

THE RAINBOW INITIATIVE



The Rainbow Initiative is a program of Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the refugee resettlement and migration ministry of The Episcopal Church. It was created in 2023 in response to a decision of the Church in the summer of 2022 (General Convention Resolution D045) to focus attention on people who have been forced to leave their countries of origin because of persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The Initiative is working with congregations and communities throughout the United States and Europe to draw attention to LGBTQ+ forced migrants in June 2023 and beyond. Current partners are found here: episcopalmigrationministries.org/rainbow-initiative-communities/

LGBTQ+ Asylum is a Human Right

About LGBTQ+ Forced Migrants

A “forced migrant” is someone who is compelled to leave their country of citizenship or origin because of persecution. They may be designated as “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” “asylees,” “undocumented immigrants,” or with some other terminology, depending on how they relate to the immigration system of the country where they are located.

It is illegal to be LGBTQ+ in about 70 countries, and 11 now prescribe the death penalty. In many more countries, attacks and murder against LGBTQ+ people go unprosecuted.

Religion is used to justify much of the persecution that LGBTQ+ people face worldwide. At the same time, many LGBTQ+ people who have been persecuted remain religious themselves, and much of the help that they receive is motivated by religion.

If and when they reach the U.S., LGBTQ+ forced migrants are more likely to be asylum seekers (about 30,000 per year) or undocumented immigrants, than they are to be refugees (about 1,000 per year). These legal differences are important because asylum seekers are unable to work legally for at least 180 days after they have filed their asylum application, and they are ineligible for many government-funded benefit programs. Undocumented immigrants also face these challenges. Individuals admitted to the U.S. as refugees, on the other hand, arrive with immediate work authorization, access to various public assistance programs, and a pathway to citizenship.

Many LGBTQ+ people are alienated from the social support systems that most forced migrants depend on in order to survive, such as their families and ethnic community associations. This social isolation, coupled with the lack of work authorization, makes them particularly vulnerable to homelessness, extreme poverty, and exploitation.

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Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ forced migrants are often strong, determined, and hopeful: Successfully fleeing from persecution requires enormous strength and determination. They bring their talents and energy to their new communities. And throughout their journeys towards safety, they are driven by hope for a better future.

“Internally displaced people” have fled persecution but remained within their country of citizenship. Many LGBTQ+ Americans can relate to this experience, and have relied on Episcopal and other congregations to provide them with a warm welcome in their new communities. This same welcome is extremely important for people who have had to cross international borders in order to reach safety.

Why Should Christians Care?

The call to “welcome the stranger” through protection and hospitality is deeply rooted in many religions, including Christianity. Christian scripture and tradition emphasize seeing Jesus in all people, and particularly in those who are persecuted and in need of help.

Religion is interwoven with the persecution many LGBTQ+ people experience. It can also be interwoven with their welcome and healing.

What Can You Do?

- Join the Rainbow Initiative: Individuals and organizations are invited to learn more about the project and download resources for local use at episcopalmigrationministries.org/rainbowinitiative.
- Welcome and sponsor: Learn more about ways that you and your community can come together to sponsor a refugee, asylum seeker, or other displaced person through EMM’s Ways to Welcome: episcopalmigrationministries.org/waystowelcome/
- Advocate: Use your voice to advocate for those forced to flee their homelands in search of safety. Join the Episcopal Public Policy Network to respond to action alerts and share your thoughts with your members of Congress and the administration: episcopalchurch.org/ogr
- Give: Show your support for our newest neighbors and make a gift to Episcopal Migration Ministries. Every gift ensures newcomers welcomed through EMM are given a solid foundation to begin again in safety and hope. episcopalmigrationministries.org/give

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