

# REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

June 30, 2023

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

Dear President Biden,

I write today on behalf of [Refugee Council USA](#) (RCUSA) to offer our recommendation for the upcoming Presidential Determination (PD) on Refugee Admissions for FY 2024, as well as to suggest concrete steps your administration can take in concert with Congress to ensure a modern and responsive rebuilding of the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). RCUSA is a diverse coalition representing 36 US-based nonprofit organizations – including the ten national resettlement agencies – working to promote the rights and welfare of refugees and all forcibly displaced people. Our members represent programmatic, policy, and human rights experts, many of whom have contributed their insights to the formulation of this recommendation.

**RCUSA calls for a FY24 PD of at least 135,000, alongside bold programmatic reforms and accountability measures that will ensure the US will be able to resettle at least 200,000 refugees by FY26.**

Forced displacement is steadily rising, each year setting a new record-breaking high. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reports](#) that over 110 million people are displaced from their homes; of those, 62.5 million have been displaced within their own countries, 35.3 million are refugees, and 5.4 million are people seeking asylum, and at least 4.4 million people are stateless (although the actual number of stateless persons is estimated to be drastically higher). Only a small fraction of the most vulnerable refugees will be resettled in third countries, and UNHCR [anticipates](#) that in 2024 over 2.4 million refugees will be in need of resettlement. The availability of durable solutions for forcibly displaced people is being [far outpaced](#) by displacement crises.

We applaud your administration's willingness to consider new approaches to providing safety and protection to refugees and other forcibly displaced people. The evacuation of vulnerable Afghans, the creation of Uniting for Ukraine and the parole pathways for Cubans, Haitians, Venezuelans and Nicaraguans have provided emergency, life-saving opportunities for safety. The opening of safe mobility offices across Central America will provide much needed hope for thousands awaiting relief. The rollout of private sponsorship will help to reunite families and grant particularly vulnerable refugees a new resettlement pathway. Seven of RCUSA's members are part of the [inaugural cohort](#) of private sponsor organizations involved in the launch of Welcome Corps. The coalition is dedicated to supporting pathways that provide lasting protection.

The United States has long been the global leader in humanitarian protection, and has [led third-country resettlement](#) efforts for most of the past forty years, a responsibility that sets international expectations for response. In FY23, your administration committed to resettling 125,000 refugees but is expected to fall short of this goal, and is on track to resettle approximately 65,000 at most. Given the ever-growing global need, the Biden administration must continue to demonstrate its commitment to *resettlement* as a core component of humanitarian protection.

The Presidential Determination is intended to reflect global need and the projected domestic reception and placement capacity of the US resettlement network. In [previous years](#), RCUSA has recommended that the administration raise the refugee admissions goal to 200,000 and advocated for robust funding to provide support to overseas and domestic infrastructure to ensure the successful processing and integration of all refugees.

However, alongside inadequate investment in resettlement infrastructure and program modernization, the administration has relied heavily on nationality-specific programs of humanitarian parole that provide displaced persons with temporary safety, but with limited support and no clear path to permanent status. These humanitarian parole programs draw on many of the same resources as USRAP, and leave the nonprofit resettlement network to further stretch limited resources in efforts to address inflation and housing scarcity.

That is why the RCUSA coalition urges the Biden administration to set the Presidential Determination for FY24 at a minimum of 135,000 refugee admissions, including 10,000 to be admitted through the Welcome Corps, and to support policies that will bolster USRAP capacity, so that the United States is in a position to admit 200,000 refugees as the minimum annual resettlement goal by FY26. Our national values and global need demand no less.

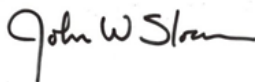
RCUSA's recommendations for strengthening USRAP, described in greater detail in an appendix to this letter, fall under four main categories:

1. **The administration must bolster equitable and accessible pathways to permanent protection.**
2. **The administration must invest in significant improvements to case processing.**
3. **Welcome Corps and the private sponsorship of refugees must be *additive* to the traditional resettlement program.**
4. **The administration must actively support robust funding to expand domestic infrastructure.**

With refugee admissions of at least 135,000 in FY24 and a commitment to implementing bold changes in the resettlement program, the US can begin to provide permanent humanitarian protection at a level commensurate with the need and our country's stature as a beacon of hope and opportunity.

RCUSA looks forward to continuing our work alongside your administration. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,



John Slocum  
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  
Jeffrey Zients, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff  
The Honorable Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor  
The Honorable Neera Tanden, Director of the Domestic Policy Council

*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.*

## Appendix

### Rebuilding the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP): RCUSA's Recommendations to Strengthen Refugee Resettlement in the United States June 2023

#### **1. The administration must bolster equitable and accessible pathways to permanent protection.**

We acknowledge that US foreign-policy goals strongly influence resettlement efforts, and that USRAP can be an effective tool in promoting regional stability and national security. However, a focus on current foreign-policy priorities and emerging conflicts should not draw protection opportunities away from refugees displaced by protracted conflict situations, or those from countries that fall outside the scope of the US government's most pressing national security concerns.

Equitable, accessible, and sustainable solutions must be integrated into all resettlement decision-making criteria. RCUSA holds that an equitable and accessible resettlement program begins with significant investments into USRAP infrastructure internationally and domestically, so that the program has the ability to pivot to meet emerging displacement crises, while maintaining the pace of processing and reunification for those who have been trapped in the resettlement backlog.

The Administration has signaled its intention to significantly increase resettlement from Latin America and the Caribbean. We are supportive of this increased focus on the region, and at the same time we expect this increase to be carried out sustainably, without adversely impacting other regions/populations, and in close consultation with the resettlement community.

#### **2. The administration must invest in significant improvements to case processing.**

Many processing improvements are already underway, however; they must be further implemented. These include concurrent overseas processing (where security vetting and medical checks happen simultaneously, rather than sequentially), increased use of video technology for interviews, and the modernization and streamlining of screening processes. Globally, the goal should be to finish the refugee application process in 180 days. On the domestic side, resettlement agencies should be given adequate advance notice of arrivals, and have maximum flexibility to serve clients in ways that make the best use of available resources.

#### **3. Welcome Corps and the private sponsorship of refugees must be *additive* to the traditional resettlement program.**

RCUSA enthusiastically supports the Welcome Corps program of private sponsorship of refugees, and looks forward to its expansion in the coming years. But we insist on a principle of additionality and the maintenance of a robust infrastructure for traditional resettlement.

#### **4. The administration must actively support robust funding to expand domestic infrastructure.**

Congress must provide more funding for resettlement processing and domestic capacity to keep up with inflation, to retain resettlement agency staff, and meet the rising cost of housing.