugees both on the Hill and in the community. Initiatives such as the HIAS Welcome Campaign engage the Jewish community in taking action for refugees and advocating for their safety and welfare.

Does HIAS serve any Jewish refugees?

We asked HIAS this question and they said, *"Still today, we continue to serve Jewish refugees who are forced to flee because of religious persecution. For example, we have helped to welcome thousands of Jews and other religious minorities from Iran. Currently, there are not refugees fleeing from anti-Semitism in Europe, but should that ever happen, we be there to support them as we have so many other Jewish refugee populations."*

What is a refugee, how is that different from immigrants that come to the US through other laws? How does the refugee program work?

[From the US Department of State website--](#)

Refugee Resettlement in the United States

The United States is proud of its history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. The U.S. refugee resettlement program reflects the United States' highest values and aspirations to compassion, generosity and leadership. Since 1975, the United States has accepted more than 3.3 million refugees for permanent resettlement – more than any other country in the world. The United States will continue to prioritize the admission of the most vulnerable refugees while upholding the safety and security of the American people.

Resettlement: The Solution for Only a Few

A refugee is someone who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The first step for most refugees is to register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the country to which s/he has fled. UNHCR has the mandate to provide international protection to refugees. UNHCR determines if an individual qualifies as a refugee and, if so, works toward the best possible durable solution for each refugee: safe return to the home country, local integration, or third-country resettlement.

According to UNHCR's latest statistics, there are approximately 25.4 million refugees in the world. The vast majority of these refugees will receive support in the country to which they fled until they can voluntarily and safely return to their home country. A small number of refugees will be allowed to become citizens in the country to which they fled, and an even smaller number — primarily those who are at the highest risk — will be resettled in a third country.

[Application and Case Processing](#)

When UNHCR — or, occasionally, a U.S. Embassy or a specially trained nongovernmental organization — refers a refugee applicant to the United States for resettlement, the case is first received and processed by a Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) funds and manages nine RSCs around the world, operated by international and nongovernmental organizations and one U.S. interests section. Under PRM's guidance, the RSCs prepare

eligible refugee applications for U.S. resettlement consideration. [For more information about the vetting process for refugees, see the US State Department [Website](#)]

[*Planning for Refugees' Arrival in the United States*](#)

The Department of State works with nine domestic resettlement agencies that have proven knowledge and resources to resettle refugees. Every week, representatives of each of these nine agencies meet to review the biographic information and other case records sent by the overseas Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) to determine where a refugee will be resettled in the United States. During this meeting, the resettlement agencies match the particular needs of each incoming refugee with the specific resources available in a local community. If a refugee has relatives in the United States, he or she is likely to be resettled near or with them. Otherwise, the resettlement agency that agrees to sponsor the case decides on the best match between a community's resources and the refugee's needs.

This is a list of the nine resettlement agencies in the US:

- [Church World Service](#)
- [Ethiopian Community Development Council](#)
- [Episcopal Migration Ministries](#)
- [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society](#)
- [International Rescue Committee](#)
- [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#)
- [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services](#)
- [World Relief](#)