



**I STAND  
WITH  
IMMIGRANT FAMILIES**



# NIJC AMBASSADOR PROGRAM TOOLKIT



# BECOME PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Congratulations on becoming an Ambassador with the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)! As a NIJC Ambassador, you have chosen to stand immigrant families and are helping to create a stronger, more inclusive community for all. Thank you!

The main objectives of being an NIJC Ambassador are to:

- Engage your local community in protecting the rights of immigrants and refugees
- Create a culture of inclusivity in your personal and professional networks
- Humanize the immigrant experience through productive conversations
- Inspire meaningful action on behalf of immigrants and refugees



Thank you for protecting human rights and advancing justice for all. Welcome aboard!

In solidarity,

Mary Meg McCarthy  
Executive Director  
National Immigrant Justice Center

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## Table of Contents

About the Ambassador Program.....p. 3

About NIJC.....p. 4

Learn

- FAQs.....p. 5-6
- Immigrant Stories.....p. 7-8
- Resources.....p. 9

Gather

- Event Ideas.....p. 10

Act

- Messaging for Social Media.....p. 11
- Writing to your Elected Officials.....p. 12
- Ways to Get Involved.....p. 13

*This toolkit was designed to encourage conversation and action in support of immigrants and refugees. If you would like more information or are interested in hosting an event to benefit NIJC, please contact Cindy Tapper at 312-660-1444 or by email at [ctapper@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:ctapper@heartlandalliance.org).*

# NIJC AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

As an NIJC Ambassador, you will serve as important ally to the immigrant community by helping to raise awareness of immigrants' rights, create a safe space for conversation, and encourage the exchange of accurate, quality information.

## Why You're Needed:

For centuries, immigrants have come to America to build better lives and have become integral contributors to our country. Welcoming immigrants and supporting them as they settle here is important for the safety and wellbeing of our communities. Unfortunately, the hateful rhetoric that permeates our national dialogue today often leaves immigrants feeling afraid and disconnected from society. Language barriers, fear and distrust of the government, and intimidation continue to marginalize our immigrant neighbors. Together, we can shift the dialogue to ensure immigrants and refugees feel welcome and safe in our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, places of worship, and all other institutions that serve us better when no one is left behind.



## Ambassador Activities:

- Learn
  - Use this toolkit to find answers to common questions about immigration and read about the diverse experiences of immigrants in the United States
  - Visit NIJC's website at [immigrantjustice.org](http://immigrantjustice.org) and other resources listed in this toolkit to delve deeper into immigrant rights issues
- Gather
  - Organize an event or gathering to engage your professional and community networks in conversations about immigrant rights
  - Host a fundraising event to raise financial support for NIJC
- Act
  - Speak out at community events where your voice can help support immigrants
  - Call or write your elected officials and ask them to support policies that help immigrants establish stable and secure lives in the United States
  - Share NIJC messages and resources online and in person
  - Volunteer to support immigrants and their families as a *pro bono* attorney, interpreter and advocate

# ABOUT NIJC

The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) is a non-partisan human rights leader widely recognized for its expertise in immigration law and policy and for providing direct legal services to immigrants and their families. NIJC believes the United States is stronger when we value and respect the rights of people regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

## Protecting Human Rights

NIJC provides life-saving legal representation to nearly 10,000 immigrants and refugees each year, including children, women, LGBT individuals, families, people fleeing persecution, and immigrants in detention. To extend its reach, NIJC partners with community groups at the local and national level and leverages a network of more than 1,500 *pro bono* attorneys. NIJC educates community members and policy makers, advocating for a humane immigration system that works for everyone.

## Responding to the Needs of Refugees and Immigrants

With more than 60 million people forcibly displaced around the world, we are witnessing the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. Children are exposed to violence and subjected to trafficking. Women are kidnapped and abused. Families are seeking refuge in record numbers to escape terror in their home countries.

