

AJC Policy: Immigration

Introduction & Background

Immigrants to the U.S. offer economic, social, and cultural contributions to our society. Our nation's strength and resilience derive from its diversity, inclusiveness, and openness.

Bipartisan, common sense solutions must be found to meet the economic and national security needs of the U.S., while reflecting our shared American values of justice, equal opportunity, and human dignity.

While comprehensive immigration reform is debated, the transnational nature of migration must be acknowledged. The region must also become more secure and more democratic to address the root causes of migration so that families can safely remain in their homelands. Solutions to address immigration to the U.S. must include and involve the broader region, with a goal to stabilize the Western Hemisphere.

A strategy to assess the root causes of migration to the U.S. is much needed and overdue. Numerous countries in the hemisphere struggle with existential problems related to stability, crime and law enforcement, democracy, and security. Congress should evaluate aid to the region with an eye towards creating meaningful reforms. The U.S. should be actively engaged with the OAS to achieve common objectives, promote democratic values and good governance.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Ongoing national disagreement over immigration undermines our country and weakens its commitment to democratic and humanitarian values. In addition to recognizing the political and economic factors that drive migration, comprehensive immigration reform must address:

- **DACA/Dreamers:** The roughly 800,000 Dreamers (undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children) need a permanent solution that yields stability and security.
- **Stability in the Western Hemisphere:** Legislation like the 2020 U.S.–Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act empowered a U.S. strategy to advance prosperity, combat corruption, strengthen democratic governance, and curb irregular migration. Similar efforts to promote stability in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are vital to address migration, protect lives, and stabilize the region.
- **Temporary Protected Status (TPS):** Ending TPS for Hondurans, Salvadorians, Haitians, and others who escaped dangerous conditions in their home countries threatens to destabilize Central America, jeopardize U.S. national security, and endanger lives.
- **Asylum seekers and refugees:** Recognizing that many migrate not for a “better life” but to simply survive, it is imperative to note that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has not only played a key role in saving the lives of millions of people fleeing persecution, but it has also made the United States, founded and built by refugees and immigrants, stronger and richer. It also allows our nation to fulfill its international obligations to assist refugees. The sharp decline in the number of refugees admitted in the past several years is deeply concerning. The refugee admissions ceiling should be returned as quickly and prudently as possible to at least 75,000 for FY 2021 and urges the administration to consider returning to historically higher levels of admission, on the order of 90,000. Refugee detention—especially vulnerable populations such as families and asylum seekers—should occur only where a serious threat is determined, not as a default procedure.

Protecting Minority Communities

Lastly, any discussion of immigration cannot be divorced from the reality that there is currently a dangerous rise in anti-immigrant, antisemitic, and xenophobic rhetoric in our nation's political discourse. American leaders must speak and act decisively to bring the nation together, heal wounds, and prevent individuals supporting xenophobic and racist positions from further terrorizing our communities. To affirm with absolute moral clarity American democratic and pluralistic core values, which remain the bedrock of our nation and the best defense against the forces of hatred that seek to appeal to prejudice and to divide us, it is necessary to address gaps in hate crimes reporting, through bipartisan legislation like the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act, and to protect communities like immigrant communities that are particularly susceptible to hate crimes. The United States must continue to be a nation of immigrants—one that welcomes immigrants and protects them.

This policy paper is meant to be a resource for candidates and elected officials. It is one of several that outlines American Jewish Committee (AJC) standpoints and policies on issues of core concern to our organization and our community.

AJC, founded in 1906, is the Jewish community's global advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the security and well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values around the world. In addition to its New York headquarters and its Office of Policy and Diplomatic Affairs in Washington, D.C., AJC has 24 U.S. regional offices, 12 overseas posts, and 37 partnerships with Jewish communities and institutions worldwide.

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