



## **Church World Service Statement to the House Judiciary Committee on its Hearing – “The Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services”**

Church World Service (CWS) is a 77-year old faith-based humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions, as well as resettlement offices and affiliates and home study and post release services across the country. At the border, CWS assists vulnerable asylum seekers in accessing the support they need, including by working alongside DHS to operate asylum seeker case management services, working closely with shelter partners to offer initial respite and welcome to recent arrivals, and operating a hotline to provide timely, accurate information to recent arrivals and ensure asylum seekers can access the services they need. CWS urges the House Judiciary Committee to reject harmful, anti-asylum policies, and to use this hearing to catalyze support for solutions that address the challenges we face at the border while recognizing the dignity of arriving migrants and the positive impact they have on the communities that welcome them.

### **CWS urges Congress to recognize the vitality and value that immigrants bring to U.S.**

**communities.** With almost eight decades of experience in supporting newcomers, CWS recognizes that when we build a welcoming infrastructure to support newly arriving immigrants – regardless of status – these newcomers will benefit our communities. The data is unequivocal, at the [local](#), [federal](#), and [even international](#) level. Immigrants bring enriching diversity; they are small business owners, tax contributors, and job creators. Undocumented immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes while being ineligible for federal benefits. A Trump administration [report](#) found that over a ten year span, refugee resettlement brought in \$63 billion more in government revenues than it cost. The positive impact of refugees is felt particularly in the parts of America that are bearing the brunt of population decline.

**CWS urges Congress to reject asylum restrictions in upcoming funding negotiations and instead [robustly fund](#) programs that support an infrastructure of welcome and establish more effective and humane asylum processing.** The January 11 hearing comes amid concerning reports of attempts to include in an upcoming funding measure authorization provisions that threatens the integrity of the U.S. asylum system and parole program. The inclusion of anti-asylum provisions – widely denounced by [advocates](#), [faith-based organizations](#), [Members of Congress](#) and key House [caucuses](#) – would tarnish any appropriations deal and should be categorically rejected. Appropriations negotiations [should focus](#) on funding the government and supporting those in need, rather than embedding cruel, anti-immigrant, anti-family provisions in statute. Programs that would support the thriving of asylum seekers and the communities that welcome them include the Shelter and Services Program (SSP), the Case Management Pilot Program (CMPP) and expanded access to work authorization.

**CWS urges Congress to affirm the dignity of arriving migrants and reject false and harmful rhetoric that describes an “open border” or “migrant invasion.”** See the following January 9, 2023 testimony from CWS Associate Director of Asylum and Border Services rejecting these false premises:

“My name is Emily Miller and I serve as Associate Director, Asylum & Border for Church World Service. In this capacity I work with shelters along the U.S. southern border to provide technical support focused on protection and education. For the past 4 years my work and life has centered around immigration both in the United States and Mexico, living in El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. During 2023 a team of colleagues and myself interviewed over 1,000 asylum seekers about their journeys and why they chose to come to the United States.

The public narrative that borders are open, people are invading the southern border, and that rolling back asylum provisions will stop immigration are categorically erroneous. As an individual who lives on the southern border and travels to Mexico regularly, the borders are not open. As a

U.S. citizen, I regularly wait 2 plus hours to enter the United States. Custom and Border Patrol agents are busy and vigilant checking vehicles and individuals' documentation prior to entering the United States. As a pedestrian crossing the bridge into the United States, I have observed CBP agents turn individuals away at the limit line if they do not have the proper documentation to enter the United States.

It is true that the U.S. has seen more encounters between ports of entry 2023 than previous years. An encounter is not an invasion. In interviews I have asked asylum seekers why they chose to enter between ports of entry rather than use the CBP One application. I have received different answers, some are not aware of the application, some think that turning themselves in to the authorities is lawful entry since they are not sneaking in, however the overwhelming response is 'I tried to use the application, I have waited over 3 months and have not been able to get an appointment and it does not work.' To that statement families have told me: *my child was sick, we were kidnapped and cannot risk being in Juarez longer, my money was taken by the police and migration.* Approximately 75% of the individuals we spoke with indicated that the reason they left their country of origin was due to violence and insecurity. Many individuals reported experiencing violence along the journey, specifically being required to pay bribes to police and immigration in other countries. Once they have turned themselves in to authorities at the border these asylum seekers are being placed in removal hearings. Asylum seekers at the Southern border arrive in search of safety for themselves and their families. They are not invading the country.

To claim asylum in the U.S. one must prove that they have been and will be persecuted if they return to their country of origin. This requires documentation. I spoke to one family who had to leave their house in the middle of the night without even diapers for their infant because they had been made aware armed individuals were looking for them. They were looking for them because the husband saw a murder occur while he was walking home from work. This family had minutes to leave, they did not have time to grab documentation and paperwork proving their story. Increasing asylum restrictions and requiring additional proof of persecution within the first days to week of entering the United States could mean sending a family like this home to die. To obtain the necessary paperwork for a Cuban asylum seeker, a colleague of mine who works on the border had to send someone to Cuba to retrieve the documentation. Proof of persecution under U.S. asylum law is difficult, making it more difficult puts vulnerable families and individuals at more risk.

In our interviews we would often ask individuals if they had anything else to share. An older man from Nicaragua expressed to me that he wanted to say thank you to the United States for the opportunity to apply for asylum. He told me when he crossed the bridge from Mexico to the United States, he felt safe for the first time in years. He told me that while he saw police watching him walk through the streets, he did not feel the fear he had felt at home or along the journey, he had trust that the police here implied safety. As U.S. citizens we often take the feeling of safety for granted. Asylum was created to provide safety to people being persecuted. Do not roll back this right by law and persecute those who are already being persecuted. Real solutions at the border involve addressing root causes of and building and resourcing a more effective infrastructure of welcome.”

Emily Miller, Associate Director of Asylum and Border, Church World Service  
El Paso, Texas  
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