Immigrants do not have a right to government-appointed counsel. Even though many immigrants and refugees are eligible for legal protections, the odds are stacked against them. Through a unique and proven combination of direct legal services, education, litigation, and advocacy, NIJC works to secure legal protection and stability for immigrants and their families while promoting immigration reform that respects human rights.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Why do people come to the United States?**

Anyone who has made a long distance move knows how difficult it can be to uproot their lives and families and start a new life. Many people who come to the United States believe the United States provides their only means of survival. Many asylum seekers and refugees tell us that they wished they could remain in their home countries, if only they could live safely there. Mothers seeking asylum in the United States often tell us they believed the only way to save the lives of their children was to take the dangerous journey to the U.S. to seek protection. They weighed the risks and decided to leave because it was their only hope.

### **Who are the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States?**

Undocumented immigrants are interwoven into our communities. Many live in mixed-status families and at least one in 15 children in the U.S. has an undocumented parent. Nearly 60 percent of undocumented immigrants have lived in the United States for more than 10 years.

### **How does the immigration court process work?**

Immigration law is one of the most complex areas of law. Without legal counsel, immigrants (including children) struggle to navigate the system alone. Many have to appear before an immigration judge and against a government attorney without anyone to assist them. Many who are eligible for protection are unaware of their legal rights, and those in removal proceedings face the imminent threat of deportation. Only 30 percent of immigrants and 14 percent of detained immigrants have access to counsel<sup>1</sup>, yet NIJC's research shows that immigrants with legal counsel are more likely to prevail in their cases.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why don't undocumented immigrants apply for green cards or U.S. citizenship?**

For many undocumented immigrants living in U.S. communities, there is no available route to legal status. Immigration to the United States on a temporary or permanent basis is generally limited to three different routes: employment, family reunification, or humanitarian protection. Even those who have qualifying family relationships must wait decades or may be prevented from using visas available to them because U.S. immigration laws are punitive, particularly for anyone who has been in the United States without status. To make matters worse, some people who qualify for status must wait three or more years between immigration court hearings in order to resolve their cases.

### **What is DACA?**

Beginning in 2012, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) provided temporary immigration protection and employment authorization for eligible immigrant youth. The president terminated this program in September 2017, but under a federal court injunction, as of the date of this document, individuals who previously obtained DACA can still apply to renew their protection. DACA recipients may work legally until the work permits they obtained under the program expire. We do not know how the fate of the DACA program will be resolved by the courts; it remains urgent that Congress and our communities step up to protect Dreamers.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://chicagoreporter.com/finding-a-lawyer-a-huge-obstacle-for-asylum-seekers-in-chicago>

<sup>2</sup> <http://jmhs.cmsny.org/index.php/jmhs/article/view/37>

## **Who is eligible for refugee or asylee status?**

Refugees and asylum seekers must establish that they have been persecuted or will be persecuted in the future because of a characteristic they can't change. Refugees must show they have faced or will face harm because of their race, nationality, political beliefs, or because they belong to a particular social group, such as women opposing forced marriage. People persecuted because of their religion also qualify for refugee protection. Discriminating against refugees based on their religion or nationality, as the current administration has through numerous controversial policies, undermines America's promise as a nation that upholds freedom for all. Such behavior deteriorates our moral standing. It is un-American.

## **What is the difference between a refugee and asylum seeker?**

Both refugees and asylees have to meet the same legal standard in order to be granted legal protection. However, refugees are screened for protection at designated locations outside the United States and enter the country with refugee status already secured. In contrast, asylum seekers are immigrants who enter the United States and request protection after their arrival. If the government determines that they meet the refugee test, then they too are granted protection. Although many people throughout the world are able to request protection through the refugee system, others do not have a safe place to do so and must escape to the United States before they can seek protection.

