



# **(Un)welcome: the state of refugee resettlement in America**

**World Refugee Day | June 2018**



**[Rescue.org/Unwelcome](https://rescue.org/unwelcome)**

Refugee resettlement to the United States has been ground to a halt. Under the current administration, a **series of policy changes** will result in **no more than 21,000 refugees being welcomed to the U.S. in Fiscal Year 2018<sup>1</sup>**. This will mark the lowest arrivals ever in the **program's history** at a time when global needs have never been greater.

The **impacts** of reduced refugee resettlement are far-reaching at home and abroad: The U.S. is abandoning the most in-need refugee populations, including religious minorities; those who assisted U.S. troops and missions overseas; families seeking to be unified with their loved ones; and the 50 percent of refugees who are children. Our allies hosting more than their fair share abroad and our local communities across the U.S. are also feeling the consequences.

This slowdown is in stark contrast to the resettlement program's long history of support and success, with over 3 million refugees resettled in the U.S. since 1980. Resettled refugees provide widespread **economic benefits** across the country and **revitalize local communities** experiencing demographic decline. The program is also instrumental to U.S. foreign policy, supporting the success of diplomatic missions and national security objectives overseas.

### ***The bottom line: a policy that hurts refugees, Americans on Main Street, and allies abroad***

- A steep 70% drop in refugee admissions signals a departure from U.S. leadership, although nearly 60% of Americans believe the U.S. has a moral obligation to help refugees.
- Three out of four Americans recognize the extensive cross-agency nature of security vetting for refugees. The evidence speaks for itself: **Not a single** resettled refugee has committed a lethal attack on U.S. soil since the modern resettlement program was established in 1980.
- Two-thirds of Americans recognize resettled refugees contribute a great deal to this country through the sharing of their talents, skills, cultures and customs. Yet, reduced arrivals are already impacting Main Street, where business owners the IRC works with are struggling to fill jobs typically fit for refugees.
- The slowdown in resettlement **jeopardizes** U.S. national security interests while creating an added burden for key U.S. allies. 76% of Americans believe the refugee crisis is an important national and global issue.
- **The time is now for the American people and Congress to be on the right side of history and stand up for refugees.**

## **METHODOLOGY**

To assess the consequences of low refugee arrivals in FY18, the IRC:

- Analyzed data and impact evidence from its U.S. resettlement offices and international country operations;
- Analyzed public data on refugee arrivals to the U.S. and departures by key processing countries<sup>2</sup>; and
- Commissioned a poll<sup>3</sup>, to better understand Americans' views on refugees.

*The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has **27 offices** that **support newly arrived refugees** to secure jobs, learn English, achieve self-sufficiency, and eventually go on to ultimately become citizens, own homes and realize the American Dream. Among resettlement agencies, the IRC also has the biggest international operation with a presence in over 40 countries worldwide, supporting refugees both at the source of global crises and as they restart their lives in resettlement countries.*

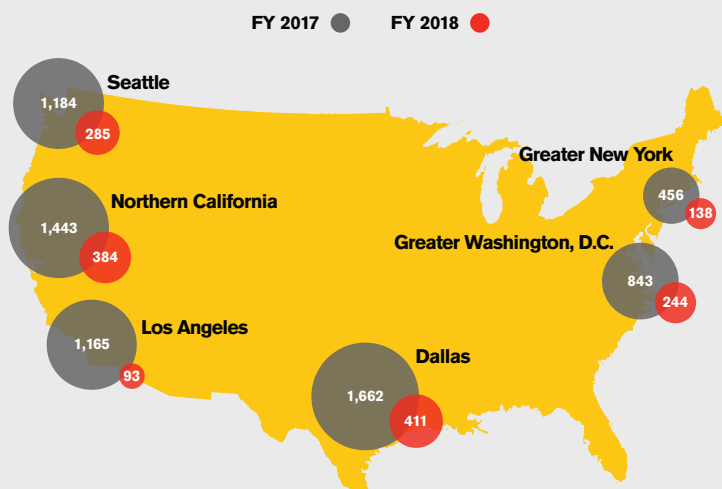
## A steep drop in U.S. refugee admissions

Nationally, in the first seven months of FY18, refugee arrivals have dropped 70% compared to the same period last year: from 42,414 to 12,189 refugees. No religious group or minority has been spared: The slowdown has resulted in **a 60% drop in Christian refugee arrivals**, including targeted Christian minorities; **an 80% drop in Muslim refugee arrivals**, the group suffering the highest casualties from terrorists; and **a 99% drop in Yazidi arrivals**, a brutally persecuted minority.

