

Priority Recommendations to the Biden Administration

The Women's Refugee Commission is a research and advocacy organization focused on the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by crises. We work with refugees to understand their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for policies and programs to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

Based on our work with those most at risk of violence and exploitation, we know it is vital for the Biden administration to move quickly to restore global US leadership and reset US priorities globally and at home.

With record levels of people displaced by conflict, the majority of whom are women and children, the Biden administration must restore the rights of those seeking asylum in the United States. We also urge immediate action to protect the human rights of refugees globally, expand support for gender equality in humanitarian action, and promote access to humanitarian services for all those in need, including sexual and reproductive health care.

To take forward this humanitarian and human rights agenda in the first 100 days, WRC recommends the following:

Propose strong increased funding in the President's Budget Request for humanitarian assistance that is rights based; addresses the needs of those most at risk, particularly women and girls; promotes gender equality; and supports self-reliance goals. Include needed resources for a revived and robust US Refugee Admissions Program.

Renew the US commitment to gender equality in its humanitarian, development, and peace and security work. Using USAID's 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy as the starting point, develop an updated policy that builds on progress and learning to date, emphasizes the importance of sexual and reproductive health care, and promotes the full participation of the most marginalized, including adolescent girls, LGBTQI persons, and women and girls with disabilities. Also review, update, and resource the US Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security and agency implementation plans to ensure a more detailed framework with strong accountability mechanisms.

Take action to ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion care. This includes rescinding the Mexico City Policy (also known as the Global Gag Rule) and working with Congress to repeal the Helms and Hyde amendments and repeal the Kemp-Kasten amendment and replace it with language consistent with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Expand efforts to address gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. Immediately affirm US membership in and leadership support for the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

Re-establish US leadership on global humanitarian and human rights policy and practice by joining the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, affirming full support for the Global Compact on Refugees, and strengthening US engagement on effective implementation of both Compacts. Re-engage with the UN Human Rights Council and strengthen advocacy on the rights of crisis-affected people, including women human rights defenders. Restore funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and for the World Health Organization (WHO), whose role in humanitarian response in the time of COVID-19 is more critical than ever. Also restore funding

for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides assistance and protection for more than 5 million Palestinian refugees. Re-join the Paris Accord to help prevent and mitigate climate-related disasters and displacement.

Restore the rights and respect the dignity of displaced people in search of protection. Reverse policies that have closed the border to asylum seekers and unaccompanied children, including ending the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, also known as “Remain in Mexico”); ending the use of Asylum Country Agreements (ACAs) with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; rescinding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order barring entry to asylum seekers; and immediately resuming the processing of asylum seekers at the border. Repeal all iterations of the Muslim, African, and asylum travel bans, and ensure that foreign policy addresses root causes of migration and supports access to protection (including asylum), and is not focused on deterrence.

Immediately begin to restore the integrity of the asylum system. Restore eligibility for asylum for survivors of domestic violence, victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), gang violence, and members of the LGBTQI community. Withdraw or reverse decisions by the Attorney General and Board of Immigration Appeals that narrowed the refugee definition and due process in contradiction with human rights norms.

Phase out the use of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention. Apply a presumption of release and invest in appropriate community-based case management programs instead of immigration detention. Immediately end family detention. Implement meaningful oversight and accountability mechanisms over DHS detention and custody policies.

Stop separating families at the border and in the interior. Immigration policies and practices must respect family unity. Families should neither be separated nor detained together.

End the use of expedited processing and other measures that inhibit due process. Immediately reverse the expansion of “expedited removal” and ensure that all those in immigration proceedings have a fair day in court. Protect sensitive locations from enforcement actions.

The Women’s Refugee Commission looks forward to working with the Biden administration and the Congress to repair the devastating impacts of the previous administration’s actions, and to proactively advance the rights and protections of displaced persons around the world.