


# Where are the Refugees? RCUSA

Drastic Cuts to Refugee  
Resettlement Harming  
Refugees, Communities,  
and American Leadership

A black and white photograph of a woman and a child walking away from the camera on a dirt path. The woman is on the left, wearing a light-colored headscarf and a dark jacket. The child is on the right, wearing a dark jacket and carrying a backpack. The background shows a hilly, rural landscape with sparse vegetation. The entire image is framed by a light blue border.

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of 24 U.S.-based non-governmental organizations, is dedicated to refugee protection, welcome, and excellence in the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Please visit us at [RCUSA.org](https://www.rcusa.org)



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# Introduction

For almost 40 years, the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has welcomed refugees as an embodiment of our country's values and strategic interests. The USRAP operates through a public-private partnership consisting of national refugee resettlement agencies with local offices and affiliates that engage faith communities, civic groups, former refugees, and volunteers from all walks of life.

In the wake of World War II, faith communities came together to resettle refugees from Nazi Germany, creating what would later become the USRAP. Since the program was formalized by Congress in 1980, the USRAP has admitted over three million refugees fleeing conflicts and persecution from countries all over the world, including Vietnam, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Kosovo, the former Soviet Union, and Burma. Since 2017, the USRAP has undergone unprecedented changes, including a significant drop in the number of refugees resettled to the United States each year. This has prompted refugee communities, faith leaders, business leaders, and elected officials to ask: where are the refugees?

Following the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump in January 2017, the administration made policy and operational decisions that severely restricted U.S. resettlement and dismantled the USRAP. This report details how these changes have harmed the United States' ability to protect refugees in dangerous situations, address displacement crises, and protect U.S. national security, foreign policy and diplomatic interests. These reductions have placed refugees in harm's way, leaving refugee families separated across continents. Besides the clear humanitarian consequences, reduced resettlement has also deprived U.S. communities of the economic and cultural benefits that refugees provide.

This report's findings are supported by experts who are involved with the USRAP at every level, including national security advisors, faith leaders, authorities from state and local governments, and refugees themselves. All of these experts agree that the systematic dismantling of the USRAP is negatively impacting not only the lives of individual refugee families and their friends and neighbors but also U.S. national security interests and state and local economies.

This report also describes how Americans across the country welcome refugees and are in favor of a robust refugee resettlement program. The report outlines recommendations for the U.S. government to swiftly restore and rebuild the U.S. refugee resettlement program as supported by the American people.



# The United States Resettlement Program

## A Proud History

Forced migration—the displacement of people from their homes due to conflict, human rights abuses, environmental disasters and other catastrophic events—has been evident throughout human history. Long before there was an international definition of “refugee,” people fleeing religious and political persecution sought safety in the United States and stayed to rebuild their lives. These immigrants built America into what it is today. By the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, the United States admitted displaced persons under a series of laws recognizing the necessity and benefits of resettling refugees.

Most of these refugees were assisted by religious organizations in the United States. These organizations, with the approval of the U.S. government, welcomed refugees and supported their integration. This arrangement formed the basis for the public-private partnership model that is the cornerstone of today's U.S. refugee resettlement system. The partnership was formalized in the Refugee Act of 1980, a bipartisan law that included the adoption of the United Nations definition of “refugee” into U.S. domestic law and led to the standardization of resettlement services for all refugees admitted to the United States.

The Refugee Act of 1980 established the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which instituted a network of agencies that contract in a public-private partnership with the State Department to provide newly arriving refugees with reception and integration services. Prior to 2017, there were approximately 325 local refugee resettlement offices providing these services to arriving refugees in every state except Wyoming. These local offices are social service providers that help refugees successfully integrate into their new communities by helping them find housing and jobs, learn English, access medical care, and enroll their children in school.



The Refugee Act of 1980 states,

The term 'refugee' means any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality... and who is unable or unwilling to return to... that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

[I]t is the historic policy of the United States to respond to the urgent needs of persons subject to persecution in their homelands, including, where appropriate, humanitarian assistance for their care and maintenance in asylum areas, efforts to promote opportunities for resettlement or voluntary repatriation, aid for necessary transportation and processing, admission to this country of refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and transitional assistance to refugees in the United States.

The Congress further declares that it is the policy of the United States to encourage all nations to provide assistance and resettlement opportunities to refugees to the fullest extent possible.

The Refugee Act also established that the President, after consultation with Congress, is responsible for setting the number of refugees that can be admitted each fiscal year, known as the Presidential Determination (PD).

## Why Resettlement?

For nearly 40 years, the USRAP enjoyed continuous bipartisan support from Members of Congress and six successive U.S. Presidents. It has been developed and maintained as a program capable of nimbly responding to refugee crises and resettling a robust number of refugees to the United States. In fact, from 1980 to 2017, the United States set an average PD of 95,000 and resettled an average of 80,00 refugees per year. USRAP continues to enjoy strong bi-partisan support from Congress, as seen for example, by continuously strong bi-partisan appropriations funding for refugees and by the recent revival of the House bi-partisan Refugee Caucus.