Locally, in six major metropolitan areas, refugee arrivals year-over-year declined by:

- Roughly 70% in both Greater New York and Greater Washington, D.C./Maryland;
- 73% in Northern California;
- 75% in Dallas;
- 76% in Seattle; and
- In Los Angeles, refugee arrivals virtually stopped altogether, primarily because of halts to resettlement of religious minorities. Arrivals have plummeted by 92% with only 93 refugee arrivals, compared to 1,165 last year.

### Drop in refugee admissions in 6 major metro areas



Comparison October 1 to April 30

“Everyone thinks that it's the refugees that need us... This is a misconception, because truly, it's us who need the refugees. They are passionate and dedicated to do their part to serve our guests, and in the hospitality industry, this is what we need.

— Craig Kind, Director of Rooms,  
The Meritage Resort & Spa,  
Napa, CA

## At home, Main Street is feeling the impact

IRC offices across the country have noted adverse consequences for local communities, and employers in particular, resulting from the stark drop in refugee admissions:

- The decline in refugee arrivals has left many employers with jobs they are unable to fill with American workers. In FY17, the IRC's workforce programming helped refugees and other clients find employment with more than 1,700 employers nationwide. But now, the IRC is unable to help employers fill critical jobs in metro areas including but not limited to Dallas, Denver, Greater New York, Northern California, Seattle, Richmond, Charlottesville and Phoenix.
- Over 60% of Americans believe that the private sector, including U.S. corporations, should play a prominent role in aiding refugees to integrate into our communities. Employers in key U.S. industries—including manufacturing, hospitality and meatpacking—rely on refugees to fill jobs at a time when demographic decline and job growth have generated labor shortages. In contrast to the aging U.S.-born population, of which only 49.7% is working-age, an estimated 77.1% of refugees are working-age.



In contrast to myths, U.S. government-commissioned research shows that refugees have generated \$63 billion in net revenue over the past decade. Moreover, resettled refugees ages 18 to 45 pay on average \$21,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits over a 20-year period and are around 30% more likely to be entrepreneurs than the U.S.-born population. Employers report that hiring refugees increases company efficiency, improves management practices, widens applicant pools and brings down turnover rates.

In Dallas, an IRC employment partner is struggling to fill nearly 200 jobs that would have been filled by refugee arrivals. The IRC's Seattle office receives frequent calls from employers looking for job-seekers, yet there aren't enough refugees to meet the demand: A recruiter in the local hospitality and service industry described the shortage of applicants as "desperate." In the IRC's Phoenix office, where 47 employers hired more than one client in FY17, the IRC is now only able to meet half of the total demand from employers looking to hire. Similar trends were observed in other offices, including in Northern California, Greater New York, Charlottesville, Denver, Phoenix and Richmond, and in Garden City, Kansas.

### **In the face of these negative impacts, there has been an outpouring of community and private support for refugees.**

According to the IRC's Los Angeles executive director, Martin Zogg: "In spite of the nationwide slowdown of refugee arrivals... community support has never been higher, with the broadest array ever of community groups supporting refugees and resettlement agencies." In FY17, the IRC worked with more than 7,600 volunteers nationally, and saw a 97% increase in volunteer applications and a 116% increase in unique donations compared to the previous year.

## **The consequences of reduced resettlement extend beyond our borders**

Resettlement has always been purposefully grounded in foreign policy while providing a life-saving solution to the most in-need refugees for whom a safe return home, or remaining in their country of first refuge, is not possible. Now, new policies and bureaucratic red tape are stalling processing, leaving refugees in limbo and jeopardizing U.S. strategic interests—all at a time when there are over 1 million refugees in need of resettlement: the most vulnerable of the world's 22.5 million.



