



Meeting the Moment

Protecting Refugees and Rebuilding Stability Amid Unprecedented Policy Shifts in America | March 2026

The clients and communities served by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have been profoundly affected by sweeping U.S. government policy changes. These impacts include:

- **Deep uncertainty for families** who spent years waiting to be resettled to America as refugees are being detained for the re-review of their refugee status,
- **Ongoing separation of families** from refugee relatives who had undergone intensive vetting and background checks,
- **Undermined protections for children** that put them at increased risk of trafficking and abuse,
- **Local and national economic contributions limited**, and humanitarian protections cut off for people from countries experiencing severe humanitarian crises.

During these challenging times, IRC offices in 29 cities across 17 states and virtual programs with national reach continue to deliver timely and accurate information, initial resettlement support, legal representation, workforce development, anti-trafficking services, and many other humanitarian programs critical to the health, safety, and stability of our clients and the communities that welcome them.

To ensure refugees and other newcomers to America are protected from being sent back to life-threatening dangers and can continue to contribute to communities across the country, **IRC programs are stepping up to meet this deeply challenging moment**. The IRC is prioritizing delivery of legal information and services to defend refugees' rights, rolling out a crisis assistance program for children at risk, expanding services for survivors of trafficking, and stepping up support for workforce and

other essential needs for clients struggling after the loss of work authorization and service cutbacks.

The IRC continues to call on the President and Congress to work in a bipartisan manner to deliver a functioning system that upholds the core protections reflected in the Refugee Convention that was adopted in the wake of the horrors of World War II, ensures that people who have fled persecution and conflict are never returned to harm, and offers newcomers paths to flourish and contribute to the communities that welcome, and benefit from, their arrival.

Below are a few of the humanitarian services IRC programs delivered in communities across America last year (FY 2025), ensuring that:



An Afghan family resettled by the IRC reunites with their son in Virginia after years of separation.

- **8,102 refugees**, including **3,371 Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa holders** who assisted American troops, received initial resettlement support. Overall, 6,939 clients received individualized case management, financial assistance and other integration services. Of the 2,172 refugees who received intensive employment services, **69% reached economic self-sufficiency within 8 months**.
- **30,272 workforce development clients** received assistance, including **5,090** clients successfully placed in jobs and **1,443** newcomer entrepreneurs enrolled in **microenterprise programming** who accessed **\$1,791,091** in capital to launch and support local small businesses.
- **806 survivors of human trafficking**, including **110 children**, received comprehensive, victim-centered, and trauma-informed support, enabling them to escape exploitation, navigate complex legal systems, and begin rebuilding safe, independent lives.
- **2,558 unaccompanied children** received legal services, including screenings and representation, to pursue asylum and other protections for survivors of abuse, crime, and trafficking. In addition, **676 unaccompanied children** and household members facing emergencies received basic necessities, critical information, and case management support.
- **14,049 newcomers** received legal assistance, including **5,126** resettled refugees, people granted asylum, and other eligible individuals who filed applications to become **U.S. lawful permanent residents** and **1,319** who applied for U.S. citizenship.
- **78,656 unique users** accessed **accurate information and crucial service referrals** through community-informed content and two-way communication with moderators via IRC's **Signpost** digital platforms, including **18,946 children and adults** who accessed **ImportaMi**, IRC's dedicated information platform for unaccompanied children.
- **800 refugees**, Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders, and other recent newcomers exchanged more than 21,000 messages in the first three months of IRC's AI-powered **ALMA** virtual assistant that helps newcomers navigate life in America.

