

Making Refugee Policy Work for Refugees—and Americans

THE ISSUE

America’s refugee policy should be one that protects the truly vulnerable, while also protecting American sovereignty and security. Historically, the United States has been the global leader in welcoming those fleeing persecution. The annual admissions number for refugees has varied significantly in recent years, and refugee advocates seek to change it again, from its current low of 15,000 refugees in one year to 125,000, the highest number since 1993, and the fifth-highest since the U.S. refugee program began in 1975.

Rather than focusing on a number, policy-makers should: (1) consider the larger picture, including exploding asylum claims at the U.S.–Mexico border, of humanitarian immigration benefits that refugees and asylees receive; (2) identify how to provide safety for those truly facing persecution in their home countries, while prioritizing regional and global resettlement; and (3) maintain the integrity of the refugee program as well as high national security standards.

REFUGEE AND ASYLUM: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

- Refugee protection is just one form of humanitarian relief that the U.S. offers. Asylum is an additional type, among others. The U.S. received 259,104 asylum claims in 2017.
- Applicants for asylum must prove the same elements as an applicant for refugee status: a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. The difference is *where* the applicants are. Asylum applicants are already in the U.S. or at a U.S. port of entry; refugee applicants are abroad.

- When President Obama raised the refugee admissions ceiling to 110,000 in FY 2017, the highest number in the previous 20 years, asylum applicants faced longer processing times for their cases.
 - The Obama Administration pulled U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum resources to prioritize processing refugee cases.
 - By January 2018, the USCIS asylum application backlog reached “a crisis-level” of 311,000 pending cases, an increase of more than 1,750 percent in five years.
 - The backlog was compounded by the caravans of illegal aliens traveling from Central America and other countries to the southern border of the U.S. and claiming asylum. The rate of new asylum applications filed with the USCIS had more than tripled. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the U.S. led the world in new asylum application receipts in 2017 and 2018.
- President Trump prioritized asylum applicants—those claiming a fear of persecution who were already in the U.S. or at a port of entry, and lowered the annual refugee admission numbers to 50,000, 45,000, 30,000, 18,000, and 15,000 from FY 2017 to FY 2021, respectively.

NATIONAL SECURITY MUST BE MAINTAINED

- When the Obama Administration scrambled to meet the FY 2017 110,000-refugee ceiling during the Syrian conflict, leaders in the Intelligence Community and the FBI warned that refugee applicants could not be adequately vetted for security concerns due

to a lack of information about the applicants coming from that region.

- The higher the refugee-admission ceiling, the less time and attention adjudicators can devote to vet each applicant for security issues.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the U.S. receive funding to help refugees resettle in the U.S. Many of these NGOs also lobby the U.S. government for looser immigration policies.

NO COMPROMISE ON REFUGEE ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS TO REACH AN ARBITRARILY HIGH NUMBER

- In a rush to admit very large numbers of refugees in one year, adjudicators have neither the time nor the incentive to probe an applicant's persecution claim for fraud. Instead, they are incentivized to grant cases. This waters down standards of the refugee program and undermines the intention of the program—to protect those truly in danger.
- It is far better to have an admissions number that adjudicators can manage, to ensure that truly eligible applicants receive the lifesaving benefit of refugee status. This number should also take into account the number of pending asylum claims.
- The U.S. must preserve access to humanitarian protection for bona fide refugees and asylees, while discouraging ineligible applicants from misusing it, which delays relief for meritorious applicants.

REGIONAL RESETTLEMENT HELPS MORE DISPLACED PERSONS THAN RESETTLING A RELATIVE FEW IN THE U.S.

- The UNHCR and NGOs can help more displaced persons more quickly and cost-effectively in the regions of their home countries than bringing relatively small subsets of displaced populations to the United States.

- The cost to resettle one Middle Eastern refugee in the U.S. for five years would help 12 refugees in the Middle East for five years, or 61 refugees for one year.
- According to a recent Center for Immigration Studies report, the total fiscal cost of resettling one adult refugee is \$133,000.
- Regional resettlement facilitates refugees' safe and voluntary return to their home country when conditions allow, so they can participate in rebuilding their homelands, promoting recovery and long-term stability of their home countries.

ASSIMILATION IS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF SUCCESSFUL U.S. RESETTLEMENT AND HOMELAND SECURITY

- Assimilation into American society, using a common language, and understanding American civics is key to immigrants' success.
 - Embracing the American creed, learning English, and gaining an education help immigrants to build an American identity and gain the knowledge, skill sets, and social capital that increase their sense of belonging in American society.
- Assimilation does not require that refugees forget their history or language. Patriotic assimilation simply asks that immigrants to the U.S. embrace the principles of the United States, and develop loyalty to the U.S. and fellow Americans above other countries and people.

The growing number of Islamist terror attacks in Europe, as well as terrorism-related and violent crimes in the U.S., by radicalized refugees are a reminder that non-assimilation is a direct threat to homeland security and societal cohesion.