

# LANDLORD CONVERSATION GUIDE

## Welcoming Asylum Seekers

### How to Talk About Asylum Seekers

The **Landlord Conversation Guide: Welcoming Asylum Seekers** is a comprehensive resource designed to facilitate dialogue between housing providers (both small landlords and rental apartment building managers) and individuals seeking housing opportunities for asylum seekers. This guide is a tool for agency case managers, sponsors, advocates, and organizations seeking to foster understanding and collaboration between housing providers and prospective tenants from diverse backgrounds. By providing comprehensive information, practical tips, and talking points, this resource empowers users to navigate discussions with empathy, confidence, and a focus on mutual benefit. This resource will help build knowledge and access tools to facilitate productive conversations, promote inclusivity, and support the housing needs of people seeking asylum in the U.S.

#### 1. Introduction: Establish Common Ground with Housing Providers

- **Acknowledge Current Events:** Begin by acknowledging the current situation regarding asylum seekers arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border.
- **Express Openness to Discussion:** Assure the housing providers that you are open to discussing any concerns or questions they have.
- **Reiterate Common Goals:** Remind them that fostering a consensus on securing housing for asylum seekers enhances the overall well-being of the community.

#### 2. Provide Context: Understanding Asylum Seekers

- **Define "Asylum Seeker":** Explain what it means to be an asylum seeker, emphasizing that these individuals are seeking protection from persecution or violence in their home countries.
  - *An asylum seeker is someone who flees their home country due to fear of persecution or harm based on factors like their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. They come to the U.S. seeking protection and refugee status under international and domestic laws, hoping to find safety and rebuild their lives free from oppression and violence.*
- **Legal Right to Seek Asylum:** Clarify that seeking asylum is a legal right protected by international and domestic laws.
- **Government Processing:** Describe the process by which asylum seekers are vetted by government agencies upon arrival at a U.S. border. Note that this includes interviews, screenings, and adjudication of their asylum claims.
- **Humanitarian Considerations:** Highlight the humanitarian aspect of assisting people fleeing

persecution and/or violence. in the U.S. Note that there are multiple security screenings, background checks, interviews, and medical examinations done by the Department of State and its non-government and U.S. government partners to ensure the safety and security of both refugees and host communities in the U.S.

- **Legal Status:** Clarify the legal status of refugees and their rights in the U.S., including their right to live in the U.S. under the protection of international refugee laws and agreements as well as their eligibility to work and to access healthcare and public-school education for children < 18.

### 3. Provide Understanding: The Vetting Process

- **Screening:** Asylum seekers present themselves at a border point/port of entry or apply for asylum to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). They are initially screened to assess their eligibility for asylum based on a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.
- **Credible Fear Interview:** Those who pass the initial screening may be referred for a credible fear interview with an asylum officer. During this interview, the asylum seeker must prove a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to their home country.
- **Background Checks:** Asylum seekers undergo extensive background checks, including for biometric and biographical information; these are done by relevant U.S. government agencies, usually FBI and Department of Homeland Security, to verify their identity and assess any security risks.
- **Asylum Interview:** If deemed to have a credible fear of persecution, asylum seekers proceed to an asylum interview with USCIS. During this interview, asylum seekers provide detailed testimony and evidence to support their asylum claim.
- **Decision:** Based on the asylum interview, USCIS or an immigration judge determines whether the asylum seeker qualifies for asylum protection under U.S. law. If granted asylum, the individual can remain in the U.S. and may eventually apply for permanent residency.

### 4. Provide Reassurance: Addressing Concerns and Questions

- **Encourage Questions:** Invite the housing providers to ask questions or express concerns about renting to asylum seekers.
- **Provide Factual Information:** Offer factual information to address any misconceptions or concerns about the legal status or background of asylum seekers.
- **Discuss Support Systems:** Explain that asylum seekers often receive support from legal aid organizations, advocacy groups, and community members to navigate the asylum process and access services to address basic needs, including housing.
- **Assure Safety and Stability:** Reiterate that renting to asylum seekers can provide them (the asylum seeker) with a safe home while they await resolution of their asylum claim.
- **Emphasize Legal Compliance:** Assure housing providers that renting to asylum seekers is

allowed under U.S. [fair housing laws](#) and does not pose any legal risk to them.

