



*The Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) supports the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as it secures the nation while preserving individual liberty, fairness, and equality under the law.*



### DHS Releases 2023 Update to Equity Action Plan, Outlines New Commitments

*Release Date: February 14, 2024*

WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced the release of the [2023 Update to the DHS Equity Action Plan](#), which builds on the progress made in the 2022 inaugural plan to further embed equity at the center of the Department’s mission. The [2023 Update highlights DHS’s accomplishments](#) over the past three years and identifies nine focus areas to comprehensively advance equity across the Department’s policies, programs, and operations.

DHS selected the nine focus areas in the 2023 Update based on feedback from external stakeholders representing underserved communities. These nine areas include the following strategies and initiatives:

1. Advance equity through the planned updates to the FEMA Individual Assistance Program, which will create opportunities for underserved communities by increasing accessibility and eligibility for post-disaster support.
2. Reduce barriers to citizenship and naturalization through continued evaluation of programs, policies, and outreach opportunities.
3. Promote equitable use of AI technology across the Department through the development and application of new guidance as well as intra-agency coordination.
4. Counter Domestic Violent Extremism and targeted violence through a public health-informed approach.
5. Advance equity for persons who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) by strengthening language access programs.
6. Advance equity in DHS’s screening activities at airport checkpoints and ports of entry through updates to training and enhanced technologies.
7. Advance equity for the 574 federally recognized Tribal Nations and their citizens by ensuring appropriate Tribal consideration and representation in the Department’s work.
8. Advance equity for persons seeking humanitarian protection during immigration processing by strengthening programs available to assist them.
9. Advance equity through Community Disaster Resilience Zones.

The 2023 Update also notes the following accomplishments, among many others:

- Exceeded all small business prime and socioeconomic goals as negotiated with the Small Business Administration in FY 2023. This equates to \$9.94 billion awarded to small businesses, including \$4.69 billion to small, disadvantaged businesses. DHS is the largest spending agency to have achieved this goal.
- Deployed TSA’s new software to over 1,000 Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) screening systems at airports across the country: Updates to the software algorithm eliminate the need for security officers to

#### Inside

[DHS Releases 2023 Update to Equity Action Plan, Outlines New Commitments](#)

[CRCL Officer Gives Remarks at Naturalization Ceremony, Visits U.S. Border Patrol](#)

[CRCL Hosts Women, Peace, and Security Event with Civil Society](#)

[DHS Continues Global Fight to End Female Genital Mutilation](#)

[CRCL on the Road](#)

[Contact Us](#)

determine a passenger's gender prior to AIT screening, enhance accuracy, and significantly reduce false alarms and pat downs for all passengers. It is projected to reduce instances of enhanced screening for members of underserved communities.

- Updated medical certification for disability exceptions and related policy guidance: Applicants for naturalization with a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment may request an exception to the English and civics testing requirements for naturalization. This form and policy update streamlines the process for applicants to claim and substantiate a disability by eliminating unnecessary and duplicative questions.

DHS released the 2023 Update to the DHS Equity Action Plan pursuant to Executive Order 14091, [Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#). The Executive Order called on federal agencies to strengthen their efforts to deliver more equitable outcomes for members of underserved communities. Read more about [advancing equity at DHS](#), and the [White House's agenda on equity](#). This release is available in [nine alternate languages](#).

**\*Upcoming Engagement:** On March 21, 2024, CRCL will host a national engagement to share information and solicit feedback about the 2023 Update to the DHS Equity Action Plan. CRCL invites your participation and input to this important conversation. Please [RSVP](#) by March 20, 10:00 AM ET.

### **CRCL Officer Gives Remarks at Naturalization Ceremony, Visits U.S. Border Patrol**

CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia recently traveled across the country to meet with federal partners and community stakeholders, and to welcome new citizens of our Nation.

