

# Refugee Council USA

## **No Justification: The Administration's Crusade to Ban All Refugees**

*As Trump Attempts to Shut Down the U.S. Asylum System, Some Officials Propose Ending Refugee Resettlement*

**Background:** Reports indicate that some officials in the Trump administration have proposed resettling zero refugees in Fiscal Year 2020. This comes despite the worst refugee crisis in history with more than 25 million refugees worldwide in need of safety and [1.4 million in need of resettlement globally](#). Following the administration's attempts to bar access to asylum, any further decimation—or worse elimination—of the refugee resettlement program in FY2020 would amount to a total refugee ban. The message is clear: it appears no one is welcome, no matter how they seek safety, no matter what persecution they face.

The administration has continually and wrongfully justified its abdication of U.S. leadership on refugee resettlement by blaming the number of asylum seekers arriving at our southern border who are fleeing violence and persecution. But they are demonstrating that their own stated rationale is invalid, as they are turning away asylum seekers, including via an [interim final rule](#) barring asylum seekers who travel through another country en route to the United States. The administration has already implemented a myriad of policy changes to dismantle the refugee resettlement program, as documented in RCUSA's [report](#), including by setting record-low refugee admissions goals—45,000 in FY18 and 30,000 in FY19.

We cannot turn our backs on those who we have pledged to protect. Nearly 40,000 refugees are already approved and at various stages in the resettlement process. To reject them, after they have already waited for years to be resettled, would be a betrayal in violation of our values and humanitarian obligations. In particular, it would abandon our commitment to U.S.-affiliated Iraqis who put their lives on the line, as well as religious minorities and other refugees with no other option for safety. RCUSA is calling on the administration to return the resettlement program to historic norms—95,000 refugees per year. Anything less is unjustifiable, cruel and immoral, and would have devastating consequences for U.S. communities, national security and foreign policy interests.

### **Ending the Life-saving U.S. Resettlement Program Is Cruel, Dangerous and Unnecessary**

**U.S. protection of those seeking refuge is embedded in our history, identity and values.** The United States has historically had robust refugee admissions and access to asylum protections. At times of great demand in the world, agencies cannot forgo their mission and legal responsibilities to accept refugees through both the resettlement program and the asylum system. The administration often claims that the United States does more to accept refugees than any other country. However, for every 1,000 residents in the United States only 3 of those are refugees and asylum seekers. Compare that to 17 in Germany, 30 in Sweden, and 167 in Lebanon.

**The United States has the capacity and resources to support robust resettlement and asylum protections.** The administration has often pointed to the growing backlog of asylum cases and refugee crises to argue that the United States simply cannot handle any more people fleeing violence. The reality is quite the opposite: the administration can and should properly staff both U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) Refugee Corps and the Asylum Division, using funds already allocated, to address the backlog.

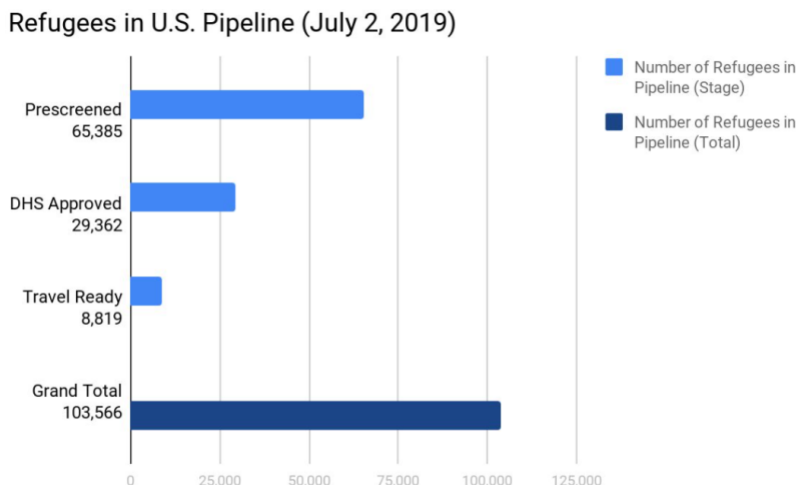
**The Trump administration has exacerbated the asylum backlog and is now blocking all refugees from accessing protection in the United States.** The administration has pointed to the asylum backlog and increase in asylum seekers as justification for limiting refugee admissions. There is no validity in the claim that USCIS does not have the capacity to interview or screen refugees, especially given the administration's efforts to end access to asylum. Moreover, [recent news](#) that USCIS is urging its officers to volunteer with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), reveals their true motivation — to end all refugee protection.

**Abandoning our commitment to refugees undermines regional security and U.S. foreign policy interests.** Decimating the U.S. resettlement program is unnecessary, counterproductive, undermines American interests and makes our country less safe. Over the past two years we have already seen the dire consequences of the decline in U.S. refugee resettlement. When the United States signals to the world that protecting vulnerable individuals is not a priority, the world takes notice. Refugee resettlement has already seen a drastic decline globally, impacting front-line countries including key military allies that host the overwhelming majority of the world's refugees.

### The U.S. Has Had an Average Refugee Admissions Goal Historically of 95,000

There is absolutely no reason to zero-out the refugee resettlement program or to cut the program further than the historically low levels that the administration has already set. The administration will come close to reaching its 30,000 refugee admissions goal this year, showing that it can be done, even if the administration reassigns USCIS officers to the U.S. southern border.

Current data illustrates that there are a sufficient number of refugees who are already approved and/or who have already passed their interviews with USCIS officers to welcome *at least* the same amount as this year. **As of July 2, 2019, 8,819 refugees were approved for travel to the United States and an additional 29,362 refugees had passed their USCIS interviews.** The chart below provides the total number of refugees who are in the U.S. pipeline, including those prescreened, post-USCIS interview, and ready for departure.



### We Have Welcomed Far Higher Numbers of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Past

For nearly 40 years, the United States has been able to welcome both refugees and asylum seekers. The two programs work in tandem—increased refugee arrivals do not detract resources from the asylum program and vice versa. The United States can—and has—maintained high levels of refugee resettlement while processing large numbers of asylum seekers. One key example of this is in the 1980s,

during which the United States admitted more than **five times** the number refugees and asylees that we admitted in 2018.

- • In 1980, at the height of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan humanitarian crises, the U.S. welcomed **208,220 refugees and asylees**, and throughout the 1980s, the United States welcomed an average of 102,017 refugees and asylees per year. The average asylum grant rate in the 1980s was 16%.
- • In 2018, the U.S. welcomed only **36,691 refugees and asylees**: 19,978 individuals were granted asylum, with a 5% grant rate, and 22,491 refugees were resettled. Under the Trump administration, the U.S. has welcomed an average of only 58,487 refugees and asylees per year.