## **Are asylum seekers required to seek protection at designated ports of entry?**

No. Under international and U.S. law, the U.S. government has a legal obligation to allow people who come to our border and ask for asylum to have the opportunity to have their requests heard, no matter where or how they cross the border. People cross the U.S. border between ports of entry for many reasons: many do not know where these ports are located, or it is too dangerous to journey to them. Most asylum seekers are looking to reach safe haven as quickly and safely as they can. All migrants who request protection have a right to tell their story to a judge and have a fair and full adjudication of their case.

## **Is our refugee system secure?**

Yes. Refugees undergo a more rigorous screening than any other group admitted to the United States. The 21-step<sup>3</sup> screening process is conducted by multiple federal agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, the National Counterterrorism Center, the Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department. In addition to hefty security screenings, refugees undergo medical exams and other interviews to make sure they qualify for refugee resettlement. The review process typically takes more than a year. By the time refugees arrive in the United States, they have been heavily vetted and their cases have been thoroughly reviewed.

## **How do immigrants and refugees impact our economy?**

Numerous studies show that immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, strengthen the U.S. economy and create jobs for native-born workers.<sup>4</sup> Many undocumented immigrants pay into programs like social security even though they are not eligible to receive those benefits.<sup>5</sup> Overall, immigrants are barred from access to public benefits, and refugees receive very limited assistance to help them resettle in the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2015/11/18/125812/infographic-the-screening-process-for-entry-to-the-united-states-for-syrian-refugees/>

<sup>4</sup> American Immigration Council overview of several studies: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/value-added-immigrants-create-jobs-and-businesses-boost-wages-native-born-workers>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-03-01/study-undocumented-immigrants-pay-billions-in-taxes>

# LEARN

## IMMIGRANT STORIES

Learn the unique stories of NIJC clients and the wide ranging challenges they face.

### Life After Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage

Aissatou is a young woman from Guinea who came to the United States to attend school. Her uncle started threatening to harm her if she did not return to Guinea and marry a 50-year old man who already had multiple wives. Aissatou had witnessed him hire two men to rape one of his wives. Aissatou knew if she returned home, she could not obtain protection from the police or other Guinean government officials, who view forced marriage as a family matter and do not intervene to protect girls and young women from harm. At the same time, she was also suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder related to the female genital mutilation she suffered as a child. With the support of NIJC, and after two and a half years in the immigration court system, Aissatou secured asylum. She now is pursuing a bachelor's degree at Northeastern University.



NIJC Client Aissatou

### Breaking Barriers to Higher Education

Daniela was three years old when her family came to the United States to start a better life after her uncles were kidnapped in their hometown in Mexico. As she got older, being undocumented presented more and more obstacles. *“While my friends were getting their driver’s licenses and thinking about college, I was becoming increasingly fearful of being separated from my family. Thanks to DACA, I have the opportunity to study, work, and pursue my dreams. Today, I’m an honors student at Noble Street College Prep with plans to continue my education at DePaul University and pursue a degree in entrepreneurship.”*



NIJC Client Daniela

### Escaping Gang Violence

*“When I was 11-years old, my little brother and I left our home in Honduras and traveled alone to the United States. Even though we were scared to make the trip, we had no choice. Our mother lived in the United States and the aunt who was supposed to be taking care of us did not treat us well. For girls like me, it is especially scary to become a teenager, because if a gang member decides he wants you to be his girlfriend, you can’t say no. Two weeks after our asylum interview, we received a letter telling us we won asylum! We are so grateful for our lawyers and happy that we get to stay and live with our mother, go*



NIJC Client Karina at NIJC's Human Rights Awards in 2016



# LEARN

## IMMIGRANT STORIES

### Overcoming Domestic Abuse

Marisol suffered years of abuse at the hands of her husband. She was fearful to leave him because she was undocumented and he threatened to contact the Department of Children & Family Services to take away her young children. Marisol desperately wants to bring her teenage daughter, who still lives in Honduras, to the United States, but her husband refused to submit the petition. With support from NIJC, Marisol obtained legal status through the Violence Against Women Act and is now applying for permanent residence and attempting to bring her daughter to the United States.