### 5. Address Common Concerns

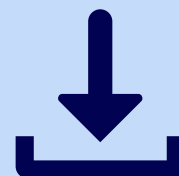
*Refugee Housing Solutions conducted a housing provider survey in April 2024, and it showed several common trends of concerns when it comes to renting to newcomers, some of whom are asylum seekers. Below, each concern is addressed, including its rationale, a talking point, and a suggested action item.*

- **Communication Limits and Understanding of Rental Property Care**
  - **CONCERN:** Housing providers may face challenges due to language barriers and limited ability to communicate with tenants, which may impact understanding of home care and maintenance.
  - **TALKING POINT:** Assure housing providers of the availability of language assistance, cultural orientation programs, plus educational materials that aid asylum seekers and tenants in understanding U.S. home care and maintenance expectations.
  - **ACTION ITEM:** Coordinate with language service providers or bilingual staff to offer interpretation services for meetings, lease signings, and ongoing communications with asylum seekers and tenants.
- **Concerns and Misunderstanding About Immigration Practice and Policy**
  - **CONCERN:** Housing providers may express concerns about the current immigration system and unvetted newcomers, preferring enhanced border control and immigration reform before considering housing refugees, facing hurdles in accessing credit or criminal history for non-citizen tenants.
  - **TALKING POINT:** “While we understand concerns about immigration policies and U.S. Southwest border issues, our focus is on addressing the immediate housing needs of vulnerable individuals and families already in our community.”
  - **ACTION ITEM:** Engage in community outreach and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about asylum seeker housing needs and advocate for policies that support asylum seekers while respecting fair housing principles.

### RESOURCE

A fact sheet was published by the U.S. Departments of State, Health and Human Services (HHS), Homeland Security (DHS), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to answer questions that landlords and property managers may have as they consider renting to refugees, asylum seekers, and other eligible newcomers.

DOWNLOAD



- **Cultural and Social Integration**
  - **CONCERN:** Housing providers may express concerns about the cultural adaptation and adherence to local customs and laws, fearing that cultural differences may cause issues among tenants and neighbors.
  - **TALKING POINT:** “Cultural integration is complex, and we are committed to facilitating positive interactions and mutual understanding between newcomer tenants, including asylum seekers, and housing providers. We offer cultural orientation programs and resources to support newcomer tenants in adapting to their new community. We also have information and resources for housing providers.”
  - **ACTION ITEM:** Organize cultural orientation workshops or events to promote understanding and respect among tenants from diverse backgrounds and housing providers, fostering a sense of community and inclusion. Give tenants the RHS [Tenant Toolkit](#) and other resources for first-time renters, and give housing providers the RHS [Landlord Toolkit](#).
- **Rental Income Risk and Tenant Stability**
  - **CONCERN 1:** Housing providers may be worried about tenants leaving abruptly, property damage, and legal status uncertainties for those without Social Security numbers or U.S. government IDs.
  - **TALKING POINT:** “We understand the importance of stability for both housing providers and tenants. Our support systems include help with renting safe, secure housing – which sometimes includes emergency rental assistance – and in finding employment, which can help in reducing the risk of early/sudden departures, or lease-breaking.”
  - **ACTION ITEM:** If possible, provide housing stabilization services, such as rent assistance, lease co-signing, and/or landlord incentives, to mitigate the risk of tenant turnover and lost rental income.
  - **CONCERN 2:** Housing providers may be concerned about their inability to access criminal background checks, verify income, or contact past employers and landlords, all of which are customary in the U.S. tenant vetting process.
  - **TALKING POINT:** Explain U.S. government screening processes for asylum seekers, offering references and tenant education programs available to address income verification concerns.
  - **ACTION ITEM:** Share a handout that explains who asylum seekers are, why they are here, and the screenings they go through when entering the U.S., including criminal background checks.

### 6. Closing: Emphasizing Collaboration and Partnership

- **Express Gratitude:** Thank them for the conversation and their openness to better understanding asylum seekers' particular situations.
- **Express Willingness to Collaborate:** Share your willingness to be in touch further, whether by providing additional information, facilitating introductions to relevant organizations, or addressing any further questions or concerns.
- **Leave the Door Open:** Reiterate that you are available to continue the conversation and provide ongoing support as needed.

### 7. Follow-Up

- **Follow-Up Email:** Send a follow-up email summarizing the key points discussed, expressing gratitude once again, and reiterating your availability for further discussion.
- **Provide Resources:** Include links to reputable sources of information on asylum seekers and relevant community resources that can provide support.
- **Stay Engaged with Active Housing Providers:** Keep the lines of communication open and follow up periodically to address any new concerns or questions that may arise with Active Housing Providers.

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