Impacts on Clients and Communities

UPENDING REFUGEE PROTECTIONS

Unprecedented executive actions are intensifying uncertainty for refugees and asylees and undermining decades of bi-partisan support for U.S. refugee commitments. Under recent policies, immigration authorities have been directed to **re-review long-standing refugee determinations**, **arrest and detain resettle refugees**, and **re-scrutinize U.S. legal residents**. Authorities have reportedly taken dozens of resettled refugees from their homes and **detained** them. The IRC served more than 34,000 refugees who arrived between 2021 and 2025. These refugee families are concerned about whether they might be subject to traumatizing arrests, detention, and re-reviews of their refugee protection. In addition, hundreds of IRC asylee and refugee clients from **Afghanistan**, Burundi, China (Tibet), **Colombia**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **El Salvador**, Eritrea, Iran, **Kenya**, Myanmar/Burma, **Sudan**, **Ukraine**, and **Venezuela** have already had green card and citizenship interviews and naturalization oath ceremonies cancelled.

These actions, which threaten to upend lives and fracture communities, are creating significant uncertainty and distress.

FAMILIES REMAIN SEPARATED

Refugee families go through extensive overseas vetting before being lawfully admitted through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). For more than four decades, the U.S. resettlement program has exemplified America's bipartisan commitment to offer a new start to refugees fleeing persecution. Refugees prioritized for resettlement have historically included persecuted religious minorities, allies who aided U.S. missions abroad, and dissidents fleeing dictatorships. Now, more than 100,000 refugees who were vetted and approved for resettlement, some of whom have waited years in refugee camps, remain unable to reach safety in America. Last year, the Trump administration **paused resettlement** for nearly all refugees and has used the **travel ban** to block arrivals, including of refugees, from certain countries. The administration also set the **lowest ever** resettlement goal of 7,500 refugee slots and designated those limited numbers primarily for one group – Afrikaners from South Africa.



Due to these actions, for the vast majority of refugees, the opportunity to rejoin family, restart lives, and contribute to new communities is indefinitely paused.

Some of the refugee families who fled persecution and conflict who remain separated from other refugee relatives stranded abroad include:

- **A Congolese father who remains separated from his wife and children**, ages two and three, who are living in a refugee camp in Uganda. After fleeing war in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the man resettled with his parents to Kentucky in 2024. He had hoped to be able to sponsor his wife and children to join him in America, but their application has been frozen since January 2025 by the resettlement pause.
- Due to the travel ban, **a refugee couple in Kansas who fled their native Somalia**, which has seen decades of conflict, are blocked from reuniting with their three adult children. After years of waiting in Uganda as refugees, the U.S. Embassy recently told the couple's children to come to Kenya for their visas. Instead, they received a letter informing them that, due to the travel ban, they are barred from entering the United States. The family has not been together in over 20 years.
- The ongoing resettlement suspension has left **three refugee siblings in Washington state separated from their mother**, who has been waiting to resettle to America for nearly ten years. After fleeing the war in **Syria**, the three adult siblings were resettled in 2023. Their mother should have arrived in February 2025, but her travel was cancelled due to the refugee admissions suspension order, and she remains stranded abroad.
- **A refugee family displaced by the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo** remains separated by the ongoing resettlement suspension. One sibling and her one-year-old daughter, who arrived in January 2025 to Georgia, are living with a brother who is working to support the family. However, the arrival of another brother and their grandmother, who were expected in February 2025, has been indefinitely paused due to the refugee admissions suspension. The family remains hopeful that a pathway to reunify will one day reopen.

CHILDREN AT RISK

Every child deserves safety and protection. Yet, thousands of **unaccompanied children** fleeing violence and abuse are facing prolonged detention in America, and those previously reunited with family here are at risk of being returned to detention facilities. Children are also being left behind after parents are detained or deported—sometimes entirely alone. These circumstances leave children at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, while causing lasting psychological harm.

In 2025, the federal government moved to terminate long-standing funding for this work. Without it, children as young as toddlers could go before immigration judges alone. A legal challenge paused this funding cutoff, but now funding is coming only in three-month increments with no guarantee of renewal. This makes ensuring continuous support for the full length of a child's

immigration case extremely difficult to plan for and guarantee. The rollback of legal services for unaccompanied children also jeopardizes long-standing, bipartisan **safeguards** adopted by Congress to protect children from trafficking and exploitation.

