Legislation Showcase
The GRACE Act (H.R.2146 and S.1088)

Summary of bill
This legislation amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to increase the minimum annual goal of refugee admissions to 95,000.1

Benefits Offered
If passed, this bill would fulfill our international responsibility to support our allies with the burden sharing of displaced people around the world. It also upholds the promises made to the international community to uphold the rights of refugees under the New York Declaration.2 Additionally, increasing refugee admissions would stimulate economic development in both the U.S. and across the globe by fostering international trade, increasing labor participation, and supporting socio-cultural diversity. See here for an article from Dany Bahar at the Brookings Institution on how accepting refugees would contribute to the economic development of the United States.3

Criticism from Opponents
Opponents of increasing refugee admissions consistently argue that admitting more refugees would increase the risk of terrorism in the United States, especially in light of a wave of terrorist attacks in Europe. This concern mainly stems from the misconception that the vetting process for accepting refugees is weak. However, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, there are several security entities that review each refugee application. These include the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)4. This clearance process, on average, lasts two years and is considered one of the most secure refugee resettlement programs in the world.5 Education on the security considerations built into the current refugee screening process to the broader public would eliminate a lot of the fear that drives the opposition.6

Bill process
On April 9, 2019, H.R.2146 and S.1008 were referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary and the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, respectively. On May 15, 2019, H.R. 2146 has been referred to the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship.1

Sponsors and Co-Sponsors
The Sponsor of H.R.2146 is 12-term Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA-19), and the Sponsor of S.1088 is Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA). There are currently 42 House Members that are Co-Sponsoring H.R. 2146 and 22 Senators Co-Sponsoring S. 1088. All of the co-Sponsors for both bills are Democrats, with the exception of Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT).1 Maryland Representatives Raskin and Trone, DC Representative Holmes Norton, and Virginia Senator Tim Kaine are all co-sponsors of this bill.

Relevance to the National Capital Area
Refugees have long contributed to the development of the National Capitol Area and have established productive, vibrant communities. Neighborhoods such as the Central American diaspora in Columbia Heights, Washington DC, and the Ethiopian community in Silver Spring, Maryland, have exemplified refugee integration at its finest.7 There are also numerous non-profit organizations and services throughout the National

2 “The New York Declaration of Refugees & Migrants” UNHCR
3 “Why accepting refugees is a win-win-win formula” Dany Bahar
4 “Refugee Security Screening Fact Sheet” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
5 “Resettlement” UNHCR
6 “The Trump Administration Doesn’t Believe in the Global Refugee Crisis” Dara Lind
7 “Residents in Diverse Neighborhoods Areas Say Their Neighborhoods are Better Than Others” Perry Stein
Capital Area that deal with refugee affairs such as Lutheran Social Services, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Silver Spring, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR): Office of the Mayor, DC, and HIAS.

Relevance to the UN and the Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations provides insurmountable resources and assistances for refugees and displaced people. These services are offered by various agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization on Migration (IOM), and the World Health Organization (WHO). These agencies offer services ranging from refugee resettlement, local employment integration, and medical assistance.

Upholding the rights and livelihoods of refugees is also interwoven throughout many of the Sustainable Development Goals:

**GOAL 10: REDUCE INEQUALITY. WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES**

Under this goal, Target 10.7 stresses the need for orderly, safe migration and the mobility of people. This directly addresses the dangerous routes many refugees must travel when displaced, including extensive periods without water, shelter, and little sanitation. Target 10.7 also includes the need for well-managed migration policies within and among countries. Nations should be equipped to deal with migratory flows and provide some form of assistance to those seeking refugee status like medical and psychological treatment, housing, and clean water. Having the proper infrastructure in place for those forced to flee could foster social and economic stability, as well as allow them to integrate into their new environments.

**GOAL 11: MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE**

According to the UNHCR, most refugees settle in urban areas. Cities have traditionally been a haven for displaced people and refugees, and this tradition of urban cities providing inclusive and innovative opportunities should extend to refugee communities. Target 11.B aims to implement policies towards resource efficiency, environmental mitigation, and economic development. Refugees can contribute towards this sustainable and environmental development efforts, as they have proven to generate economic growth. In 2015 alone, nearly 200,000 refugee entrepreneurs generated $4.6 billion in business income across the United States.

**GOAL 16: PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS**

This goal expresses the need to uplift nations in distress by promoting peaceful and accountable institutions to govern their constituents. Two of this goal’s targets highlight the various conflicts many refugees face: Target 16.1 specifically points to reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere and Target 16.2 aspires to end abuse, trafficking, exploitation and the torture of children. According to UNHCR, refugees are highly vulnerable to these issues; not just in their country of origin but in their host countries as well, due to language barriers, cultural differences, and a scarcity of resources. By addressing these problems, societies can build upon a foundation to reduce psychological and physical violence that harm refugees around the world.

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8 [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10)
9 “The Implementation of UNHCR’s Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas” UNHCR
11 “Immigrants as Economic Contributors: Refugees Are a Fiscal Success Story for America” The National Immigration Forum
13 “Figures at a Glance” UNHCR