

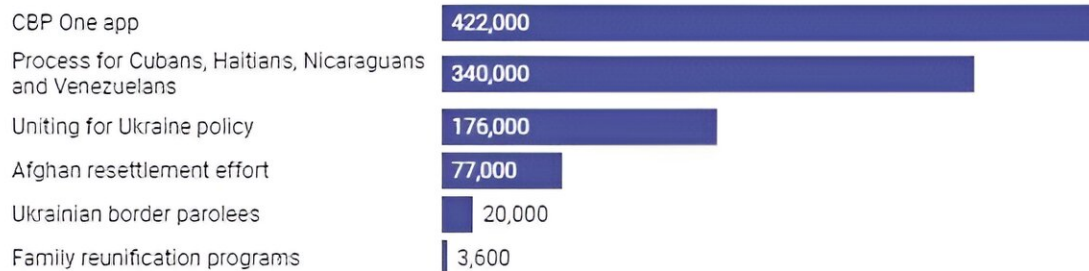
# Who are the immigrants coming to the US on humanitarian grounds, and how can they be supported?

May 7 2024, by Karen Jacobsen

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## The Biden administration has admitted over 1 million people to the US through humanitarian parole programs since 2021

Parole can be offered if it provides an urgent humanitarian or public benefit. It allows entrants to stay for a finite period and to seek work authorization.



*CBP One is a mobile application that lets migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border seeking asylum preschedule appointments for processing and maintain guaranteed asylum eligibility. Some Ukrainians have received parole at the U.S. border, while others applied from abroad under the Uniting for Ukraine program.*

Credit: The Conversation

Immigration has become [a defining issue](#) in the 2024 elections and a major challenge in many U.S. cities. Over the past several years, wars

and armed conflict, violent persecution and desperate poverty have [displaced millions of people worldwide](#) and propelled the arrival in the U.S. of thousands seeking protection, [mainly at the U.S.-Mexico border](#).

Large cities such as [New York](#), [Miami](#), [Denver](#) and [Boston](#) are struggling to house new arrivals and meet their [basic needs](#). Cities are looking for ways to support these new arrivals—some for a short time, others for months, years or permanently.

I study forced migration, government responses to it, and [how refugees and asylum-seekers integrate into new settings](#). My focus is on humanitarian arrivals—people who enter the U.S. legally as asylum-seekers, resettled refugees or under various temporary protection programs, also known as parole.

In total, the Biden administration has admitted or authorized admitting roughly 1.5 million people under these programs since 2021. Cities need help to cope with these waves of new arrivals. The good news is that with support, refugees and people receiving asylum successfully integrate into life in the U.S. and [contribute more to the national economy than they cost](#).

## Entering on humanitarian grounds

People immigrate to the United States for many reasons and receive different types of visas and treatment when they arrive. Here are the main types of humanitarian admissions:

—**Humanitarian parole:** The [federal government](#) can give certain groups permission to enter or remain in the U.S. if it finds "[urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons](#)" for doing so. People

who enter through parole programs must have an approved financial supporter in the U.S. They typically can stay for one to two years and may apply for authorization to work.

Currently, the federal government is admitting [a maximum of 30,000 people per month](#) under a parole program for immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The Biden administration has also admitted people from Afghanistan and Ukraine through other parole programs. In total, the Biden administration has admitted [more than 1 million people through these programs](#).

—**Refugees and asylees:** People who can show that they have experienced persecution, or have a well-founded fear of being persecuted based on their race, religion, nationality, social affiliations or political opinion, can apply for [refugee](#) status or asylum. Asylum is granted to people who are already in the U.S. Refugee status is provided to people who are vetted abroad and approved for resettlement.

Resettled refugees and people granted asylum can apply for authorization to work in the U.S. After one year in the U.S., they are eligible to apply for legal permanent residence, also known as a green card.

For [fiscal year](#) 2024, Biden has approved a [maximum of 125,000 refugee admissions](#). There is no limit on the number of people who may be granted asylum each year.