Unaccompanied children IRC assisted this past year who experienced prolonged and unnecessary periods of custody include:

- **A seven-year-old unaccompanied girl with cerebral palsy** and other severe physical disabilities spent 13 months in government custody despite having a caring adult ready to receive her in the United States. After the death of her mother, the girl arrived with a relative seeking safety here. Despite her deteriorating condition, which required hospitalization, and extraordinary efforts by her sponsor to comply with all government requirements, the girl was only released to her sponsor when legal counsel began the process to file a habeas corpus petition.
- **A 13-year-old unaccompanied Guatemalan girl**, who was ultimately granted asylum, spent months in Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody even after a close relative sponsor was identified to receive her. Despite struggling with severe mental health challenges as a result of the violent trauma she experienced in her home country, the girl was transferred repeatedly among six ORR facilities over 20 months in custody, which compounded her distress. Shortly before her asylum interview, the girl was referred to IRC attorneys in Washington state who helped her to submit evidence and prepare for her hearing. After USCIS determined that she met the legal requirements as a refugee, she was finally released to her family in August 2025.



IRC legal teams use LEGOs to explain what an immigration courtroom looks like to unaccompanied children clients in Atlanta.

Upon turning 18, some unaccompanied children who were previously released to the care of sponsors are being arrested and held in adult detention facilities.

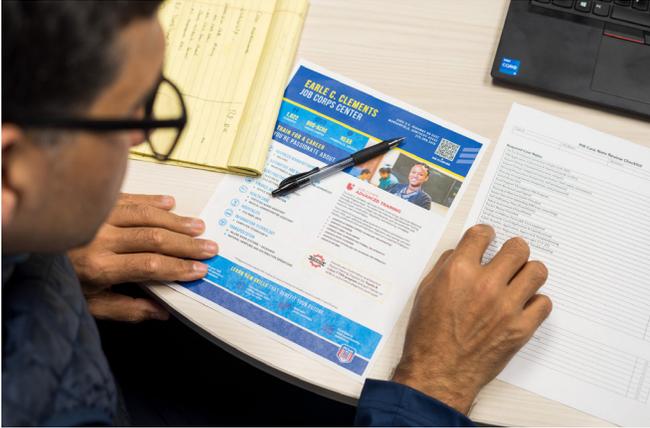
- Despite having a pending asylum application based on persecution against him as a member of an indigenous community, **immigration authorities unexpectedly detained a newly turned 18-year-old in New Jersey** served by the IRC's unaccompanied children's team. With no apparent basis to target him, a federal judge quickly ordered his release from custody after his lawyers challenged the detention.

THE FABRIC OF AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Refugees, asylum seekers, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders make significant contributions to the cultural, social and economic vitality of communities across America. They fill essential jobs, including in the health-care and food supply sectors, and many **small town** economies are being revitalized by their presence. Refugees and asylees **pay more in taxes** than is spent on services to support their integration. TPS holders contribute an estimated **\$36 billion to GDP** annually.

Yet, the government is making it more **expensive** and **difficult** to receive and maintain **work permits, pausing applications** for many people from countries listed on the **travel ban**, and even attempting to limit the **kinds of work** newcomers can do.

- A recent rule that attempts to prevent refugees and other immigrants with lawful status to hold **Commercial Drivers' Licenses (CDL)** would deeply impact the transportation company built by **a former combat linguist from Afghanistan** who fled due to his work alongside U.S. Special Forces. After arriving in Washington state as a refugee, he saved enough in two years to launch his own business that manages logistics for truckers and has hired fellow refugees who are starting over, just like he once was. The CDL rule is temporarily blocked by litigation but could impact thousands of refugee drivers critical to long-haul shipping, construction, bus transportation operations, and other commercial vehicle industries.



