

Biden Resettlement EO "Report Card"

2022

Introduction

On February 4, 2021, President Biden issued the *Executive Order on Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration*. This executive order (EO) served as a roadmap, outlining the Administration's principles and proposed benchmarks for reinvigorating the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) after four years of near decimation. It also called for a report that addresses the multiple security, protection, humanitarian assistance, and partnership impacts of climate induced migration, "including forced migration, internal displacement, and planned relocation."

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) marks this one year anniversary with an assessment of the progress that the Administration made in meeting the EO's stated goals and what work remains.

Green, yellow, and red ratings may each contain a range of actions or inactions. Selections were made using the following criteria:

GRADE: GREEN



The administration took meaningful and substantive steps to ensure the goal was met

GRADE: YELLOW



The administration took some level of action toward meeting this goal, or the goal was partially met with indications that the administration will continue to take meaningful next steps

GRADE: RED



After a year, we have not seen significant changes implemented in order to meet this goal

GRADE: GREEN



Commitment to the Protection of Refugees

The Biden Administration has shown a commitment to enhance USRAP and ensure that the program has the leadership infrastructure it needs to be administered in a way that promotes our nation's values while addressing some of the world's most urgent humanitarian crises. We urge continued action to match this stated commitment.

GRADE: YELLOW



Rebuilding and Expanding USRAP

While there have been efforts to expand USRAP, including an increased refugee admissions goal, the program still lacks the necessary tools and resources to be able to efficiently and rapidly respond to global need. We appreciate the administration's efforts to make case processing more effective, including through the expanded use of video interviews, and look forward to the continued use and expansion of this practice.

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GRADE: YELLOW



Minimizing Resettlement Delays

The Biden Administration said it was dedicated to shrinking delays within USRAP processing. At this point in the fiscal year, the administration has only resettled a small fraction of the 125,000 refugee goal and many families still are awaiting reunification. We await clarification of the administration's recent announcement of expedited 30-day refugee processing for Afghans abroad; among other concerns, we don't want expedited processing for Afghans to contribute to further delays for other refugee populations awaiting resettlement.

GRADE: RED



Security Vetting Should Be Efficient, Meaningful, and Fair

Flawed and inefficient security vetting has long caused unfair delays in refugee resettlement. The Biden administration has not shared any findings in the executive order-required reports or any related efforts made to streamline this process. The administration should reform unsound vetting practices and resolve the delays this causes.

GRADE: YELLOW



Eliminate Discrimination in Refugee and Immigration Policies

All displaced people should be treated with dignity and respect. President Biden reversed the previous administration's discriminatory Muslim and refugee bans. This was a welcome and important step; however, the administration should continue to root out policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on Black and/or Muslim migrants and refugees. The administration's continued reliance on Title 42 expulsions and its reinstatement of the Migrant Protection Protocols (the "Remain in Mexico" policy) means that thousands of persons seeking asylum at the southern border have been returned to situations where their lives are in danger.

GRADE: RED



Prioritize Family Reunification and Transparency

Unfortunately, refugees are still prevented from accessing basic information about the progress of their case and far too many families remain separated. The Biden administration should prioritize addressing the backlogs of family reunification and regularly share information about progress on program reforms with the public.

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GRADE: RED



Prioritize Vulnerable Groups

The USRAP is meant to serve refugees from all over the world. While the Biden administration declared it would make every effort possible to return the USRAP to one that serves refugees from all parts of the world –with a renewed focus on LGBTQIA+ people, girls, women, survivors of sexual assault and gender based violence, and political activists – we have yet to see meaningful programmatic changes to make resettlement or asylum safer and more accessible for these groups.

GRADE: YELLOW



Restore Complementary Pathways for Protection

The Biden administration restarted the Central American Minors program to allow a pathway for vulnerable youth to safely reunite with family in the US, but we haven't seen robust processing of CAM cases. The administration has failed to restore the Cuban / Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP), terminated by the previous administration, and there are far too many delays in processing Afghan nationals with pending humanitarian parole applications. The administration should work toward fully restoring - and expanding - complementary pathways for protection in the US.

GRADE: GREEN



Build on Community Engagement

US communities, private partners, and the government responded quickly to build out greater community and private sponsorship opportunities in response to the evacuations of vulnerable Afghans. It is now incumbent upon the administration to support a systematic review of the design and implementation of the private and co-sponsorship models that have been launched as part of the U.S. Afghan response, to better understand what has worked well and where improvement is necessary. This analysis will be an invaluable tool in moving beyond the pilot phase of community and private sponsorship and co-sponsorship in the United States to formally incorporating it into the USRAP moving forward.

GRADE: YELLOW



Uphold Promises to At-risk Afghans and Iraqis

A red flag for us is that at-risk Afghans and Iraqis, including those who assisted the U.S. missions overseas, still face threats due to their work with the US government. While the administration has promised to speed up the evacuation and processing of Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants, the program is still chronically delayed. At-risk Iraqi allies continue to have virtually no functional pathway to safety in the United States.

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GRADE: YELLOW



Protecting People Displaced by Climate Change

While the administration did not meet its goal of issuing a climate induced migration report within the stated timeline of 120 days, in October 2021, it issued its "Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration." RCUSA applauds the release of the report, as it marks the first time that a US presidential administration is taking strides to acknowledge the role that climate plays in migration and the corresponding need to ensure the protection of those directly impacted. We await further concrete action from the administration.

Conclusion

The Biden administration inherited a refugee resettlement program that had been decimated by the previous administration. With an increased backlog of refugees awaiting resettlement or reunification, an affiliate network that is still re-building –including more than 50 new sites–, and newly arising humanitarian emergencies, advocates have strived to pressure and partner with the Biden administration to meet the goals outlined in the executive order. While the administration has taken some significant actions to rebuild the program, other gains have yet to occur. When signed, this executive order marked a stark and necessary shift from the previous administration. A year later, advocates and communities emphasize that this vision has only partially come to fruition. RCUSA and its member organizations are ready to partner with the administration to ensure that all parts of this order are realized.