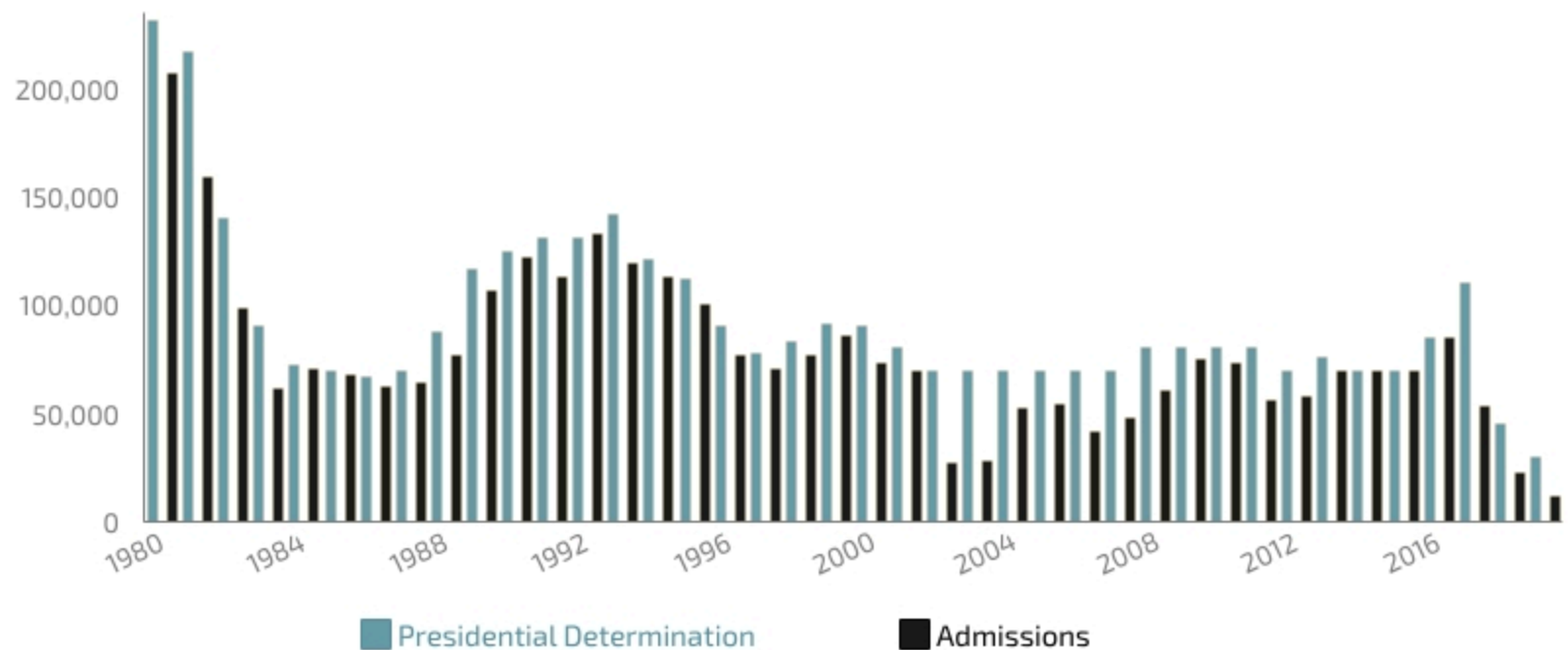
Resettlement is the last resort for refugees who are unable to return home or safely and sustainably rebuild their lives in the country where they first fled. Beyond the humanitarian benefit, the USRAP:

- Provides relief to key U.S. allies struggling to host large numbers of refugees
- Maintains the United States' credibility as a leader working to solve displacement and championing human rights
- Supports U.S. diplomats' ability to encourage other countries to respond to global humanitarian crises and human rights abuses
- Supports global and regional stability in support of U.S. national security objectives
- Fulfills U.S. commitments to protect our allies by resettling essential local staff, such as interpreters and translators from Iraq and Afghanistan, who provided vital support to US troops and government employees and now face danger as a result of their work
- Injects new workers into the U.S. labor market to help mitigate labor shortages
- Supports the creation of new jobs as resettled refugees build small businesses across the country
- Allows Americans to fulfill their desire to welcome the persecuted and the call of many faith traditions to "welcome the stranger"
- Produces new U.S. citizens who have a strong desire to give back to the communities and country that welcomed them
- Increases diversity and awareness of other cultures around the country

# The US Refugee Admissions Program Today

The current administration has enacted a series of measures that have reduced the number of refugees restarting their lives in the United States to a relative trickle. Specifically, in FY2017, President Trump reset the refugee admissions goal established by the prior administration from 110,000 to 50,000. He then set all-time low refugee admissions goals of 45,000 for FY2018 and 30,000 for FY2019. Further, over the last two years, the administration has failed to admit even these low targets. The first half of FY19 saw a 70% decline in refugee arrivals when compared to the first half of FY17 (the first full fiscal year that the USRAP operated under the Trump Administration). Table 1 reflects the marked drop in both of these figures under the current administration.

## Presidential Determination and Actual Admissions: 1980 - 2019



Source: WRAPS data from the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, available at <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

In addition to the drastic reduction in arrivals, the administration issued three executive orders throughout 2017 to limit refugee admissions in general, and in particular for refugees from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Palestinian territories, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, and those seeking family reunification, and implemented a number of destructive changes to the USRAP.



# Actions by the Trump Administration to change USRAP

January 27, 2017

Issued Executive Order 13769 which suddenly halted the USRAP by drastically reducing refugee admissions; banning all refugees for 120 days; banning refugees from Syria indefinitely; and presenting the pretense of protecting religious minorities. This first Muslim/refugee ban resulted in immediate chaos and confusion at U.S. airports and nationwide protests as refugees and foreign nationals were prevented from boarding flights to come to the U.S. or detained at ports of entry nationwide. Within days, the EO was challenged in the courts and a temporary restraining order was placed on the EO, preventing its implementation.

