



WESTCHESTER
JEWISH 
COALITION FOR
IMMIGRATION

WJCI REFUGEE SHABBAT 2023 TALKING POINTS

Refugee Shabbat 2023 is a sacred moment for congregations, organizations, & individuals in the United States and worldwide to dedicate a Shabbat experience to refugees and asylum seekers.

Questions for Speakers to Respond to OR Address in Their Speeches

- What was life like before your situation became threatening or dangerous?
- When and how did life begin to change? When did you know you had to leave?
- How did it feel leaving your home? What was your journey to America like?
- Who has helped you find your way in America?
- What do you like most about living in America? What has been the most significant challenge?
- Can you talk about some cultural differences between America and your home country?
- What has been your biggest challenge acclimating to your new life here?
- Who are the people who have helped you acclimate to your new home?
- What is the most important thing about your story you want everyone here to know?

Questions for WJCI Board Members or Synagogue Clergy/Members to Respond to:

- Why are you personally drawn to this work?
- What part of the world are your ancestors from?
- You can say any or all of these things in your presentation:
 - Now is the time for us to raise our voices as a (Jewish) community to say that we will not allow our country to abandon its long legacy of welcoming the stranger. It is our obligation to welcome, love, and protect the stranger. Welcoming the stranger is a central Jewish value – repeated more than any other Torah commandment.
 - We understand. Many times in our history, Jews have been turned away from safety (e.g., In June 1939, the United States turned away the M.S. St. Louis – a ship carrying more than 900 Holocaust refugees).
 - When we think about today's refugees and asylum seekers, we can focus on how refugees and asylum seekers contribute to building our country – economically and otherwise – and contribute to our communities, a fact highlighted during the Pandemic.

Bullets About WJCI (if applicable):

- In 2022, WJCI received grants from the UJA-Federation of New York, the Jewish Federation of New York, and The Shapiro Foundation to respond to the Ukraine crisis. These funds are mobilizing the Jewish community to form Welcome Circles with the support of HIAS). Seven microgrants have been awarded to help with the placement of Ukrainian refugees.
- WJCI is a proud regional sponsor of Refugee Shabbat
- Through mobilization, education, advocacy, and partnership, WJCI provide our community experiences and opportunities to make the United States a place where refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants can live safely with dignity by...
 - Bringing people together in an atmosphere of mutual encouragement to effect change through community-wide projects.
 - Standing up for human rights and social justice around the significant issues facing immigrants today, including citizenship, food insecurity, healthcare, housing, and employment.

Facts about Ukraine and What WJCI is Doing:

- As of 12/15/2022, HIAS has received 47 Welcome Circle applications for Ukrainians; 44 circles have been certified, and 25 circles have been matched with newcomers through the RUTH database.
- The Uniting for Ukraine program is a pathway for Ukrainian citizens to come to the United States and stay temporarily for two years. Entry to the United States for Ukrainian citizens under this pathway is known as "parole."
- On December 21, 2022, President [Joe Biden](#) announced during his meeting with [Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) that the U.S. had accepted roughly 221,000 [Ukrainian](#) refugees via earlier Title 42 encounters, Uniting for Ukraine, and other organizations.

Facts about the Afghan Refugee Crisis

- All the roughly 73,000 Afghans brought to the U.S. with Special Immigration Visas ("SIVs") have moved off U.S. military bases. Well over 100 have already moved to Westchester.
- Unfortunately, Congress still needs to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA), leaving refugees evacuated from Afghanistan in legal limbo with no clear pathway to permanent residency when their humanitarian parole status expires in the coming months. Even though the last-minute push for the AAA was unsuccessful, WJCI is grateful for all the work that everyone did. We hope that passage of the AAA will happen. Without the Afghan Adjustment Act, Afghans must apply for permanent residency through the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, which takes years, or through the complex and overwhelmingly backlogged U.S. asylum system.
 - 12,000+ asylum applications have been received, representing 22,800 individuals;
 - Over 900 cases have received decisions, representing 1400 individuals (99% approval rate); and
 - Almost 5,000 are post-interview, pending a decision.

Facts about the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis

- Venezuela is the origin of one of the world's most significant forced migration crises. The country is [in the midst](#) of "an unprecedented social and humanitarian collapse," and [millions have fled](#) violence, corruption, food insecurity, and a lack of medicine and other essential services.
- On October 18, 2022, the administration launched a [private sponsorship parole program](#) that will initially allow up to 24,000 Venezuelans to access temporary protections in the U.S.
- According to DHS, the continued operation of the parole program will be contingent on the second plank of the administration's response to increased Venezuelan migration: An agreement with Mexico to immediately expel Venezuelans arriving at the border under a pandemic-era policy called [Title 42](#).
- The policies raise serious concerns regarding the safety of migrants returned under Title 42 and whether the parole program is accessible enough to serve as an alternative to irregular migration.
- In general, the new parole program will only be accessible to a small number of wealthier and better-connected Venezuelans.

Questions/Comments/Concerns? Email marilyn@wjci.org.