

# Immigration reform key to protect women from violence

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Comprehensive immigration reform that includes a clear path to citizenship could drastically reduce violence against women and girls in the United States and across the world, according to a new policy brief released today by the George Washington University Global Women's Institute (GWI) and We Belong Together.

"For so many women in the United States and around the world, the passage of comprehensive immigration reform and policies that reduce gender-based [violence](#) is a life or death issue," said GWI Director Mary Ellsberg. "This policy brief is a critical tool in advancing these issues and helping to end [violence against women](#) and girls."

The first step in addressing the gaps in U.S. policies that lead to violence against women and girls is to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation that specifically addresses the issue of gender-based violence, the brief says.

Roughly 51 percent of foreign-born individuals in the U.S. and 48 percent of refugees are women, yet only 27 percent of U.S. work visas are granted to women. Migrant women tend to work in service industries, which are not prioritized for visas. Without a visa, women are vulnerable, left open to exploitation from employers and their partners, and often without the means to assert their labor and civil rights. Immigration reform that adequately protects women will strengthen worker protections, no matter an individual's [immigration status](#).

Immigration reform must also include a clear path to citizenship, according to the brief. Research shows that when granted citizenship, women are more likely to remove themselves from abusive relationships that they previously felt trapped in due to the threat of deportation. Laws must promote immigrant integration into society and ensure that immigrant and refugee survivors of violence and trafficking are properly protected and have access to health and social services. Comprehensive immigration reform must also reduce the backlog of immigration petitions and support alternatives to detention.

In addition to immigration reform, lawmakers should support policies that remove the causes of violence abroad, which will in turn reduce the need for women and girls to leave their home countries. If passed, the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA) would advance this goal. IVAWA, which was recently introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives, offers economic and education programs aimed at preventing violence and trafficking while also helping survivors. It would improve humanitarian assistance and provide support for in-country efforts to change attitudes surrounding violence against women.

Policies such as IVAWA will not only help change institutional norms leading to the reduction of gender-based violence, but they will also help to reduce strains on the U.S. immigration system.

"Every day that we delay action on reform that reflects the needs and contributions of [immigrant women](#), our country is paying a terrible price," said Pramila Jayapal, co-chair of We Belong Together, a campaign to mobilize women in support of common-sense immigration reform that will keep families together and prioritize women. "We are tearing families apart, missing out on the talents of millions of dedicated women workers and putting women's lives in jeopardy. That's why millions of [women](#) from all backgrounds are stepping up their advocacy efforts to Congress."

**More information:** Read the complete policy brief:  
[globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/ ... gration-policy-brief](https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/...gration-policy-brief)

Provided by George Washington University

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