March 2017

Increased deportation of Vietnamese immigrants through a reinterpretation and violation of the U.S.' 2008 agreement with Hanoi to protect Vietnamese immigrants from deportation if they arrived in the U.S. before July 12, 1995.

June 26, 2017

The U.S. Supreme Court decided to keep in place the lower court rulings, which prevented the Administration from implementing EO 13780 in full, exempting from the ban refugees and foreign nationals who have a "bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States."

August 2017

Supported the introduction of the RAISE Act by Senators Cotton (R-AK) and Perdue (R-GA), which would permanently cap refugee admissions at 50,000 and decimate opportunities for families to be reunited.

March 6, 2017

Issued Executive Order 13780, a revised version of EO 13769 with a similar impact. This EO maintained suspension of the USRAP for 120 days, maintained suspension of entry of foreign nationals from 6 of the 7 countries in the initial EO (Iraq was removed from this list and certain individuals were exempt) for 90 days, and maintained a reduced admissions ceiling of 50,000 refugees. Legal battles in lower courts allowed the resettlement program to continue for refugees who were deemed to have a "bona fide relationship with a person or entity" in the United States, resulting in the arrival of 53,716 refugees in FY17.

May 23, 2017

Released an FY18 budget request that included a 33% cut to funding for refugee resettlement as well as significant reductions to funding for international assistance.

June 2017

Narrowly interpreted the Supreme Court's decision to allow partial implementation of the ban--recognizing "bona fide relationships with a person or entity" as those of a parent, spouse, child, and sibling, and denying the relationships that refugees have with resettlement agencies.

August 16,

2017

Ended the Central American Minors parole program, which allowed minors who did not receive refugee status to enter the U.S. on a two-year, renewable parole if they had a parent with legal status in the U.S. Applicants were living under the assumption that their applications (and payments) to the program were being processed for months.

## September 2017

Rejected a study by HHS that demonstrated that refugees contributed \$63 billion more in revenues than the cost of their resettlement services over the past ten years.

## October 24, 2017

### Issued Executive Order 13815

Announced the resumption of the U.S. Refugee Admissions program with new "enhanced vetting capabilities" and placed a 90-day ban on refugees from 11 countries; Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and stateless Palestinians, which accounted for 44% of refugee admissions in FY17.

## December 2017

Announced new requirements for local resettlement offices, including that offices expected to resettle fewer than 100 refugees would be closed and that offices could only be affiliated with one national resettlement agency, dissolving the tri-agency model that had previously allowed Church World Service, Episcopal Migration Ministries, and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to work jointly with local resettlement offices.

## January 29, 2018

Issued a memorandum mandating additional security procedures for nationals of the 11 countries impacted by EO 13815. Lack of further guidance caused even greater delays in refugee arrivals and continued uncertainty for refugees.

## September 2017

Reassigned Refugee Corps officers to the Asylum Division, claiming that it was necessary to address the asylum backlog.

## September 2017

Issued a Presidential Determination that set FY18 refugee admissions at 45,000, at the time the lowest level in the history of the USRAP. The administration failed to properly consult with Congress, as required by law, prior to setting the PD and reduced the number of nationalities eligible for the Priority 3 family reunification program from 22 to 15.

## November 9, 2017

Ended the Central American Minors refugee program, which helped Central American children reunite with parents/family members who had legal status in the U.S. by allowing them to apply for refugee resettlement. This decision ended new applications immediately. All interviews were cancelled as of Jan. 31, 2018, deleting the pending cases of more than 3,800 children with no other option for relief.

## December 23, 2017

A U.S. federal district court ruled that "following-to-join" refugee family members and refugees from the 11 countries identified in the refugee ban (EO 13815) who have a bona fide relationship with an individual or entity in the U.S. cannot be banned from the U.S.



## February 12, 2018

Released an FY19 budget request that would continue to fund refugee resettlement services below FY17 levels, including a complete cut to funding for the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account.

## March 11, 2019

Released an FY20 budget request that would drastically cut funding for critical initial services for resettled refugees and for overseas assistance to refugees and dismantle the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) by moving its international assistance funding to USAID. This reorganization would hinder PRM's ability to effectively assist refugees overseas and leverage resettlement for U.S. foreign policy goals.

## Today

These changes have had far-reaching and lasting consequences. For example, the first executive order in January 2017 paused all refugee arrivals for four months. Because the United States has a complex and intensive screening process, involving coordination between the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Defense, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Counterterrorism Center, even a short delay can derail an application. Since each part of the refugee screening process has a narrow validity period, refugees only have about a two-month travel window during which all their checks are complete and valid. When one check expires, it can take months to repeat it, and during that time, another check will likely expire. This can be especially disruptive for families who are traveling together but whose checks have been completed at different time intervals. Therefore, refugees who were approved to arrive in January 2017 were not only delayed during the four month suspension of the resettlement program -- many have still yet to arrive, confronted by a domino effect of expiring validity periods.

## February 1, 2018

Implemented new procedures for follow-to-join refugees, which further delayed refugees seeking to reunite with their spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21, including those who were already screened and approved.

## October 4, 2018

Issued a Presidential Determination that capped FY19 refugee arrivals at a dismal 30,000--a new historic low. Comparatively, the U.S. has, on average, maintained a yearly admissions goal of 95,000 refugees.

## March 2019

Announced the closure of all U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) international field offices. These offices provide critical services including for military personnel and veterans, international adoptions, refugee resettlement, family reunification, immigration application processing, and fraud detection and deterrence. Office closures would increase family separation and make family reunification more difficult, as USCIS offices are vital to processing applications that allow immigrants and refugees to join family members in the U.S.



