

The Immigrant Experience

The New Americans—Assimilating in Today's USA

New Canaan Men's Club 6/26/26

Presented by

Jean Meyer and Amy Ewing

Stamford Interfaith Refugee Settlement (SIRS)

Part 1: Status of Refugees and other Documented Immigrants**

Part 2: The Experiences of Families SIRS has assisted

** Primary Source: 10/5/25 Co-Sponsor Update by IRIS—Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services
Cosponsor update by IRIS. + later info from IRIS and info from newspapers

Current environment

“I heard something today that the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, issued a report that said immigrants contribute substantially to economic growth, create jobs in the economy and pay their share of taxes.

That’s not the established line from govt.”

- Mike Dorfsman, New Canaan Men’s Club, May 2025

Recent history shows that although immigrants commit violent crimes at a lower rate than native-born Americans, any bad action by a single immigrant is seen to be validation for the need to further restrict immigration.

“This Administration believes there is never a need for immigration.”

-- Stamford-based immigration attorney, May 2025

“At scale, migrants and their descendants recreate the conditions, and terror, of their broken homelands.”

-- Stephen Miller on X in 2025

Why you should care: CT needs to maximize immigrant potential to address CT's workforce challenge

- As of Jan 2025, CT had 92,000 unfilled jobs
- 25% of foreign-trained professionals are underemployed
- 50% of recent immigrants have a bachelor's degree
- Yet 1 in 4 can't find jobs at their skill level
- IRIS proposes targeted workforce partnerships to close this gap
- CT's native-born workforce is aging rapidly
- Working-age adults declined by 108,000 since 2010
- Labor force only grew by 29,000 in a decade
- Immigrants now make up 20% of CT's workforce (368,000 workers)

Immigrants are key to stabilizing the labor market in CT

IRIS is focused on English up-skilling and Employment partnerships

Definitions: Refugees, SIVs, Parolees, TPS, Asylum seekers

Refugee: A person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution

- Over 26 M worldwide, and only 1% resettled each year
- 1-2 year security screening.
- U.S “ceiling” typically ~100,000-125,000/year, but much lower in Trump administrations (15,000 or 7,500)
- Legal resident with immediate authorization to work; Eligible for Green Card in a year.
- Access to Department of Social Services benefits (temporary family/cash assistance, SNAP, HUSKY)

SIV – Special Immigrant Visa holder: Person who because assisted US is now in harm's way.

- Vetted in country and brought to U.S. once approved.
- Permanent resident with Green Card for authorization to work.
- Access to DSS benefits.



Humanitarian Parole:

- Employment Authorization for two years. Must apply for asylum to extend.
- Access to DSS benefits

Afghans: Evacuees 8/2021 → U.S. under “Afghan Placement & Assistance” program.

- >100,000 fled. Housed (and vetted) in US bases in US or abroad.
- Includes vulnerable supporters of US, press, women's rights.

Ukrainians: Feb. 2022+

Temporary Protected Status: For people fleeing war or persecution and/or need time to seek asylum.

Asylum-seeker: A person who, to escape persecution, flees to a foreign country and requests permission to live there permanently. SIRS does not assist these undocumented immigrants.

US Supreme Court
6/25/26: US can end
TPS for Haiti and Syria

Stamford Interfaith Refugee Settlement (SIRS)

SIRS focus areas as an all-volunteer Community Co-Sponsor trained by IRIS**

Refugees – Syrian and Afghan

SIV – Special Immigrant Visa holders - Afghan

Humanitarian Parolees – Afghan and Ukrainian

(Not TPS holders or Asylum seekers.)

Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) scope:

Directly resettle refugees and SIVs – housing, English, work.

Train, coach and monitor Community Co-Sponsor groups

Provide Legal Services – for a fee.

Provide a Food Bank for refugees and other immigrants

Summary of relevant federal changes 1-20-25

On his first day back in office (January 20, 2025), President Trump signed six major executive orders targeting immigration: (Credit to National Immigration Law Center)

- 1. Ending Birthright Citizenship:** Revokes automatic citizenship for children born in the U.S. to non-citizen parents, effective February 19, 2025. *This has been temporarily blocked by a federal judge due to constitutional concerns.*
- 2. Suspending Refugee Admissions:** Halts the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, with case-by-case exceptions requiring joint approval from the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security.
- 3. Enhanced Vetting:** Orders stricter screening for visa applicants, especially from countries deemed security risks.
- 4. Securing Borders:** Calls for physical barriers, increased deportations, and termination of humanitarian parole programs for nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.
- 5. Declaring a Border Emergency:** Authorizes military deployment and aerial surveillance at the southern border.
- 6. Trade and Immigration Linkage:** Reviews trade agreements like USMCA, which could affect visa programs such as TN visas for Canadian and Mexican professionals.