### Rising Above Violence and Gender Discrimination

Gretta is a transgender woman who fled persecution in Mexico in 2003 after suffering beatings when relatives caught her wearing girls' clothing. Gretta spent nearly three years in U.S. detention centers where she was housed with men. *"I was verbally attacked by officers and detainees all the time,"* Gretta says. She faced repeated abuse and frequent full body cavity searches. With the help of NIJC, she was released on bond and is awaiting the result of her asylum request.



NIJC Client Gretta

### Harsh Laws and the Criminalization of Immigrants

Astrid came to the United States when she was seven years old and eventually became a permanent resident. In May of 2013, immigration agents surrounded Astrid's home and arrested her in front of her children for a 14-year-old drug offense. Because of unfair drug laws that are particularly harsh on immigrants, Astrid was mandatorily detained without bond, where she languished for two and a half years. If Astrid were to be deported, there would be no legal way for her to return to the United States. With support from NIJC, Astrid is fighting to remain in the United States, her home, and avoid permanent separation from her children.

David and his wife have two young sons, both U.S. citizens, who have serious developmental issues and require constant care. A couple years ago, David's son was sick and needed to get to the hospital immediately.

On the way to the hospital, a police officer pulled David over for speeding. When the arresting officer saw that David's only identification was his passport from El Salvador, he arrested David and turned him over to immigration authorities. NIJC convinced the government to exercise discretion and discontinue David's deportation proceedings. Today, David has his driver's license and work authorization and can more securely provide for his family and care for his sons.



NIJC Client Astrid and her daughter

# LEARN

## RESOURCES FOR IMMIGRANTS & ALLIES

### Hotlines and legal counsel

**Immigrant Legal Defense Hotline**, *National Immigrant Justice Center*  
Call 312-660-1370 or email [immigrantlegaldefense@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:immigrantlegaldefense@heartlandalliance.org).

**Family Support Hotline**, *Illinois Coalition for Immigrant Rights*  
Call 1-855-HELP-MY-FAMILY (1-855-435-7693) English/Spanish/Korean/Polish

**Know Your Rights**, *National Immigrant Justice Center*  
A list of rights and safe practices every immigrant in the United States should know.  
[immigrantjustice.org/know-your-rights/know-your-rights-preparing-new-administration](http://immigrantjustice.org/know-your-rights/know-your-rights-preparing-new-administration)

### Tools for allies

**What to Do Next to Protect Immigrant Communities**, *National Immigrant Justice Center*  
Learn how to protect immigrant communities.  
<http://immigrantjustice.org/know-your-rights/what-do-next-protect-immigrant-communities>

**#ReportHate**, *Southern Poverty Law Center*  
Use this form to report hate incidents post-election which are then tracked by SPLC.  
<https://www.splcenter.org/reporthate>

**Post-Election Resource Guide for Schools**, *Immigration Legal Resource Center*  
In this brochure, ILRC shares guidance with schools on providing emotional support and critical information to families.  
<https://www.ilrc.org/post-election-resource-schools>

### Immigration enforcement

**DACA is Ending: Know Your Rights**, *National Immigrant Justice Center*  
A Know Your Rights Brochure regarding the end of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.  
<http://immigrantjustice.org/know-your-rights/daca-ending-know-your-rights>

**What to Do If the FBI is at Your Door**, *Asian Americans Advancing Justice*  
A Know Your Rights Brochure for Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian communities.  
<http://www.advancingjustice-alc.org/community-education/>

**Know Your Rights Card**, *Immigrant Legal Resource Center*  
This red card is a symbol of safety and knowledge providing critical information for immigrants dealing with ICE agents. ILRC provides cards for free upon request.  
<https://www.ilrc.org/red-cards>

**Know Your Rights! Protect Yourself Against Immigration Raids**, *United We Dream*  
Use this Deportation Defense Card when interacting with ICE.  
<http://unitedwedream.org/thank-deportation-defense-card-handly-phone/>  
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# GATHER

Bringing people together in person to share information and perspectives is often the best way to overcome the artificial barriers that prevent Americans from understanding the consequences of unjust immigration policies. Even casual conversations among friends and neighbors can shift someone's perspective and help them better understand the importance of upholding America's promise to welcome the refugees and immigrants who make our country strong.