In late January, Officer Wadhia traveled to the Southwest border where she visited U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operations in the Tucson Sector. While there, she met with local leadership from the CBP Office of Field Operations and the U.S. Border Patrol, toured the Tucson Soft Sided Processing Facility, and participated in a roundtable with DHS and CBP's chief medical officers to discuss operations concerning the recent migration surge, including medical considerations and support for children and families as they go through processing.

This month, Officer Wadhia gave keynote remarks at a naturalization ceremony in Boston. In her remarks (to 99 new citizens from 47 countries), she reflected on her father's immigration story to Boston, her career as an immigration attorney, and the significance of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 to efforts to eliminate race discrimination in immigration. "Your talents and contributions will uphold America's tradition of providing opportunities for generations. We are a nation unlike any other – individuals from across the globe bound by a common belief in human freedom. We are a nation seeking justice for all. Just as you will strive to be better than yesterday, so will America. And you will be part of that story."

Following the ceremony, she met with the Immigration Family Services Institute, Lawyers for Civil Rights, and other local stakeholder groups to discuss matters affecting immigrant workers. CRCL staff, along with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' Chief Eva Millona, also met with the executive director of Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores.



## **CRCL Hosts Women, Peace, and Security Event with Civil Society Working Group**

This month, the Department's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) initiative convened a joint workshop with the WPS Civil Society Working Group at the United States Institute of Peace. The Working Group, established to support the effective implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, is a non-partisan network of more than 60 civil society organizations with expertise on the impacts of conflict on women and their participation in peacebuilding.



This workshop was a first-time event between DHS and the Working Group, with a focus to establish an ongoing relationship to exchange information on shared WPS equities. CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia and Deputy Officer Veronica Venture gave opening remarks on the importance of the collaboration. DHS WPS Program Manager Carolyn Washington presented on the evolution of WPS integration across DHS.

The workshop included a break-out portion that focused on two of the WPS Strategy/National Action Plan's lines of effort: Participation; and Relief, Response and Recovery. Also, a key concept of the workshop was the integration of a gender perspective, which identifies the various security needs of not only women and girls, but men, boys, and non-binary individuals, into the work of the Department's numerous initiatives.

Approximately 60 stakeholders and subject matter experts attended the workshop across DHS Components, civil society, and the WPS interagency that includes U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Defense, and Department of State. DHS representation included: Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Secret Service, the DHS Office of Partnership and Engagement, Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, and the DHS Science and Technology Directorate.

## **DHS Continues Global Fight to End Female Genital Mutilation**

*Release Date: February 6, 2024*

WASHINGTON — Today, on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its Components join together to call for the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C). Annually on February 6, the international community observes Zero Tolerance Day to raise awareness of the significant harm that FGM/C causes people around the world. On this day, and every day, we stand together to protect the health and well-being of all individuals and uphold their human rights.

FGM/C occurs domestically and in many countries across numerous religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. DHS works closely with other government agencies, nongovernmental partners, medical and educational professionals, and local communities to share strategies and training to eliminate this practice and provide resources to people who have undergone or are at risk of experiencing FGM/C.

The United Nations (UN) reports that more than 200 million people alive today — most between infancy and age 15 — have undergone some form of FGM/C.

DHS is committed to supporting survivors of FGM/C through a survivor-centered approach and is taking steps to combat this human rights abuse. The Department is conducting outreach to diverse stakeholders, including community leaders and victim advocacy organizations, and collaborating with the medical community. "We have made encouraging progress over the past decade. Through a health-focused approach, DHS is partnering on continued action towards eliminating gender-based violence and ensuring that all individuals — including the medical and public health community — are unified in our collective goal to address these harmful acts in a

victim-centered way,” said Dr. Herbert Wolfe, Acting Chief Medical Officer and Acting Director of the DHS Office of Health Security.