Although the suspension on refugee admission has since been lifted, refugees from the majority Muslim countries included in the administration's executive orders continue to arrive in disproportionately lower numbers than ever, with a 90 percent reduction in the resettlement of Muslim refugees overall. Many resettled refugees from these countries whose spouses and children were preparing to join them when the bans went into effect remain separated to this day.

### Arrivals of Refugees from Majority Muslim Countries Included in President Trump's Executive Orders

Nationality	Arrivals in FY16	Arrivals in FY17	Arrivals in FY18	Arrivals in FY2019
Egypt	21	9	1	1
Iran	3750	2577	41	63
Iraq	9880	6886	140	168
Libya	1	3	1	0
Mali	6	6	0	0
Somalia	9020	6130	257	27
Sudan	1458	980	76	124
Syria	12587	6557	62	218
Yemen	26	21	2	1

(Source: wrapsnet.org)

In addition to executive orders and low PDs that have limited the number of refugees gaining admission to the United States in the past two years, the administration has made several changes that have dismantled the USRAP. Beginning in December 2017, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) within the State Department has announced numerous changes that have impacted the network of local resettlement offices. These changes have resulted in the loss of approximately one third of the local reception and placement programs across the country.

# The Impact of a Declining Refugee Admissions Program on America's Strategic Interests

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that of the 68.5 million displaced persons worldwide, 25.4 million are refugees. The sheer size of the world's displaced population is relevant to U.S. foreign policy and national security interests. In 2019, UNHCR estimates that 1.4 million refugees, who are currently residing in 65 hosting countries worldwide, are in need of resettlement. As a leader in refugee resettlement, the U.S. government's actions and policy choices have an impact on the global humanitarian response.

## An increasing humanitarian gap

Only a fraction of the world's refugees are resettled each year, but the United States had, until 2017, consistently led the way in resettling refugees. Accordingly, the recent restrictive U.S. refugee resettlement practices and policies have had an extremely detrimental impact on worldwide refugee resettlement.

According to the 2017 UNHCR Global Trends report,<sup>3</sup> in 2017, UNHCR submitted only 75,200 refugees to countries for resettlement. This was a 54% decrease compared to the submissions from 2016. According to UNHCR, this drop was due to the decline in the number of refugees that resettlement countries had committed to accept. Although several countries started new resettlement programs in 2017 and others such as Canada expanded existing programs, these programs have unfortunately been insufficient to fill the humanitarian gap left by the United States.

## Foreign Policy and National Security

Although refugee resettlement is first and foremost a humanitarian protection tool, it takes place within a complex set of foreign policy and national security interests. Refugee resettlement has been long recognized as a strategic diplomatic tool that allows the United States to support refugee hosting countries by sharing the responsibility of caring for refugees needing resettlement protection. These host countries are often important U.S. allies, and our support of them helps maintain regional stability in often sensitive and strategic countries and regions. For instance, the willingness of the United States to resettle refugees from Kenya was part of the leverage used to encourage Kenya to keep open one of its largest refugee camps. Likewise, U.S. commitments to resettle Syrian refugees served as leverage to encourage Jordan to allow Syrian children to attend school and Syrian adults to be permitted to work.



USRAP is a useful humanitarian initiative with which the U.S. engages the world and provides relief for a select few during international crises. It supports U.S. interests by enabling the U.S. to assert leadership in foreign crises, assist in the midst of intractable crises, and help allies and partners in need. It also strengthens U.S. public diplomacy and tangibly alleviates human suffering.

The Heritage Foundation - The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program: A Roadmap for Reform

National security experts have consistently opposed the administration's restrictionist refugee policies. Responding to the President's first executive order of January 27, 2017, a group of national security experts summed up the impact on national security, declaring that the initial 120 day suspension of all refugee resettlement would,

"[E]ndanger U.S. troops in the field. Every day, American soldiers work and fight alongside allies in some of the named countries who put their lives on the line to protect Americans. For example, allies who would be barred by the Order work alongside our men and women in Iraq fighting against ISIL, [the militant group Islamic State]. To the extent that the Order bans travel by individuals cooperating against ISIL, we risk placing our military efforts at risk by sending an insulting message to those citizens and all Muslims.

The Order will disrupt key counterterrorism, foreign policy, and national security partnerships that are critical to our obtaining the necessary information sharing and collaboration in intelligence, law enforcement, military, and diplomatic channels to address the threat posed by terrorist groups such as ISIL. The international criticism of the Order has been intense, and it has alienated U.S. allies. It will strain our relationships with partner countries in Europe and the Middle East, on whom we rely for vital counterterrorism cooperation, undermining years of effort to bring them closer. By alienating these partners, we could lose access to the intelligence and resources necessary to fight the root causes of terror or disrupt attacks launched from abroad, before an attack occurs within our borders."

## Impact on Allies

Thousands of Iraqis worked with U.S. forces, U.S. humanitarian agencies, diplomats, contractors, and other government personnel to assist the U.S. mission in Iraq. As a result, many of them and their families have been and continue to be killed, abducted, tortured or threatened. In response to advocacy from U.S. diplomats and military leaders, who recognized the contributions of these local partners, Congress created programs to benefit Iraqis who had come under threat because of their service to the United States.