## Office Brown Bag or Event

Help create a safe space for colleagues to engage in discussion around immigration, personal stories and fears. Host a brown bag discussion or other interactive event on welcoming immigrants and share information on immigrant rights, challenges and resources.

## Book or Film Club

Grow the impact of your book or film club by suggesting [titles featuring immigrant issues](#). Invite allies, community members, students, and folks less familiar with immigrant rights and challenge them to join in on the discussion.

### Suggested books

- *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- *The Same Sky* by Amanda Eyre Ward
- *In the Sea There are Crocodiles: Based on the True Story of Enaiatollah Akbari* by Fabio Geda
- *No Safe Place* by Deborah Ellis
- *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers
- *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream* by Joshua Davis
- *The Wind Doesn't Need a Passport: Stories from the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* by Tyche Hendricks
- *A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central America* by Óscar Martínez

### Suggested films

- *A Better Life* (2011)
- *Into the Fire: The Hidden Victims of Austerity in Greece* (2013)
- *Don't Tell Anyone* (2015)
- *The Muslims are coming!* (2013)
- *The Land Between* (2014)
- *Documented* (2013)
- *The Visitor* (2007)
- *Made in LA* (2007)
- *The Journey to Europe* (2016)

## Cocktail Party

Host a cocktail party in your home or at a local restaurant or bar. Use the event to generate awareness or raise funds for immigrant rights issues.

## Birthday/Anniversary Party

Do you have an upcoming birthday, anniversary, shower or other life milestone? Consider making a contribution to NIJC in lieu of personal gifts – and ask your friends and family to do the same.

## Business Partnerships

Are you a business owner, restaurant, or retail owner who is looking to align with a great cause? Whether it is a percentage of proceeds for a week or simply collecting change, you can make a difference while you work.

## Fireside Chat or Panel Discussion

Invite an NIJC staff or board member to talk to your group (professional or personal network, alumni group, book club, etc.) about the challenges facing immigrants and refugees, and need for legal services and advocacy.

If you would like more information or are interested in hosting an event to benefit NIJC, please contact Nina Gagnon at 312-660-1326 or [ngagnon@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:ngagnon@heartlandalliance.org).

## GET INVOLVED

Now is the time to stand together with immigrant communities. We need your energy and support to ensure the well-being of our friends, our neighbors, and our community. There are many ways you can stand up for immigrants – join us:

**Donate to NIJC's Emergency Response Fund** at [www.immigrantjustice.org/donate](http://www.immigrantjustice.org/donate)

### **Represent immigrants**

NIJC provides a variety of opportunities for *pro bono* attorneys to represent immigrants on various matters, including, but not limited to bond hearings, asylum cases, Freedom of Information Act litigation and affirmative and appellate litigation. If you work with a firm that has the resources to support *pro bono*, consider volunteering to provide legal representation for immigrant children and families. As a *pro bono* attorney you help give voice to immigrants and refugees who are without representation, and hold the U.S. government accountable to facts and the Constitution.

