



MCC U.S. Washington Office Guide to

Immigration Reform

MCC U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY PRINCIPLES (SUMMARY)

1. Pass legislation that provides the option of earned legal status for undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States.
2. Maintain the current family-based immigration system and increase the number of available family visas so families can reunite and immigrate together.
3. Create fair and just guest worker programs that ensure labor rights, employer choice and opportunities for immigrant workers to change status.
4. Preserve access to social security, healthcare and other benefits and services for lawfully present immigrants, while avoiding policies that deter access to public services by immigrant communities.
5. Enact oversight mechanisms to support community security, accountability and rights on the border, while opposing policies that contribute to deaths on the border and that create fear among immigrant communities.
6. Address political instability and economic disparity in migrants' home countries.



Additional resources

- MCC Washington Office legislative information and resources: mcc.org/us/washington/issues/immigration/index.html
- MCC U.S. general immigration education office: mcc.org/us/immigration
- MCC Immigration and Globalization brochure: mcc.org/us/washington/resources/
- MCC Immigration Listening Project Report: mcc.org/us/immigration/
- Mennonite Church USA immigration information page: peace.mennolink.org/immigration.html
- Brethren in Christ immigration information page: bic-church.org/resourcesimmigration/

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The Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office is a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ presence on Capitol Hill, providing and encouraging prophetic witness to the way of Christ on matters of U.S. public policy.

Undocumented immigration

There are more than 12 million undocumented individuals in the United States. Some crossed the U.S./Mexico border illegally but many more entered lawfully and “overstayed” their visas.

Contrary to popular belief, few could have immigrated through legal channels. Temporary work permits are difficult to obtain, immigrant visas are rarely issued to unskilled workers and family visas can involve long waits (up to 22 years). And once a person enters without authorization, U.S. law often provides no mechanism to adjust status. For children brought here by parents and raised in the United States, this result can be particularly frustrating.

MCC worker Jodi Read recently met a young man who struggled to feed his family in Honduras before deciding to seek work in the United States. Although his brother lives in Louisiana, a family visa (if obtainable) would have taken many years to receive—years of hunger for his children. So the young man tried to cross the border on a train and almost died when his leg was crushed between two train cars.

MCC also works with migrant farm workers, many of whom are undocumented. There are few well-paying jobs in Mexico and work is readily available in U.S. fields—but few legal immigration avenues are open to them.

U.S. failure to provide needed immigration avenues may or may not excuse the conduct of those who enter or stay without a valid visa. It does, however, inform MCC’s belief that new laws are needed and earned legalization for those already here is an important first step.



Faith reflection

If you’re not an undocumented immigrant to the United States, why should you care what happens to them? Why advocate for anything on their behalf? After all, they broke the law by either coming or staying, didn’t they?

Most of us agree that the Bible promotes and affirms the concept of the rule of law (Romans 13:1–7). But U.S. immigration laws are broken and they harm many who have already suffered injustice. The Bible instructs Christians to oppose broken laws that harm people made in God’s image (Isaiah 10:1–4, Jeremiah 7:1–7, Acts 5:29).

Just as Jesus was willing to reach out to tax collectors and “sinners,” Christians today often want to help people they believe have broken laws or biblical commandments, and who are eager to make amends. As a result, many Christians are engaged in prison ministries, victim-offender reconciliation programs and halfway houses. Should we be less forgiving, active and creative with individuals who commit civil immigration violations?

Detention and deportation

Every year, thousands of Haitians apply for asylum in the U.S. but only one-third are accepted despite reports of wide-spread human rights abuse and political turmoil in Haiti. The United States is obliged not to return refugees to areas where their freedom may be threatened, but it still deports many Haitians.

MCC worker Brad Ginter works with asylum applicants in Miami. He recently helped a 26-year-old Haitian political activist named Jean seek asylum after he was beaten and threatened in his home country. Fortunately, Jean’s petition was successful.

Like many people uprooted by political and economic upheaval, however, Jean is a trauma survivor. Too often, U.S. government policies re-traumatize immigrants and asylum seekers by subjecting them to mandatory



detention, oppressive border policies, long waiting periods, uncertainty, family separation and deportation.

Citizen advocacy is needed to reshape how the United States treats those who come here. Although nations claim the right to enforce borders, they do not have the legal or moral right to do so at any cost.