Maintaining resettlement commitments is also critical to our military, diplomatic and intelligence operations abroad. Tens of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan nationals have put their lives on the line to support intelligence-gathering, operations planning and other essential services. Terrorist groups openly target these individuals because of their cooperation with Americans. Resettlement is instrumental to ensuring their safety — a testament to the U.S. military's commitment to leave no one behind on the battlefield.

Former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, the Washington Post 2017

One such program is the Direct Access Program (DAP) for U.S.-affiliated Iraqis. It is administered through the USRAP and currently is the primary option for Iraqis to be resettled to safety. As of August 2018, more than 100,000 Iraqis are waiting for processing through this program. Despite the need, last year the administration admitted just 140 Iraqis and at the six-month point in FY19, only 168 Iraqis have been admitted to the United States through this program. This follows the admission of 9,880 Iraqis in FY2016 and 6,886 in FY2018. This extreme slowdown in the processing of Iraqis is apparently caused by the administration's policies, such as the temporary refugee program suspension and additional vetting procedures for certain countries, including Iraq. These changes have added additional bureaucratic steps to an already secure program, making it nearly impossible for individuals to attain protection.

### Delays in Direct Access Program Shatter One Iraqi Man's Dream of Safety

Sam,\* an Iraqi who had worked as an interpreter for U.S. forces in Iraq, fled to Egypt in 2014. He and his family had been threatened as a result of his service to the United States. Upon arriving in Egypt, he applied for resettlement through the Direct Access Program. In October 2017, when he had been waiting for resettlement for over three years, the new refugee restrictions went into effect and his upcoming travel to the United States was suddenly canceled. Today, Sam\* remains in limbo in Egypt. He is not allowed to work and he is separated from his family. His hopes of safety shattered, he daily fears deportation back to Iraq.

While not resettled through USRAP, Afghan wartime partners have also seen drastic cuts in the last two years. Afghans who worked for the U.S. government in Afghanistan and who face threats as a result can be considered for immigration to the United States through the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program and are eligible for refugee resettlement benefits on arrival. Congress has approved thousands of visas to allow the State Department to continue processing, but Afghan SIV arrivals have plummeted since the beginning of fiscal year 2018, from roughly 2,000 individuals (including family members) in October 2017 to fewer than 550 on average in fiscal year 2019.

## Impact on Religious Minorities

Religious persecution is one of the five grounds for receiving refugee protection under U.S. and international law. As a nation first formed by religious minorities fleeing persecution, the United States has long championed religious liberty for all people—insisting that each individual should be able to choose how (or whether) to practice their faith, without governmental restriction, interference or persecution.

This proud tradition of religious liberty has led the United States to be a leader in offering protection to persecuted religious minorities around the world through the USRAP. Although President Trump has specifically promised to ensure a more robust resettlement process for particular persecuted groups of religious minorities, thus far, these religious minority groups have also faced restricted access to the USRAP.

This steep overall drop in refugee admissions has not spared any religious group, including religious minorities. As compared to FY16, refugee admissions in FY19 saw the following reductions:

- 48% fewer Christian refugees arrived, including targeted Christian minorities. (37,521 to 9,844)
- 90% fewer Muslim refugees arrived, despite the fact that 4 out of the 5 largest refugee crises in the world impact Muslims (Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia). (38,900 to 1,854)
- 96% fewer Yazidi refugees arrived despite their brutal persecution under the Islamic State. (393 to 9)<sup>10</sup>

Such delays lead to hardship and deprivation, but in some cases they are life-threatening, as the Moradi family's story reveals:

Seid Moradi and his family practiced Yarsanism, a religion the Iranian government treats as a "false cult" despite nearly two million followers living in Iran. In August 2014, following many threats to their lives, the Moradi family boarded a bus for a 20-hour journey across Iran's northwestern border with the hope of a new beginning. In the Turkish city of Kayseri, Seid Moradi and his wife, sister-in-law, and three children worked odd jobs to be able to meet their needs while they underwent interviews to be recognized as refugees. Seid's case was especially urgent, as he had a life-threatening heart condition and was urgently in need of medical attention. In 2017, the U.S. government notified the Moradis that they would be resettled to Seattle, Washington. A few days before their scheduled flight, they sold everything they had that would not fit in their suitcases. The family's flights to the United States were cancelled three different times due to various restrictions on refugee resettlement by President Trump throughout 2017. U.S. officials told the family, which had passed through three years of interviews, background checks, form filings, and medical visits, to be patient. But, the delay was too long. Seid Moradi, four years after fleeing his small town in Iran and 15 months after being told that he would resettle in Seattle, collapsed and died in the Turkish city of Kayseri when a swollen blood vessel burst and triggered a heart attack. He was 54 years old.

## Arrivals for Religious Minorities FY2016 vs. FY2019 (Projected)

Religious Affiliation & Country of Origin	FY2016	FY2019 (based on YTD)	Projected Decline from FY16 to FY19
Christians from the 50 Countries on Open Doors USA's 2019 World Watch List for Persecution of Christians	16,702	4,356	73.9%
Christians from Pakistan	112	49	56.5%
Muslims from Burma (primarily Rohingya)	3,145	1,104	64.9%
Ahmadiyya Muslims from Pakistan	345	115	66.7%
Christians from Burma	7,634	2,245	70.6%
Yezidis from Iraq and Syria	417	20	95.2%
Christians from Iraq	1,524	62	95.9%
Christians from Iran	2,085	71	96.6%
Sabeans-Mandean from Iraq	91	2	97.6%
Bahai from Iran	501	11	97.8%
Sabeans-Mandean from Iran	263	4	98.3%
Jewish from Iran	72	0	100.0%
Zoroastrian from Iran	226	0	100.0%



# The Impact of a Declining Refugee Admissions Program on US Domestic Interests

The reduction of the USRAP is having very negative impacts on the infrastructure of the resettlement program, local communities, local and regional economies, faith communities, and family unity for resettled refugees and their relatives who remain in harm's way.

