

RCUSA Factsheet: An Overview of Refugee Resettlement in the United States

The United States has a proud history of welcoming refugees. In the aftermath of World War II, Congress enacted refugee legislation, providing a safe haven for more than 650,000 displaced Europeans. Since the U.S. resettlement program was codified in the *Refugee Act of 1980*, the United States has set a standard of excellence, providing a new start and durable solution for more than 3 million people. Through our public-private partnership model, such as *Welcome Corps*, a community sponsorship program that allowed Americans to directly sponsor and welcome refugees, the United States demonstrated a legacy of leadership.

That legacy was abruptly disrupted in January 2025. On January 18, 2025, the Trump administration issued **Executive Order 14163**, “*Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program*,” which indefinitely suspended refugee processing and admissions through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). In the days that followed, the administration took a series of additional actions that brought refugee processing and resettlement to a standstill:

- On **January 21, 2025** the U.S. Department of State canceled travel for more than **100,000 refugees and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders** who had already been approved for admission—including **over 22,000** individuals deemed “ready for departure.” Many were left stranded in unsafe and precarious conditions abroad.
- On **January 24, 2025** refugee resettlement agencies were instructed to cease all USRAP-related services. Federal funding for refugee programs was paused, immediately jeopardizing **food, housing, and employment support** for **over 40,000** refugees and Afghan allies who had already arrived in the United States.
- Shortly thereafter, the **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** announced a pause in adjudicating **green card applications** filed by refugees and asylees, further restricting their ability to obtain both continued permanent legal status and long-term protection.

To date, refugees are admitted to the United States only on an extraordinarily limited case-by-case basis. Following court intervention, a small number of refugees were admitted to the United States in FY 2025. But in the first six months of FY 2026, of the 4,499 USRAP arrivals, only 3 were Afghan refugees and 4,496 were from South Africa. Approx. 95% of FY26 USRAP arrivals are Afrikaners.

Who is Considered a Refugee and How Many Are There?

Under international and U.S. law, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their own country and is unable to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group and/or political opinion. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in mid-2025 there were over 117.3 million forcibly displaced people (FDP) around the world, more than 36 million were classified as refugees with 40% being children. The UNHCR estimated 2.9 million refugees would be in need of resettlement in 2025 and in FY 2025 the United States resettled fewer than 40,000 refugees with approx. 98.7% of whom being resettled in Q1 of FY25.

What is Resettlement?

UNHCR considers three durable solutions for refugees: a safe, voluntary, and dignified return home, integration into their host country, or third country resettlement. Resettlement is only considered when integration or return are impossible and is generally available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection. The United States is one of multiple resettlement countries and has the most secure and thorough vetting process in the world. Eligible refugees undergo a rigorous screening process before they are approved.

Refugee Resettlement Agencies

Before January 20, 2025, there were 10 national U.S. refugee resettlement agencies with local offices and affiliates throughout the country that helped newly-arrived refugees rebuild their lives. These organizations provided essential support services, including welcoming refugee families at the airport, preparing their first home in the United States, helping enroll their children in school, providing opportunities to learn English, providing mental health and other

healthcare, supporting the acquisition of job readiness skills, and finding employment. These initial investments are designed to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency and a sense of belonging in their new homes. The administration has dismantled the domestic capacity piece-by-piece, and now many of the agencies that once partnered with the U.S. government have been forced to close or significantly reduced their staff.

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) – U.S. Department of State

PRM directs U.S. admission policies; coordinates overseas processing, is responsible for the transportation of refugees to the United States, and administers U.S. funding to UNHCR and humanitarian assistance overseas. PRM works closely across federal agencies that conduct the security screening process, including the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Defense, and the National Counterterrorism Center.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) – U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Specially trained USCIS officers conduct eligibility interviews to determine whether refugee applicants qualify for resettlement, manage the security clearance process, and process applications for refugees to reunify with family and adjust their status to permanent residents and citizens. In November 2025, USCIS released a memo that called for the review of more than 200,000 refugees who had been thoroughly vetted and admitted into the U.S. between January 20, 2021, and February 20, 2025.

Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

ORR administers federal funding to state and local programs that provide refugee resettlement services, including the new Program of Initial Resettlement (PIR). It also funds and oversees programs for other populations of concern, including unaccompanied refugee minors, asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and survivors of torture and human trafficking.

Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) – U.S. Department of State

CARE was the center for the U.S. government's interagency effort to relocate Afghan allies with whom we have an enduring commitment, including those who qualify for Special Immigrant Visas, Immigrant Visas, and approved USRAP cases. CARE handled the planning and logistics of relocating eligible Afghans on flights or by ground transportation to overseas case processing sites. CARE has been dismantled, halting evacuations, reunifications, and other services for Afghans who had worked with the U.S. government.

BILLS TO CONSIDER:

Refugee Protection Act – [H.R.9685](#) / [S.5353](#) (117th Congress) would serve as a blueprint to restore and strengthen U.S. refugee and asylum programs to a gold standard of excellence.

NO BAN Act – [H.R.924](#) / [S.398](#) (119th Congress) would add religion to INA nondiscrimination provisions, narrowly tailor INA 212(f) authority to address compelling government interests, and add procedural requirements to increase oversight.

Afghan Adjustment Act – [H.R. 4895](#) / [S.2679](#) (119th Congress) would allow certain Afghans who arrived during Operation Allies Welcome with temporary status to have an opportunity to apply to become lawful permanent residents – the same legal status they would have received had they been admitted as refugees.

GRACE Act – [S.3535](#) / [H.R.6870](#) (119th Congress) would set a minimum refugee admissions goal at 125,000 and strengthen oversight initiatives over the U.S. resettlement program.

Community-Based Refugee Reception Act – [S.2655](#) (119th Congress) would establish a community-based refugee reception program to provide initial resettlement services in complementarity to traditional resettlement capacity.

Stateless Protection Act – [H.R.7755](#) / [S.3987](#) (118th Congress) would establish a formal "Stateless Protected Status" in the United States and aims to provide a pathway to lawful permanent residence and U.S. citizenship for this population.

Climate Displaced Persons Act – [H.R. 6455](#) / [S.3340](#) (118th Congress) would establish the Global Climate Change Resilience Strategy and authorize the admission of climate-displaced persons into the United States.