



CWS Statement to the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration & Citizenship, pertaining to its [hearing](#) entitled "Immigrants as Essential Workers During COVID-19" on Wednesday, September 23, 2020

As a 74-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, Church World Service (CWS) urges the Subcommittee to affirm the value and dignity of immigrants and refugees as essential workers and provide immigrant and refugee communities with critical support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Immigrants and refugees are part of our national fabric and vital to the prosperity of our communities. They are valued members of our families, congregations, and communities. Immigrants and refugees are mothers, fathers, and children. Immigrants help drive our economy, including undocumented immigrants and individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS). They are [doctors, nurses, and medical aides](#) working in our hospitals and elder care facilities, caring for and treating COVID-19 patients. They are [farm workers](#) who put food on our tables and truck drivers and grocery store workers making sure our grocery stores stay stocked. They are factory workers making sure Americans have what we need to stay healthy and beat the pandemic. They are [postal workers](#) supporting a safe and fair election during the pandemic. As the world searches for solutions during a global pandemic, we have a moral and legal obligation to those who are our neighbors and community members.

CWS urges Congress to include immigrants and refugees in COVID-19 related legislation to meaningfully respond to the pandemic. When one person is at greater risk of COVID-19, we are all at greater risk. Immigrants and refugees are serving on the frontlines of the pandemic, however they have been [largely left out](#) of COVID-19 relief packages. In the U.S., an estimated [176,000 refugees](#) are health care workers and [175,000](#) work in food supply chains. Despite 69% of all immigrants in the US labor force serving as [essential workers](#), [6.2 million essential workers are not eligible](#) for relief payments under the CARES Act. [Faith communities](#) have consistently called for the inclusion of our immigrant and refugee neighbors in COVID-19 relief. As Congress negotiates COVID-19 legislation, they should provide free COVID-19 testing and treatment for all, regardless of immigration status; direct cash assistance for immigrants and refugees, including those in mixed-status families; automatic extensions of work permits for DACA recipients, TPS holders, and asylum seekers for at least two years; a moratorium on deportations and ICE and CBP enforcement activities; and a supplemental \$642 million in funding in FY 2020 to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to ensure that refugees don't fall through the cracks.

Congress should hold the administration accountable to provide meaningful consultations (required by U.S. law) and to set a refugee admissions goal of 95,000 (the historic average) in FY 2021. Last week, troubling [new reports](#) indicated that the Trump administration is considering delaying setting the admissions goal and/or further cutting the admissions goal from the already historic low of 18,000. The administration has already cut refugee admissions by more than 80%, from the historic average goal of 95,000 to just 18,000 in FY2020 – an all-time low. Further, per CDC guidelines, all international travelers – including refugees – must undergo thorough medical checks for COVID-like symptoms prior to entering the U.S., and are required to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. We can – and should – continue the safe resettlement of refugees in the United States.

CWS urges Members of Congress to cosponsor [bipartisan legislation, H.R.8046](#), the *Improving Opportunities for New Americans Act of 2020*, to facilitate immigrant and refugee integration. Many immigrants and refugees remain unable to fully contribute their foreign credentials to the U.S. workforce because of systemic barriers, including the lack of recognition of their international education and experience, outdated occupational and professional recertification processes, and insufficient access to meaningful workforce development and adult education services. The underutilization of immigrant and refugee talent has [devastating effects](#) on individuals, local communities, and the U.S. economy. This important legislation would direct the U.S. Department of Labor to study the factors that lead to the underemployment and unemployment of immigrants and refugees who hold professional credentials earned outside the United States.

As the U.S. recovers and rebuilds, the need to integrate talented immigrants and refugees into the workforce is increasingly urgent. Crises test who we are as a nation – and we are stronger when we are united, extend compassion to our neighbors, and listen to public health experts.