## Impact on Local Economies

Shortly after arriving to the United States, refugees are able to successfully achieve independence and in turn contribute both culturally and economically to their new communities. In fact, studies reflect:

- Over the course of their first 20 years in the US, refugees pay \$21,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits.
- More than 57% of all likely refugee households own their homes (not far from the 65.8% homeownership rate among U.S.-born persons).
- More than 84% of refugees who have been in the country for 16 to 25 years have become citizens.
- The United States was home to more than 180,000 refugee entrepreneurs in 2015, generating \$4.6 billion in business income that year. Thirteen percent of all refugees are entrepreneurs, compared to 9% percent of the U.S.-born population.

Resettled refugees are students, doctors, elected officials and entrepreneurs. Refugees open small businesses and fill a variety of needed jobs in a wide range of industries including dairy, meat packing and food manufacturing. Due to lower refugee arrival numbers, employers who have anticipated welcoming refugees as potential employees have experienced extreme disruptions to their businesses. And the U.S. economy is unable to reap the critical benefits refugees bring.

For example, in Idaho, refugees play a critical role in the local workforce. On average, Idaho dairymen are short at least one to two positions in their dairy farm that they cannot fill because the labor market in that area is so tight. Recently resettled refugees have long played a critical role in filling the local labor shortages. Yet, with low arrivals, Idaho's dairymen are experiencing a turndown in labor and fearing a slow down in dairy production and a reduction in the willingness of the next generation to invest in the family businesses.

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Historically, the meat and poultry industry has been an excellent starting point for new Americans. Immigrants and refugees are valued members of our 500,000 person workforce and can be an important component of some companies' labor forces, especially in rural areas where low unemployment creates a tight labor supply. Companies that employ refugees frequently work with local governments and with refugee organizations to help refugees assimilate into American culture and communities.

Julie Anna Potts, President and CEO of the North American Meat Institute

In Burlington, Vermont, there is a fear that the low number of incoming resettled refugees can not keep pace with the needs of the labor market. This is due to an aging population in Vermont and the secondary migration of some refugees to other parts of the United States. One local employer, a food manufacturer that makes specialty baked goods, including the cookie dough that goes in Ben and Jerry's ice cream, is particularly concerned. New Americans make up 37% of the company's workforce. Employees hail from around the world, including Nepal, Bosnia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Without new refugees coming to the state, it may be difficult to find new employees.

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Our refugee communities provide the energy, patriotism, and gratitude that come from people who have finally been granted a safe haven from the terror they have experienced in their home countries. The refugees I know represent the best of America with their entrepreneurial spirit, hard work, love of our country, and determination. They give me such hope for our future.

Steve Farley, Former Arizona state senator

While refugees are a valuable source of specialized labor and fill valuable gaps in the communities where they live, they are also consumers. They create new demand for specialized grocery stores, restaurants, and clothing. Without their patronage, local businesses have suffered. For example, in Buffalo, New York, a medical clinic and a dental clinic that catered to recently resettled refugees was forced to close its doors. Additionally, landlords that had planned on developing housing for refugees were forced to cancel their plans. Local refugee resettlement offices are unable to fill the requests for employees.

Communities that have welcomed refugees have gained innumerable benefits. The stories of Fidele Mugisha, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Officer Kadra Mohamed, a refugee from Somalia, demonstrate the American spirit of working hard and giving back. Fidele was resettled in Durham, North Carolina in 2015. Despite not knowing any English when he arrived, 20-year old Fidele learned English, began working at local businesses, and then became a straight-A student at community college. Fidele gave back by volunteering at Church World Service and World Relief as an interpreter and participated in community initiatives such as cemetery cleanup, beekeeping, and assisting international students with their assignments and exam preparation at Durham Tech. He also served as a Sunday School leader at his church. Fidele was later awarded a scholarship to study at UNC Chapel Hill.

Officer Kadra Mohamed became the first Somali-American female to wear a hijab as a police officer in the United States. Officer Mohamed was born in a refugee camp in Kenya before her family immigrated to the U.S. in the early 1990's. She was raised by a single mother with four younger siblings on the west side of St. Paul. She has a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Human Relations from St. Cloud State University. She is also working towards her master's degree.



Officer Mohamed is on the board of Voices of East African Women and the Somali American Police Association. She has been awarded an exceptional service award for her accomplishments. She mentors young females in high school and college who are interested in law enforcement. Her vision is to encourage young Muslim women to break boundaries and pursue their ambitions.

Our country is strong because of its diversity, because of people like Kadra and Fidele who came to America and embraced the American spirit and improved America.





## Local Communities of Support

Even before the inception of the formal refugee resettlement program in 1980, local communities have welcomed refugees, recognizing that they bring specific skills, enhance local economies and institutions, and reflect the diversity and vibrancy of America's founding. As fewer and fewer refugees arrive, many communities have found their plans and preparations for welcoming refugees have been replaced by disappointment and worry about children and families who never arrived.

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People choose to live in Winooski because they like to be surrounded by culture, and different languages and perspectives, .... And if we see that wane, we are losing a strategic advantage we have as a community.