[immigrantjustice.org/be-pro-bono-attorney](http://immigrantjustice.org/be-pro-bono-attorney)

### **Be an interpreter**

Most of NIJC's *pro bono* cases require the use of an interpreter to prepare a detailed affidavit or to translate foreign language documents. Even clients who speak English benefit from the assistance of an interpreter because discussing the nuances of their immigration cases may be difficult and communicating in their native languages is preferred. (Languages in greatest demand: Spanish, Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin, Burmese, Hmong and French). [immigrantjustice.org/be-volunteer-interpreter](http://immigrantjustice.org/be-volunteer-interpreter)

### **Conduct legal screenings (in pilot phase)**

If you are interested in providing legal screenings to immigrants to help immigrants access legal protections, NIJC will provide trainings and schedule opportunities for *pro bono* attorneys to conduct initial legal screenings. [immigrantjustice.org/be-pro-bono-attorney](http://immigrantjustice.org/be-pro-bono-attorney)

### **Support immigrants in detention**

Immigrants in detention facilities around the United States are often subject to punitive and long-term solitary confinement leaving them isolated from their families and support systems. Help support detained immigrants and refugees by writing letters of encouragement and inviting your friends and family to join you. Become a volunteer with Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants (ICDI) and visit immigrants in local detention centers and assist with the transition of recently released immigrants. [icdichicago.org/volunteer/](http://icdichicago.org/volunteer/)

### **Teach English**

Assist immigrants as they integrate into the community by teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. [eslteacheredu.org/illinois/](http://eslteacheredu.org/illinois/)

### **Speak out**

Talk to elected officials about supporting immigrant rights – call the congressional switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to speak with your representative or senators. Encourage your elected officials to support immigrants and undocumented students.

### **Attend NIJC's Annual Human Rights Awards**

NIJC's annual luncheon each summer in Chicago draws thousands of leaders from the legal, civic, and philanthropic community to honor human rights champions and support NIJC's mission to defend immigrant rights. More information at [immigrantjustice.org/humanrightsawards](http://immigrantjustice.org/humanrightsawards)

# ACT

## CONNECT ON SOCIAL MEDIA



/ImmigrantJustice



@nijc



/ImmigrantJustice



National Immigrant Justice Center



[Immigrantjustice.org/action](mailto:Immigrantjustice.org/action)



[Immigrantjustice.org/donate](https://immigrantjustice.org/donate)

### Sample Posts:

#### Facebook

- We are a nation of immigrants. Join me in standing with immigrants by supporting @ImmigrantJustice. Learn more at [immigrantjustice.org](https://immigrantjustice.org).
- I believe in America's founding values of liberty and justice for all. Join me and share this image to stand with the immigrants who make our nation strong. Learn more about @ImmigrantJustice at [immigrantjustice.org](https://immigrantjustice.org).

#### Twitter

- I believe in the American value of justice for all. I stand w/ immigrants who make our nation strong. #RefugeesWelcome #HereToStay @nijc
- We are a nation of immigrants. I stand with immigrants by supporting @nijc. Join me: [immigrantjustice.org](https://immigrantjustice.org) #HereToStay #RefugeesWelcome

## WRITE TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Use this sample letter, or edit to focus on immigration policies you want to influence.

Dear [Senator/Representative] \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing today to urge you to defend DACA and pass a clean DREAM Act. This legislation would provide legal status for immigrant youth and would not jeopardize the safety and livelihood of other immigrants in the United States. Immigrants of all ages, not just the Dreamers, deserve the opportunity to contribute fully to our society and economy. It is essential that our elected representatives hold the administration accountable for protecting the rights of our immigrant communities.

Many undocumented individuals have no way of ever becoming Americans. They are our friends, neighbors, co-workers and classmates, and have called this country home for years. No matter how hard working or successful, many fear deportation to countries rife with violence, to towns they may not remember, and to where people speak languages they may not know.

By preventing immigrants from fully contributing to our economy, we undermine the country's economic growth and waste tremendous resources on an enforcement system that all agree does not work. The cost to deport a single immigrant is approximately \$23,000 – the cost to deport all those without status would be staggering and makes no economic sense.

As Congress considers legislation impacting immigrant communities, I urge you to stop funding efforts that lock up and deport our neighbors. Congress has the final say on federal spending and it has the power to cut off the funding that perpetuates this mass incarceration and family separation. This issue is extremely important to me and to our nation's future. Please support immigrants and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

**Find your official here:** [www.govtrack.us/congress/members](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members)