Summary of relevant federal changes 7-4-25

Impact of One Big Beautiful Bill Act” (OBBBA), July 4, 2025 *(Credit to National Immigration Forum)*

UNPRECEDENTED DETENTION AND ENFORCEMENT FUNDING

Dramatic expansion of immigration detention, including family detention

Supercharged funding for immigration enforcement

\$75 billion in enforcement and surveillance funding for border communities

\$13.5 billion for state and local enforcement of federal immigration law

\$1 billion to divert military resources toward immigration and border enforcement

\$3.3 billion to the Department of Justice, largely to prosecute immigrants for status offenses

UNAFFORDABLE FEES AND PENALTIES

New and increased fees obstruct access to humanitarian protections and due process:

RESTRICTIONS ON IMMIGRANTS’ HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Lawfully-present immigrants stripped of access to health and nutrition assistance programs

Making states pay more for Emergency Medicaid

TAX INCREASES ON IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Depriving kids of the anti-poverty benefits of the Child Tax Credit

Additional exclusions from tax-related benefits for non-citizens

SIRS clarification:
* No SNAP 11/1/25
* No Medicaid 10/1/26

Additional federal changes Fall 2025

Travel ban (suspended visa issuance) for nationals of 19 countries:

* Fully suspended for 12 countries (with limited exceptions): Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen.

* Partially suspending visa issuance to nationals of 7 countries” Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan, and Venezuela...

Source: <https://www.dorsey.com/newsresources/publications/client-alerts/2025/7/travel-ban>

Trump administration cut and redirected the Refugee Admissions Program:

* Maximum number of refugees to be admitted to US in current fiscal year: 7,500

-- Down from ceiling of 125,000 in previous fiscal year

* Priority given to white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

-- South African government disputes that Afrikaners are persecuted.

IRIS response:

* IRIS (and co-sponsors) from will not participate in Church World Service’s proposal for FY26 Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)

“We will stay true to our mission and to the many years that everyone here has helped our communities understand what it means to be a refugee.”

-- Maggie Mitchell Salem, Executive Director, IRIS. 9/16/25

* IRIS can still accept Special Immigrant Visa holders (especially Afghan allies), at a large financial expense and risk

* No SNAP 11/1/25
* No Medicaid 10/1/26

Additional federal changes after Nov. 26th shooting

Nov. 29. Halted all asylum decisions and paused issuing visas for people traveling on Afghan passports

* Affects even Afghans who assisted US war effort so are eligible for Special Immigrant Visa

December, per IRIS Legal:

*** USCIS hold on all benefit requests from country-of-birth or country-of-citizenship from the “19” countries, regardless of entry date.**

-- Affects Permanent Resident “Green Card” I-485 applications, I-90 green card replacement application, and I-131 Applications for Travel.

-- reference: USCIS Memo PM-602-0192

*** USCIS will conduct a re-review of approved benefits requests for aliens from “the 19” who enter US on/after 1/20/21.**

-- Includes re-interviews, looking for errors, omissions.

IRIS legal
response: prepare
with “Purple folder”



12/19 USICS was directed to find 100-200 denaturalization cases per month.

12/20 New emergency rule prohibits refugees and asylum seekers from getting CDL (Commercial Driver License).

Additional federal immigration changes 2026

April 2026 - Afghans (1,100) in Qatar awaiting SIV approval could be moved to DRC to wait.

May 2026 – Reversal: D.H.S says most may await approval of Green Cards in the U.S.

June 2026 – Good news: Federal court orders restart to immigration processing.

June 2026 – Good news: Federal judge challenged and struck down the administration plan to re-evaluate refugees already vetted, approved and resettled in the U.S.

The judge wrote: The court is reminded of a line often repeated in discussion around immigration policy: If people wish to immigrate to the United States, they out to ‘follow the law’ and ‘do things the right way’... This case serves as a perfect example of immigrants doing just that.”

- However, subject to appeal or announcement of nearly identical substitute measures.

June 25, 2026 – U.S. Supreme Court said U.S. executive branch can end Temporary Protected Status for Haiti and Syria.