Communities are showing their support in a variety of ways. Resettlement agencies have reported that, since the inception of the administration's refugee reduction policies, they have been flooded with more offers of supplies, donations, housing assistance, and volunteers than there are arriving refugees who could benefit from this community support. Community members have been calling to ask how they can help, and awareness about refugee resettlement is higher than it has ever been. Churches and communities in places where offices have closed have expressed strong support for the programs and deep disappointment for office closures and program suspensions.

For example, in Lansing, Michigan, St. Vincent Catholic Charities has actively raised money as part of the All Faith Alliance for Refugees (AFAR), comprised of clergy, congregations, and refugee supporting agencies. Most recently, AFAR hosted a benefit choir concert to raise money and show support for resettlement. According to Judi Harris, Program Director of Refugee Services, "The Lansing community is very welcoming and anxious to continue resettling refugees here. Through Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR), my community outreach coordinator and I do 4-5 outreach sessions per month and the demand is very high. Community members want to help. For example, one church is in the process of developing specific ministries for refugees, the first being a laundry ministry for single moms."

Continued support is also evident in northwest Arkansas, a heavily Republican area. Canopy in Northwest Arkansas's Emily Crane Linn notes that more than 400 people showed up to a town hall after the first executive order was issued. "There were so many cars that the police had to come direct traffic! We told our community we weren't sure if we would be able to resettle anymore refugees for some time and that we would need their support to continue operating. The response was overwhelming. We were flooded with donations and volunteers. People joined us in calling our elected officials... It was incredible. We wouldn't still be here if our community hadn't absolutely done everything they could to fight for us."



"Being part of this effort to welcome a refugee family has been like touching the hem of Jesus' garment."

Volunteer with Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Boston, Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR)

State and local governments are responding as well. The new governor of Michigan recently designated the state as welcoming to refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. In Columbus, Ohio the local government awarded a community center funding to remain open following the federal government's cuts to its funding. The community center serves the region's Bhutanese and Nepali refugees.

Thus, despite efforts to undermine refugee welcoming, communities continue to show both social and political support for refugees. As this support continues, more and more people are questioning whether current policies genuinely reflect American ideals and principles. As Crane Linn noted, "For us, refugee resettlement isn't political. It's the right thing to do-- and it happens to also be good for our community in so many ways. We remain a heavily Republican community and many of our supporters appreciate a lot of the things our current President stands for. We just don't agree with him on this issue. "

### Impact on Resettlement Infrastructure

The United States has a proud history of welcoming refugees, and an important part of its success has been the public-private partnership between the federal government and non-profit organizations that have developed expertise in meeting the needs of refugees. Prior to arrival in the United States, a refugee is assigned to one of nine resettlement agencies that partner with the federal government to facilitate the refugee's reception, housing, and integration into a local community.

Working alongside local community stakeholders such as law enforcement, faith groups, corporate partners, health providers, educators, and more, local resettlement offices offer programs and services to resettled refugees in order to help assure early employment, self-sufficiency, and integration. The work done by local resettlement offices and volunteers across the country helps refugees to thrive in the United States and to contribute to their new communities.

The administration's changes to the resettlement program have dramatically reduced this vital network of support. At the end of 2016, approximately 325 local resettlement offices helped refugees integrate and thrive in their new communities. As of April 2019, more than 100 local affiliate offices around the country have had to close their federal refugee programs altogether or have had to suspend some or all of their refugee program operations.



## **These include:**

- **Closed Programs:** 51 programs have closed permanently, which means that those offices can no longer provide reception and placement (R&P) services (initial resettlement) to newly arriving refugees.
- **Suspended Programs:** 41 offices across 23 States have temporarily suspended (or zeroed-out) R&P services to new refugee arrivals, which means that while they continue to serve existing clients, they cannot welcome new refugee arrivals.
- **Splitting up Long-standing Partnerships:** In December 2017, PRM mandated that 26 local resettlement offices that had partnered with more than one national agency instead only partner with one, forcing them to dissolve long-standing partnerships. As a result, fewer refugees are resettled by these local offices and relationships with local churches have suffered.

According to Emily Crane Linn, Director of Resettlement for Canopy in Northwest Arkansas, the lack of certainty about the direction of the USRAP is particularly difficult on local agencies, "When we started our work in early 2016, the U.S. was steadily increasing the number of refugees they were accepting every year. We expected to see rapid growth in our program right from the start. Instead, we were only able to resettle three families before the first executive order came down. From then on, we have had to deal with constant uncertainty--and that's been pretty challenging for us as a young nonprofit, to be sure."

These cutbacks to the USRAP infrastructure threaten the United States' ability to nimbly reverse the current downward trend and respond to the increasing global need for resettlement. Infrastructure is lost, including experts in refugee protection, trauma care, and multicultural awareness. It is time to recognize the value of these community resources, stop this loss of expertise, and rebuild the program for refugees who are already present and those who will come in the future.

This uncertainty, coupled with the progressive reduction of refugee admissions numbers and reduced infrastructure, places a strain on the remaining resettlement network and has forced many agencies to close programs, reduce staff, and lose valuable expertise on issues important for successful resettlement such as refugee protection, trauma care, and multicultural awareness.