The United States treats FGM/C as a serious crime and a form of child abuse. Those suspected of committing FGM/C, including sending children overseas for this purpose, may be investigated and prosecuted accordingly. Anyone who has information about an individual who is suspected of assisting in this crime may submit an anonymous tip by contacting your local law enforcement agency, completing this [online tip form](#), or calling the toll-free tip line at [\(866\)-347-2423](tel:866-347-2423).

### **DHS Statement on Safety and Immigration Enforcement During the Atmospheric River System in California**

**Release date:** February 5, 2024

DHS is working with its federal, state, local, and non-governmental partners to support the needs of the people in the areas that may be impacted by the atmospheric river system in California.

In light of these circumstances, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) remind the public that sites that provide emergency response and relief are considered [protected areas](#). To the fullest extent possible, ICE and CBP do not conduct immigration enforcement activities at protected areas such as along evacuation routes, sites used for sheltering or the distribution of emergency supplies, food or water, or registration sites for disaster-related assistance or the reunification of families and loved ones.

At the request of FEMA or local and state authorities, ICE and CBP may help conduct search and rescue, air traffic de-confliction and public safety missions. ICE and CBP provide emergency assistance to individuals regardless of their immigration status. DHS officials do not and will not pose as individuals providing emergency-related information as part of any enforcement activities.

DHS is committed to ensuring that every individual who seeks shelter, aid, or other assistance as a result of the severe weather impacting California is able to do so regardless of their immigration status. DHS carries out its mission without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, disability, or political associations, and in compliance with law and policy.

For information about filing a complaint with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties about these matters, please visit <https://www.dhs.gov/file-civil-rights-complaint>.

**Translations available in:** [Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.](#)

## **CRCL on the Road, February**

### ***February 8 – Boston, Massachusetts***

CRCL participated in a Lawyers for Civil Rights conference, where they spoke on CRCL’s work to advance civil rights at DHS.

### ***February 21 – Boston, Massachusetts***

CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia keynote gave remarks at U.S. naturalization ceremony.

### ***February 15 – Denver, Colorado***

CRCL hosted a stakeholder engagement with leadership of the Colorado Preventing Targeted Violence Program.

### ***February 22 – San Juan, Puerto Rico***

CRCL participated in regional training event at the Puerto Rico National Security State Information Center.

\*CRCL’s Community Engagement team conducts in-person, virtual, and hybrid engagements with federal, state, local, and civil society stakeholders across the country. We remain available to respond to any stakeholder questions or concerns via email at: [CommunityEngagement@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:CommunityEngagement@hq.dhs.gov).

## **Additional information, and contacting us**

The goal of this periodic newsletter is to inform members of the public about the activities of the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, including: how to file complaints; ongoing and upcoming projects; opportunities to offer comments and feedback; etc. We distribute our newsletters via our stakeholder email list and make them available to community groups for redistribution. Issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at: [www.dhs.gov/crcl-newsletter](http://www.dhs.gov/crcl-newsletter).

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, want to request back issues, or have other comments or questions, please let us know by emailing [crcloutreach@dhs.gov](mailto:crcloutreach@dhs.gov). For more information, including how to make a civil rights or civil liberties complaint about DHS activities, visit: [www.dhs.gov/crcl](http://www.dhs.gov/crcl).

CRCL Phone: 202-401-1474 • Toll Free: 866-644-8360 • TTY: 202-401-0470 • Toll Free TTY: 866-644-8361

DISCLAIMER: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provides links to non-government websites for convenience and informational purposes only. These websites may contain information that is copyrighted with restrictions on reuse. Permission to use copyrighted materials must be obtained from the original source and cannot be obtained from DHS. DHS is not responsible for the content of external websites linked to or referenced from the DHS web server. DHS neither endorses the information or content of external websites, nor guarantees the accuracy of the information contained on external websites. When you select a link to an external website, you are leaving the DHS site.

 **Follow the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on Facebook at: [facebook.com/CivilRightsandCivilLiberties](https://facebook.com/CivilRightsandCivilLiberties).**