



August 14, 2024

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

Dear President Biden,

I am writing today on behalf of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) to provide our recommendation for the upcoming Presidential Determination (PD) on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2025. Our PD recommendation is paired with specific recommended actions for your administration to ensure continued modernization and revitalization of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

**For FY 2025, we call on your administration to set the PD to at least 135,000.**

RCUSA is a diverse coalition that represents 41 U.S.-based nonprofits – ranging from the 10 national resettlement agencies to networks of grassroots organizers – supporting and protecting the rights of forcibly displaced people. Our members consist of experts in programmatic implementation, policy development, and human rights.

Forced displacement is steadily rising, each year setting a new record-breaking high. As of June 2024, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reports](#) that more than 117 million people are displaced from their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order. This number includes 68.3 million people that have been displaced within their own country, 31.6 million refugees, 6.9 million people seeking asylum, and at least 4.4 million people who are stateless. It is projected that there will be 2.9 million refugees in need of resettlement by FY 2025, with the largest numbers coming from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Sudan, and the DRC. The availability of durable solutions for forcibly displaced people (FDP) is being far outpaced by displacement crises.

**These numbers suggest an urgent need to increase our commitment to resettlement in the United States. That is why we are calling for a PD of *at least* 135,000.**

We have a shared goal of a dynamic, resilient resettlement program: responsive to growing global displacement and the need to offer permanent protections to the most vulnerable, as well as sustainable and able to withstand the challenges of the coming years and decades. Our recommendation for FY 2025 is thus contingent upon ongoing robust support from your administration, Congress, and the public for strengthening and expanding the refugee admissions program. To sustainably meet the PD in FY25 and beyond, **we urge your administration to commit resources to the four key areas listed below and described in more detail in the appendix:**

- Doubling the Reception & Placement Direct Assistance and Administrative Per Capita funding. RCUSA recognizes and applauds the administration's efforts to increase per capita support in FY 2024 and FY

2025, and continues to emphasize that further investment remains essential to supporting domestic resettlement capacity.

- Expanding national, state, and local housing policy solutions for refugees and newcomers to improve access to safe, affordable, and sustainable housing through ongoing coordination with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and activation of corporate partnerships.
- Continuing to facilitate and deepen interagency coordination in support of domestic resettlement capacity, including by building on the model of Afghan support centers to work across agencies to expedite connections to required services and information.
- Continuing to invest political will in refugee processing improvements and program innovations, while upholding principles of equity, additionality, and high standards of care.

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. The refugee admissions program is the lynchpin of our humanitarian protection infrastructure, and a strong program upholds our legacy as a nation of welcome. Our Presidential Determination request remains ambitious this year because Americans across the country have demonstrated again and again both their commitment and support for welcoming the persecuted.

We applaud your administration's willingness to consider new approaches to providing safety and protection to refugees and other forcibly displaced people. Your administration inherited a systemically weakened USRAP program but has methodically rebuilt and modernized the resettlement infrastructure. This fiscal year, USRAP is set to resettle more than 100,000 refugees.

The capacity to resettle this many refugees comes from a range of modalities, including the traditional Reception and Placement program (R&P), Welcome Corps, and Virtual Reception and Placement. Through the Welcome Corps program, your administration has encouraged Americans to welcome refugees into their communities across the United States. For the first time in the history of USRAP, the Welcome Corps expanded to allow private sponsors to identify and sponsor refugees they know – providing new opportunities to reunite families, allow particularly vulnerable refugees (such as LGBTQI+ refugees) a new resettlement pathway, and offer veterans the opportunity to directly support our allies whom they served alongside. Just as the Welcome Corps program has increased overall U.S. capacity for resettlement, it is important to send a message through this upcoming year's Presidential Determination that private sponsorship is additional and complementary to traditional R&P. Ongoing investment in community-centered resettlement initiatives is critical to the long-term expansion and sustainability of USRAP.

Overseas, vital improvements have been made to refugee case processing. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has tripled the size of its refugee officer corps, hiring more than 300 refugee officers who have interviewed around 80,000 refugee applicants in the first half of 2024 alone. Additionally, more than 32,000 refugees with cases pending for more than five years have been resettled in the United States, resolving many of the oldest cases in the program.

Building resettlement capacity takes time and adequate resources. We are actively working to rebuild the program sustainably, in direct partnership with local communities and an expanded set of stakeholders.

Communities and agencies are not only serving refugees but other populations eligible for services through the Office of Refugee Resettlement, including Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients, asylees, Ukrainian and Afghan Humanitarian Parolees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, unaccompanied children, and others. Overall, ORR anticipates over 700,000 eligible arrivals in 2025.

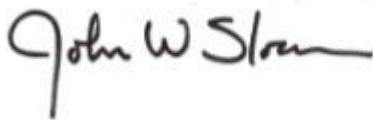
Access to affordable, safe, and permanent housing remains a major concern, and per capita funding has not kept pace with inflation or the rising cost of living. Additional resources to address these challenges would pay for themselves: HHS reports a net fiscal benefit of \$123.8 billion for refugees and asylees over a 15-year period.

The crucial need to modernize domestically starts with providing more consistent pacing of arrivals to ensure adequate staffing, as well as streamlined technology to lessen administrative burdens. The imperative of strengthening program capacity is reinforced by the administration's plans to also welcome 40,000 Afghan SIV holders through the same R&P program. Though this number does not count toward the PD, it is important to recognize the impact this has on capacity.

