

Migration Policy Priorities for 2021

The Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology
and the Ignatian Solidarity Network

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” – Hebrews 13:2

U.S. migration policies must recognize the equal dignity of all people and the many contributions migrants make to our society. COVID-19 has exacerbated the difficulties facing migrants as governments further restrict migrant rights in the name of public health or national security.

The Kino Border Initiative

The [Kino Border Initiative \(KBI\)](#) offers direct services to migrants on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. KBI promotes immigration policies that affirm the dignity of the human person and a spirit of binational solidarity. In response to rollbacks in the asylum system, KBI launched the [#SaveAsylum](#) campaign which brings together asylum seekers, community members, faith leaders and immigration advocates in actions at the U.S.-Mexico border. The campaign demands the restoration of asylum protections and offers a new path forward under the Biden-Harris administration.



A man and his child wait for the meal service at KBI (KBI).

We urge U.S. lawmakers to take the following steps:

- **Protect asylum seekers and restore refugee resettlement.** Many recent restrictions on asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border are both morally wrong and in violation of U.S. and international law. Policymakers should undo these harmful policies, including [turn backs](#), the [Remain in Mexico program](#), [asylum cooperative agreements](#), and [summary denials](#). They should also take steps to rebuild the asylum and refugee resettlement processes overall, including significantly [raising the cap on refugees resettled in the next fiscal year](#), expanding access to legal counsel for asylum seekers and developing greater [protection opportunities within the Western Hemisphere](#).
- **Reform border security, interior enforcement and detention.** In the spring of 2019, [more than 52,000 immigrants were held in ICE detention, the largest number of detainees in the agency's history](#). This is both cruel and wasteful. Alternatives to detention have proven [more effective and cost efficient](#). Policymakers should work closely with faith-based groups and other non-profit organizations to expand case management systems and [implement just and humane border policies](#).

- **Enact comprehensive and humane immigration reform.**

There are [over 10 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.](#) Over two-thirds have lived here for more than 10 years as important, contributing members of our communities. Policymakers must move beyond partisan politics to [enact reform legislation that includes a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people](#) and addresses the backlog in family reunification visas.



Children sleep in a migrant shelter on the U.S.-Mexico border (CNS).

- **Expand COVID relief to all.**

Immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, were largely excluded from benefits provided through the CARES Act despite the fact that [69 percent of all immigrants in the labor force and 74 percent of undocumented workers are essential workers.](#) We are pleased that [the December 2020 relief bill extended payments to over 5 million Americans in mixed immigration status families who were left out of the CARES Act.](#) This is an important first step; however, many people, including US citizen children with two undocumented parents, were still excluded. Future COVID-19 relief bills must extend health benefits

to all people regardless of status, shield essential workers from deportation, release low-risk immigrants from ICE detention and include immigrants and their families in cash payments.



A mother bathes her child in a temporary migrant camp on the U.S.-Mexico Border (CNS).

- **Support migrants beyond U.S. borders.** Providing safety to all vulnerable migrants is too big a job for any one country. In addition to rehabilitating its own asylum system, the U.S. should assist regional partners in strengthening their own asylum processes and developing opportunities for protection throughout the region. People have the right to lead a life of dignity in their home countries. We urge policymakers to make smart investments to improve conditions there. [This includes addressing challenges to the rule of law, food shortages caused by climate change and trade policies adversely affecting smallholder farmers.](#)



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