

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

September 3, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a diverse coalition of 27 organizations that work to support refugee inclusion and resettlement excellence, I write to urge you to set the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for FY 2022 at 200,000, to begin consultations with Congress on this matter—as required by U.S. law—as soon as possible, and to secure the increased financing necessary to ensure that the U.S. resettlement system can meet today’s enormous humanitarian challenges.

RCUSA commends the steps your administration has taken to rebuild the U.S. resettlement system. We were encouraged by your revised refugee admissions goal of 62,500 for the remainder of this fiscal year, and by Executive Order 14013, which rescinded discriminatory bans and proclamations that harmed refugees, people seeking asylum, the stateless, immigrants, and their families. We are also encouraged by the recent establishment of an interagency Unified Coordination Group to coordinate the resettlement of vulnerable Afghans, by Secretary Mayorkas’ expressed commitment to transparency and cooperation with civil society in the operations of the interagency group, and by today’s announcement of your appointment of former Governor Jack Markell to serve as the White House point person for this effort.

However, due to the ongoing humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and with a clear-eyed understanding of both the moral necessity and pragmatic challenges of offering welcome, protection and support to refugees and other vulnerable forcibly displaced persons, RCUSA is revising its recommendation for the FY 2022 refugee admissions goal upward from 125,000 to 200,000. Laying out this ambitious marker will be a critical step toward rebuilding our country’s humanitarian capabilities and expanding access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), if paired with implementing the key reforms we stipulate later in this letter and requesting robust funding from Congress. It is critical that the administration offer bold leadership in partnership with state and local governments and resettlement agencies to realize the promise of restoring U.S. global leadership in refugee protection. It will send the world a strong unambiguous message about America’s values and commitments.

The scale of the need is indeed daunting. The [Association of Wartime Allies](#) estimates that hundreds of thousands of at-risk Afghans—perhaps as many as a million or more [people](#) who assisted the U.S. mission, and their dependents—remain in Afghanistan and are in need of international protection. Many other [vulnerable Afghans](#), including women and girls, religious and minority groups, people with disabilities, and others, are in life-threatening danger. As we increase



the number of Afghan refugee arrivals, this must not come at the expense of others in need of protection. It is imperative that the United States scale up access to protection to assist not only displaced Afghans but also refugees from Burma, Syria, South Sudan, Venezuela, and other countries. UNHCR estimates that over [1.47 million refugees](#) are in need of resettlement worldwide. By re-asserting its tradition of welcome, the United States can regain its moral standing and leverage other countries to take on greater numbers of resettled refugees as well.

However, the U.S. resettlement program has sustained devastating cuts, with refugee resettlement in the United States falling to its lowest level since Congress created the modern system in 1980. This fiscal year, our country is on track to resettle the fewest refugees since the start of the program. The unprecedented decimation of the USRAP during the world's worst refugee crisis on record has had profound consequences for refugees left in harm's way and on the readiness of our communities to welcome them. With [more than 31 million refugees](#) globally, we are in an urgent moment where we must rebuild and strengthen the U.S. resettlement program, collaborate closely with state and local stakeholders, mobilize the needed public resources, and channel the generosity of the American public to bolster this effort.

Setting a robust admissions goal for next year must be met with a corresponding investment in the overseas and domestic infrastructure—as well as partnerships at the international, nation, state, and local levels—that resettle refugees and help them integrate and thrive in their new communities. As your administration implements the reforms laid out in EO 14013, we ask that you expand refugee processing and improve the equitability, efficiency, collaboration, and transparency of the U.S. resettlement program, while addressing critical challenges, such as the shortage of affordable housing, that constrains our ability to serve refugees.

In an addendum to this letter, we offer a number of specific, practical recommendations that merit immediate attention and should be of use to a number of federal agencies.

Our recommendations fall into the following six areas:

1. Responding to global need;
2. Investing in rebuilding refugee resettlement infrastructure in the United States and overseas;
3. Expanding refugee adjudications, remote processing, and other operational improvements to reduce the refugee backlog;
4. Expeditiously expanding family reunifications and reducing the Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU) backlog;
5. Swiftly expanding referral pathways to the USRAP; and
6. Swiftly expanding the Central American Minors (CAM) program and restoring the Cuban Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP) program.

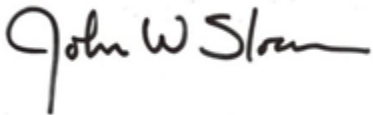
Together, we look to your administration's bold leadership in rebuilding the resettlement program, as we remain committed to strengthening a community of partnership characterized by

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transparency and collaboration, consultation with civil society, coordination with state and local governments, and partnership with refugee leaders. We look forward to working with you to expeditiously rebuild the USRAP, strengthen the global refugee protection regime, and reaffirm the U.S. tradition of providing safe harbor for those in need.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,



John Slocum
Interim Executive Director
Refugee Council USA

CC:

The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
The Honorable Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor
Curtis Ried, NSC Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs
Cindy Huang, Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement
Nancy Izzo Jackson, Senior Bureau Officer, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration

RCUSA is a diverse coalition advocating for just and humane laws and policies, and the promotion of dialogue and communication among government, civil society, and those who need protection and welcome. Individual RCUSA members do not all address all refugee-related issues, nor do all individual members approach common refugee-related issues identically.