Given the ever-growing global need, the Biden administration must continue to demonstrate its commitment to resettlement as a core component of humanitarian protection. Collectively, we have the room – and the heart – to grow the program. With a target for refugee admissions set for at least 135,000 in FY25 and a commitment to implementing substantial changes in the resettlement program, the United States can continue building towards providing permanent humanitarian protection at a level more responsive to global need and commensurate with our country's stature as a beacon of hope and opportunity.

RCUSA looks forward to continuing collaboration with the administration and appreciates your leadership in this critical endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Slocum". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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

## Appendix

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

August 2024

**1. The administration must support domestic resettlement capacity, including by committing to doubling the Resettlement & Placement Direct Assistance and Administrative Per Capita funding provided for each resettled refugee.**

Resettlement agencies receive a per capita amount from the State Department for each refugee to support administrative and direct assistance needs, including providing critical support like rent, food, clothing, and furnishings. These per capita amounts have not kept pace with inflation, the rising cost of living or housing prices, and this harms resettled refugees just as they are beginning their new lives in the United States. A recent survey conducted by the ten national resettlement agencies confirmed that doubling the direct assistance and administration per capita amount would increase resettlement capacity. The administration must continue to work with Congress to protect and deepen investments in community capacity and bolster support to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We are grateful to hear that PRM is planning a significant increase in the per capita, but the funding still falls short of what is needed.

**2. The administration must expand national, state, and local housing policy solutions for refugees and newcomers.**

President Biden has [committed](#) to find housing solutions for the most vulnerable communities across the United States. Refugees and other new Americans face particular challenges in accessing safe, affordable, sustainable housing – facing discrimination from landlords, arriving without needed documentation or credit history and sometimes unconventional family sizes. The coalition applauds strides forward made in the [HUD/ORR Memorandum of Understanding](#) and the robust [interagency factsheet](#) on renting to refugees and other newcomers. As we continue to expand affordable housing policy, the administration must work with Congress in authorizing all ORR-eligible populations to receive housing support, funding a newcomer housing voucher, investing in affordable housing supply, implementing HUD FTEs to uphold newcomer-specific portfolios, supporting enforcement of Fair Housing Laws, confronting discrimination, and continue to spearhead additional corporate partnerships.

**3. The White House must continue to facilitate interagency coordination to grow resettlement capacity and build a more resilient, nimble, sustainable USRAP.**

Supplemental funding to resettlement agencies alone will not cure all capacity challenges. The coalition applauds the White House's work to coordinate agencies in improving refugee processing. The Coalition urges the administration to facilitate: increasing access to health clinics, timely processing of social security cards and employment authorization documents, and support for newcomers in successfully accessing education, case management, and benefit programs. These are all critical in ensuring refugees are able to thrive in their new communities. Additionally, a White House coordinator focused on these issues would help address processing bottlenecks and support communication and coordination in addressing broad community capacity constraints that fall under a variety of different agencies.

The Afghan Support Center model of providing support for high-volume arrivals has been extremely successful and should be expanded and funded to include future arrivals through quarterly pop-up centers. Through these centers, new arrivals are able to obtain core service connections, which have traditionally taken three months, in up to five days. The centers have facilitated prompt processing of drivers licenses, employment authorization documents and Social Security enrollment, SNAP and Medicaid enrollments (where permitted), as well as facilitating English as a Second Language enrollment. In some Afghan Support Centers, clinical examinations and vaccinations were offered, efficiently addressing public health and school requirements. Placing such centers in states such as New York, California, Colorado, Minnesota, Illinois, and Massachusetts would benefit both new arrivals and their receiving communities.

**4. The administration must continue to invest political will in refugee processing improvements and program innovations, while upholding principles of equity, additionality, and high standards of care.**

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.

In order to resettle 135,000 refugees in FY 2025, the administration must continue to grow and improve upon these innovations and bolster pathways to permanent protection. In doing so, the administration must ensure equity across populations and regions, ensure new programs like Welcome Corps and Virtual Reception & Placement come in addition to and not in place of traditional resettlement, and – always – maintain the standards of care and service that have allowed millions of refugees to successfully build new lives in this country.

RCUSA enthusiastically supports the expansion of the Welcome Corps program of private sponsorship of refugees and looks forward to its potential as it supports family reunification and offers a new

resettlement pathway for vulnerable refugee populations who have faced challenges in accessing the program such as LGBTQI+ refugees. RCUSA also supports the ongoing efforts of Welcome Corps on Campus, a unique initiative of the larger Welcome Corps program aimed at supporting refugee students in accessing higher education opportunities while ensuring safe resettlement to the United States; and Welcome Corps at Work, another targeted initiative of Welcome Corps, for its leadership in connecting refugees to employment opportunities, enabling innovative solutions that support U.S. employers and newly resettled refugees. All elements of Welcome Corps support long-term integration for refugees and deepened investment in local communities.

Many processing improvements are underway and are proving to be very successful – but need further implementation support as programs expand. These include concurrent 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 for refugees to move from referral to resettlement 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. To the extent possible, refugees should arrive at a regular rate throughout the year.

*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.*