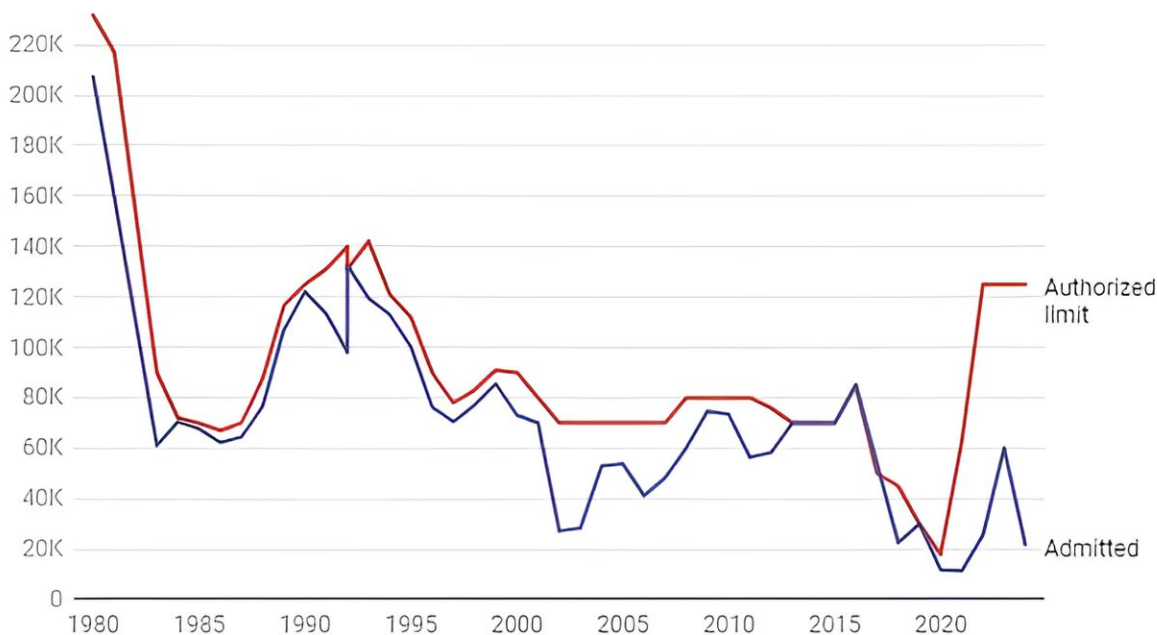
Applicants for asylum, however, must [go before an immigration judge](#) in the U.S., who will decide whether their fears qualify them to be allowed to remain. U.S. immigration courts are heavily backed up, with [more than 2 million asylum applications pending](#). Asylum applicants can remain in the U.S. while their case is pending, but they cannot receive work permits [for six months after they apply for asylum](#).

## Where new immigrants settle

As has been the case [since at least 2010](#), Texas and Florida are [top U.S. destinations for migrants](#), along with cities in New York, Illinois and Colorado. Counties where new migrants make up more than 2% of the population include Queens, New York; Miami-Dade, Florida; and Denver, Colorado.

## Refugee admissions fell sharply during the Trump administration but now are rising again

The number of persons who may be admitted to the U.S. each year as refugees is set by the president in consultation with Congress. Refugees are people who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin or nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.



Admissions and ceilings by fiscal year, data for 2024 cover the first quarter of fiscal year 2024 (October 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023).

Credit: The Conversation

In cities, many humanitarian immigrants find work in the hospitality and health care industries. Others move to [small towns](#) in rural areas, where they work in long-standing migrant sectors such as meatpacking, health services and agriculture.

People who come with an intent to stay are motivated to put down roots and become part of their new communities. But becoming established can take time, and newcomers' needs can stress city neighborhoods that are already struggling with housing and employment problems. The months immediately following their arrival is the time when refugee newcomers need support of all kinds.

## **Working with diaspora communities**

New arrivals often move to particular towns or city neighborhoods because they know that people from their country are well established there. These residents are familiar with the new arrivals' home language and cultures and understand their needs.

For example, there are [over 40,000 Ukrainians in Rochester, New York](#), and about [134,000 in New York City](#). The U.S. also has large communities of parolees, including Haitians, Venezuelans and Cubans, and long-standing diasporas of resettled refugees and asylum recipients from many parts of the world.

I see established diasporas as a critical resource for supporting new immigrants and maximizing benefits for host communities. By working with diaspora individuals and families to support new arrivals, federal and state governments could redirect funds that are now going to hotels and shelters.

For example, Boston has struggled in recent months to [house large numbers of Haitian immigrants](#), placing several thousand families at hotel and motel sites—an unusual and expensive practice born of necessity. An alternative might be to offer cash payments or tax breaks to some of the state's [81,050 Haitian residents](#) in return for housing new Haitian arrivals for a few months.

Diaspora households can offer information about navigating city bureaucracies, finding jobs and accessing banking services, in addition to the comfort of familiar food and company. These communities can be an enormous help to new immigrants as they become established and begin to contribute to the city.

Such incentives could also be aimed at non-diaspora communities and people who are willing to help newcomers. A direct community support system, with safeguards built in to protect both the refugees and their hosts, would cost a city or state much less than paying for hotel rooms.

## **Faster work permits**

Speeding up work authorizations for new arrivals can shorten the time they need support from the government. Under federal law, most nonresident foreign nationals must obtain an [employment authorization document](#) in order to apply for jobs in the U.S.

Currently, although the Biden administration is trying to move more quickly, these applications are taking [more than six months to process](#). Once immigrants have work permits in hand, diasporas and host neighborhoods could receive tax breaks or other economic benefits in return for helping them find work.

There are other things cities and the federal government can do to support new humanitarian arrivals. Banks could be encouraged to

support refugee business, as [some are already doing](#). For example, [Re:start Financial](#) is [a neobank](#)—a tech company that provides online [banking services](#)—based in Austin, Texas, and founded in 2021 by a group of immigrants. It allows immigrants who do not yet have permanent addresses or Social Security numbers to open free online banking accounts with nontraditional documentation from their home countries.

With adequate support, new arrivals usually find their feet and become self-reliant [within a few months](#). Using federal and state resources to enlist host neighborhoods and diaspora communities in this process would help ensure that everyone benefits.

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