IRIS Legal Services

IRIS Facts and Circumstances 2025:

1. IRIS lost a large percentage of its funding & staff after 1/1/2025
2. IRIS Legal staff is 20% of what it was a year ago
3. For 2025, new case intakes were firmly closed
4. Cases left by former staff had to be transferred
5. New case management system and standard operating procedures were developed

IRIS Legal Services Focus 2025/2026:

1. Accepting new case requests for:
Green Cards and
Employment Authorization Cards
2. IRIS clients & families can request a new case be opened
3. "Fee For Service" – like other organizations in New England have done
4. The goal is to keep fees lower and reasonable but also sustain services for the future*
5. Fees will subsidize department expenses

**Initial fee structure for intakes can be distributed as a handout*

Refugees already here are being asked to prove they belong – again. The risk of losing immigrant status and facing deportation is real.

IRIS Legal adds support for refugees facing re-interviews to prove their status:

Collect and organize “Purple Folder” of critical documents, including:

- * USCIS Immigration File Requests via FOIA – Proof of Refugee Status (Approved Form I-590 or I-730)
- * Green Card Applications (Forms I-485)
- * Immigration Medical Examination (Forms I-693)

Back-up

IRIS 2025/6 focus: Employment, English, Legal Services

IRIS Employment focus:

- Repositions resettlement agencies as labor force accelerators
- Partnering with workforce boards & employers (e.g. MATCH, CWP)
- Offering AI-assisted vocational English & cultural literacy
- Focus on manufacturing, healthcare, clean energy
- Inspired by successful models in MI, CO, ME

IRIS English Up-skilling focus for economic value:

- \$1.6M public investment across 14 states (5,500 learners)
- Resulted in \$10.4M in economic gains
- English proficiency boosts employment & wage
- Immigrants = 100% of CT's population growth (2013-2023)
- A critical opportunity to secure CT's future workforce

Trends in Law & Policy... and Community Consequences

Trends

1. Seismic changes –both lawful and unlawful
2. System increasingly weaponized to silence dissent
3. Remove dissenters where necessary
4. Punish people, organizations, and communities that still speak out and resist
5. Shrink the pool of eligible immigration applicants using pricing, policy, regulation & fear
6. Make it more procedurally difficult for eligible applicants to navigate the system
7. Increase fees to "price-out" applicants

Consequences

1. Increased fear of detention, arrest, expedited removal, disappearing, and/or deportation proceedings
2. Fewer (and longer, more expensive) pathways to temporary or permanent immigration benefits
3. Larger obstacles to qualified immigration legal assistance
4. Longer wait-times for government action and hearings.

*New 10/01/2025: SNAP, etc. terminated for immigrants/refugees who do not have a green card.

*Future 10/01/2026: Medicaid/HUSKY will be terminated unless immigrants/refugees hold a green card

SIRS edit:
No CT SNAP
11/1/25

Worsening problems for immigrants and refugees

Back-up

Program Changes:

	<u>model:</u>	<u>Co-sponsorship</u>	<u>Sponsor Circle</u>	<u>Welcome Corps</u>
Source of this initiative:		IRIS (in CT, other agencies elsewhere)	Community Sponsor Hub (with IRIS input) & State Dept	US State Dept initiative via CSH ann'c'd 1/19/22
Top management of the program:		IRIS	Community Sponsor Hub (CSH)	Community Sponsor Hub (CSH)
Who supervises local groups:		IRIS	"Umbrella" organizations, like IRIS	Private Sponsor Organizations (PSOs), like IRIS
What a local group is called:		Co-sponsor	Sponsor Circle	Private Sponsor Group (PSGs)
Newcomer being supported now:		Refugees from all countries	Humanitarian Parolee from Ukraine or Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela	Pilot program: Refugees from Subsaharan Africa
"Naming process" for refugees from other countries:		Special Immigrant Visa holders (SIV) US allies Or Afrikaner "refugees"	+ Humanitarian Parole revoked for all but Ukraine	"Naming process" is PLANNED to be initiated in late 2023. These refugees will likely wait to travel to US for 3 years or more.
Length of process to allow to travel to US:		Typically 2-3 years or more (large pipeline)	months	months for vetted refugees; otherwise, ~ 3 years for referral and vetting
Target # of refugees & volunteers this fiscal year:		~ 125,000 ceiling (but 7500 + some SIVs)	Emergency program, goals or caps set by USCIS/Congress by country	5,000 refugees helped by 10,000 volunteers
Federal financial support for local groups:		Federal resettlement \$ (\$2275/ person)	none	none
Other financial support for family:		Apply for SNAP, TFA, HUSKY	Some eligible for SNAP, TFA, (Afghan HP, UKR- some <u>NOT</u> eligible for benefits (Venezuelans, Nicaraguans)	Apply for SNAP, TFA, HUSKY