# Recommendations

Due to the vast reduction in refugee admissions, refugees overseas face insecurity and danger, U.S. foreign policy leverage has been weakened, refugee families are left separated, and communities are deprived of the many economic and cultural benefits that refugees bring to communities. RCUSA makes the following recommendations:

## Administration

- Admit the 30,000 refugees designated by the FY2019 Presidential Determination
- Set the FY2020 Presidential Determination to at least 95,000 refugees, in-line with historic norms and reflective of the global need
- Reverse policies that have limited refugee admissions and take action to ameliorate the damage done to the USRAP, including: appropriately staffing overseas operations, removing duplicative and unnecessary vetting procedures, and lifting discriminatory bans on arrivals
- Request funding to support a robust Refugee Admissions Program

## Congress

- Hold the administration accountable to meeting the FY2019 PD of 30,000 and raising the FY2020 PD to at least 95,000
- Request that the administration hold the annual congressional consultations on refugee arrivals before September, since last year's consultations were late
- Enact the GRACE Act, which would set the annual minimum Presidential Determination at 95,000 (the average PD since 1980)
- Enact the NO BAN Act, which would repeal the executive orders that have suspended the refugee resettlement program and banned refugees and other individuals from certain, mainly majority Muslim, countries
- Robustly appropriate funding for the Refugee and Entrant Assistance, Migration and Refugee Assistance, Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance, and International Disaster Assistance accounts to rebuild U.S. leadership on international refugee assistance and domestic resettlement
- Preserve the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration as the lead agency for international refugee assistance and the USRAP

# Conclusion

Refugee resettlement is a unique embodiment of America's history as a refuge for the persecuted and the humanitarian values held by faith communities and citizens across the country. As the Trump Administration has dismantled this critical program, it has sent ripple effects around the world and throughout the country. From religious communities looking to fulfill their call to "welcome the stranger," to rural dairy farmer's reliance on refugees with agricultural backgrounds, America is better when we welcome refugees. By buoying critical allies in the Middle East, safeguarding regional stability, and sending a message that the United States is a beacon of hope for refugees displaced by conflict, America's foreign policy is strengthened and America is safer when we welcome refugees. The current administration's changes to theUSRAP have had disastrous effects on refugees, the communities that welcome them, and the United States as a whole. Which is why we ask "Where Are The Refugees?" and urge the administration and Congress to rebuild theUSRAP and revitalize U.S. leadership on refugee resettlement.





# Complete List of Affected Resettlement Sites by State

## Closed Programs

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
CA - Anaheim	FY 2017
CA - Garden Grove	FY 2017
CA - Los Angeles	FY 2018
CA - Oakland	FY 2018
CA - San Diego URM	FY 2019
FL - Delray Beach	FY 2018
FL - Jacksonville*	FY 2017
FL - Lauderdale Lake (Miami)	FY 2017
FL - Miami	FY 2017
FL - Miami	FY 2017
FL - Miami	FY 2018
FL - Miami	FY 2018
FL - Miami	FY 2018

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
FL - Naples	FY 2018
FL - Orlando	FY 2018
FL - Orlando	FY 2018
FL - Orlando	FY 2019
FL - Palm Beach	FY 2018
ID - Boise	FY 2017
IL - Chicago	FY 2017
IL - Chicago	FY 2018
KS - Garden City	FY 2018
KY - Lexington	FY 2018
MA - Framingham	FY 2018
MA - West Springfield	FY 2017
MA - Worcester	FY 2018

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
MD - Glen Burnie	FY 2017
MI - Ann Arbor	FY 2019
MN - St. Paul	FY 2018
NC - Wilmington	FY 2017
ND - Fargo	FY 2017
ND - Grand Forks	FY 2017
NH - Concord	FY 2017
NM - Albuquerque	FY 2017
NY - Brooklyn	FY 2018
NY - Ithaca	FY 2018
NY - New York	FY 2018
NY- Poughkeepsie	FY 2018
NY - White Plains	FY 2018

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
OH - Columbus	FY 2017
OH - Youngstown	FY 2017
PA - Pittsburg	FY 2019
SC - Charleston	FY 2018
TN - Nashville	FY 2017
TX - Austin	FY 2018
TX - El Paso	FY 2017
TX - Midland	FY 2018
WI - Madison	FY 2019
WI - Milwaukee	FY 2017
WI - Milwaukee	FY 2018
WV - Charleston	FY 2017

## Zero'd Out Programs

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
CA - Glendale	FY 2019
CA - San Bernardino	FY 2018
CA - San Jose	FY 2018
CA - San Jose	FY 2019
CO - Colorado Springs	FY 2019
CT - Hartford	FY 2019
DE - Wilmington	FY 2019
FL - Clearwater	FY 2019
FL - Miami	FY 2018
FL - Northport	FY 2019
FL - Tampa	FY 2018
FL - Tampa	FY 2019
HI - Honolulu	FY 2018

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
IA - Cedar Rapids	FY 2018
IL - Aurora	FY 2019
IL - Chicago	FY 2019
MA - Boston	FY 2019
MA - Worcester	FY 2019
MI - Battle Creek	FY 2019
MI - Clinton Township	FY 2018
MO - Springfield	FY 2018
NC - Winston Salem	FY 2019
ND - Grand Forks	FY 2019
NJ - Amityville	FY 2018
NJ - Camden	FY 2019



Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
NJ - Jersey City	FY 2019
NY - Binghamton	FY 2018
NY - Yonkers	FY 2019
NY - Brooklyn	FY 2018
OH - Toledo	FY 2019
OK - Oklahoma City	FY 2019
PA - Allentown	FY 2019
PA - Chester	FY 2019

Locations of Closed Offices	Fiscal Year
PA - Erie	FY 2019
PA - Jenkintown	FY 2019
PA - Scranton	FY 2019
RI - Providence	FY 2018
TX - Dallas	FY 2019
VA - Richmond	FY 2019
VT - Rutland	FY 2018
WI - Sheboygan	FY 2018