

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) Transition Report 2020

Top 6 Priorities for the Biden-Harris Transition Team to Restore the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program on Day 1

An unprecedented 79.5 million people worldwide have been forced from their homes, of which 29.6 million are classified as refugees, having fled their countries to seek safety from persecution. Yet, the gap between the protection needs of refugees and available pathways to safety, such as refugee resettlement, have only widened. In 2019, only 5% of the 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement were resettled worldwide. In 2018, for the first time in the history of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), the U.S. failed to resettle the most refugees worldwide. And in 2021, the annual refugee target was set at a disastrous all-time low of 15,000 refugees. The United States' abdication of leadership through historically low refugee admissions and reduced financial support for global resettlement has prolonged the suffering of tens of thousands of refugees and forfeited our ability to credibly urge other countries to keep their doors open to people in need of protection.

The White House should lead in the coordination of the U.S. humanitarian response to protect and assist refugees through viable durable solutions, including resettlement. Through executive action, agency coordination, diplomacy, and legislative engagement, the White House can restore U.S. leadership in response to the global refugee crisis, rebuild and modernize the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and increase support among the American public for refugee resettlement. RCUSA urges the Biden-Harris transition team to focus on these top six priorities as it prepares for a new presidential administration:

- 1. Immediate notification to Congress of the President's intent to increase the FY21 Presidential Determination (PD) on Refugee Admissions to 100,000 refugees.** This includes delivering a new report to Congress on refugee admissions, which should restore allocations based on vulnerability with slots allocated according to regional needs, resume UNHCR referrals, permit flexibility across allocations, and reaffirm the administration's commitment to refugee protection.
- 2. Request supplemental appropriations from Congress** for the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the Department of Health and Human Services's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to ensure necessary funding to rebuild the overseas and domestic components of the USRAP and strive to meet the FY21 admissions goal.
- 3. Rescind harmful bans and proclamations** that have harmed refugees, asylum seekers, the stateless, immigrants, families, and others, such as Presidential Proclamations 9645 and 9822 and Executive Orders 13769, 13780, 13888, and 13815.
- 4. Initiate an interagency audit of refugee processing and security vetting procedures** and take rapid measures to institute major improvements and efficiencies, including by rebuilding the UNHCR resettlement referral pipeline and reinvesting in refugee resettlement domestic and overseas infrastructure. It is also critical to engage community stakeholders and experiential experts to co-design a private sponsorship pilot and explore other alternative protection pathways.
- 5. Issue executive orders or directives** to PRM, ORR, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other vetting partners to provide guidance on immediate actions and administrative changes to restore and strengthen the USRAP.
- 6. Appoint a senior-level White House coordinator** to coordinate federal agencies and other stakeholders around rebuilding the USRAP, establish benchmarks to meet admissions goals, and lead the interagency audit of refugee processing. The coordinator should aggressively monitor its progress to ensure these goals are pursued in a timely, sustainable, and comprehensive manner.

RCUSA is eager to engage with members of the transition team to discuss our community's recommendations and areas for collaboration to meet shared goals. Please reach out to RCUSA Executive Director Adam Hunter (ahunter@rcusa.org) for detailed recommendations.