IRC staff member prepares paperwork for client employment options and workforce development in Atlanta.

Terminating humanitarian parole and TPS is stripping hundreds of thousands of people of permission to work and puts them at risk of deportation, including to nine countries on IRC's 2026 **Emergency Watchlist** facing the world's most severe humanitarian crises. These actions are preventing people seeking protection, including many clients served by the IRC, from supporting themselves and contributing to their local communities.

- **A woman from Haiti** who had been working for a major online distributor in New Jersey was fired in early 2025 when her humanitarian parole status was terminated, and she was not able to regain work authorization despite a long-pending application for temporary protected status, which should have made her eligible to work. **A Haitian man** employed as a package handler for a major mail delivery company in

New Jersey also lost his job after his parole-based work authorization recently expired. The loss of permission to work has left them struggling to cover basic needs and maintain safe housing, resulting in significant personal and psychological hardship for them and the family members they support.

These policies make it more difficult for people to maintain stable employment and meet the costs of housing, food and other essential needs, particularly as initial **nutrition and healthcare support** for recently arrived refugees are eliminated. For employers, the uncertainty caused by these policies, even when some are paused by court orders, further complicates hiring, retention, and workforce forecasting.

I Holding Firm to Our Mission

As more newcomers are swept up in these policies, their legal, employment, and psychological needs are growing in complexity and scale. Even amid unprecedented strain on humanitarian organizations, the IRC is steadfast in prioritizing core services that protect clients' dignity, safety, and stability and ensure they can continue **strengthening the communities** that welcomed them.

For the most vulnerable recently resettled refugees, particularly women, and girls and families with complex medical and mental health needs, **the IRC provides intensive case management for clients and their families for up to 24 months, or longer, as needed.** This comprehensive support includes:

- **Meeting basic needs:** stable housing, emergency food, mental health services, medical expenses, and other critical necessities.
- **Navigating complex systems:** individualized, hands-on case management that builds clients' capacity to independently navigate housing, public services like education, medical, mental health and other systems.
- **Access to legal resources:** immigration legal services and application fees.
- **Virtual service delivery:** self-service digital tools, live hotline assistance, and intensive case management to reach remote and hard-to-reach locations nationwide.

The IRC strives to meet workforce and other essential needs for clients who are losing work authorization, struggling with the changing economic circumstances, and impacted by cuts to core supports for refugees, like food assistance through SNAP. This includes:

- **Emergency assistance:** food aid, access to IRC's community gardens, referrals to partners, and other individualized services that assist with self-sufficiency.
- **Workforce development:** outreach to employers to understand work authorization, upskilling and job training services.
- **Financial health services:** in-person and virtual programs with financial coaches, access to zero-interest credit building products, and help navigating affordable loans.

To defend refugee and humanitarian protections, **IRC's legal services teams have redoubled efforts to ensure clients are equipped with accurate information**, tailored legal orientation, and legal representation to navigate the process for asylum and other humanitarian protections, apply for permanent residency and citizenship, and defend their legal rights in these and other immigration procedures.

IRC's national **ImportaMi** digital information platform and newly launched **children's crisis assistance** program deliver information to children on their rights along with rapid, nationwide support through trained child protection specialists to provide:

- **Emergency aid:** safe shelter, food, medicine, medical care, and essentials.
- **Stabilization:** individualized case management linking to legal help, mental health support, education, and community support.
- **Information and safety tools:** child-friendly information on children's rights, human trafficking, exploitation, and how to access help.

To address heightened risks of **trafficking and exploitation**, **the IRC is expanding prevention, protection, and survivor empowerment efforts** by combining robust, trauma-informed case management with innovative technology solutions and targeted information services. Through new digital tools, AI-powered resources, and strengthened partnerships with local organizations, at-risk individuals and communities receive timely and effective support.

Learn more on [Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org) or to donate, click [here](#).



An asylum-seeking family visits IRC Atlanta's office for legal services.