Photo: Kellie Ryan/IRC

Fig. 1: Saido Muhina Khamis, a Somali refugee, feels the cost of U.S. resettlement policies. Though initially approved to enter the U.S. along with her mother, Saido, her husband, and their two small children were left in limbo by the changes. They remain in a refugee camp in northern Kenya, separated from Saido's mother, who is living and working in North Carolina.

Saido's story (Fig. 1) is not unique. Women, children, and people who worked with the U.S. abroad and are fleeing the 11 countries subject to additional security measures, have experienced excessive vetting requirements and freezes on admissions that have slashed refugee intake where dangerous conditions persist.

- Only 44 Syrians—fewer than the number of Syrians killed in the most recent chemical attack—have found safety in the U.S. in FY18, a 99% drop from the same period last year. Syrians are fleeing brutal violence from a civil war now in its eighth year, making increased resettlement a vital component of a comprehensive strategy that is about more than limited military action. Critically, over half of Syrians resettled last year were under 14 years old.

- The total number of Iraqis resettled has also plummeted 98% year-over-year, at a time when conditions in many areas of Iraq remain unsafe for return. The IRC has **documented** that displaced Iraqis attempting to return home have faced retributive violence and secondary displacement as a result. **Those Iraqi refugees who supported American missions**—and whose lives and the lives of their families are in danger as a direct result—qualify for priority status within the resettlement program. But in the first six months of FY18 (Oct. 1 - Mar. 31), just 36 of these Iraqis were resettled to the U.S., while the backlog of priority applicants waiting for their cases to be processed now exceeds 50,000. As a result, the U.S. is jeopardizing support for future missions.
- Since early 2015, **over 2 million Afghans** have been forced to return from Pakistan and Iran to a still **unstable Afghanistan**. Despite the fact that Afghanistan remains unsafe for returns, there has been a nearly 60% year-over-year drop in resettlement of Afghans to the U.S.
- Resettlement of Somali refugees has dropped by 96% at a time when Somalis are also experiencing worsening camp conditions in Kenya and the threat of reduced food rations. The IRC has observed that with no hope for resettlement, some Somalis are returning home to unsafe conditions—only to have to flee a **second time** to Kenya. And **tens of thousands** are newly displaced.



Our schools and health systems are bursting...Our infrastructure, social services and economy are buckling under the strain. Nonetheless, Jordan—and other countries such as mine—continues to do the right thing. The same cannot be said of wealthy nations.

— **Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan**



Photo: IRC

The U.S. has turned its back on these populations at a time when refugee-producing countries remain unsafe for return and their refugee-hosting neighbors continue to shoulder the burden.

### ***As the U.S. retreats from resettlement, it also abandons allies who are left to pick up the slack***

In 2016, developing and middle-income countries generously hosted more than **84% of the world's refugees**, while the six wealthiest nations hosted fewer than 9%. The U.S. slowdown in resettlement has exacerbated burdens on refugee-hosting countries, abandoning not only the world's most vulnerable populations but also important allies, like Jordan and Kenya.

- In Jordan, 1 in 11 residents is a refugee. The inflow of refugees, mostly from Syria, has overwhelmed Jordan, yet it has kept its doors open. In 2016, it cost Jordan **roughly 25%** of its annual state budget to host refugees. That's why, when wealthy nations like the U.S. resettled **21,000 of the most in-need refugees**, in 2016, they provided tangible relief to an overburdened ally. Yet, in the first seven months of FY18, just 37 refugees have been resettled from Jordan.

### **Refugee arrivals plummet from top 5 FY17 resettlement countries**

FY 2017 ■ FY 2018 ■

Total refugee arrivals	42,414   12,189	-71.3%
Myanmar	3,759   2,120	-43.6%
D.R. Congo	7,305   3,265	-55.3%
Somalia	5,167   222	-95.7%
Iraq	6,139   109	-98.2%
Syria	6,065   44	-99.2%

Comparison October 1 to April 30

- For more than two decades, Kenya has also welcomed more than its fair share of refugees—hosting Somalis in the world's largest refugee camp. That's why in 2016 the Kenyan government **threatened to close** this camp and forcibly return over 250,000 Somalis to a country that has been in conflict for more than two decades. It cited the failure of western countries to share the responsibility for resettling refugees in defending its decision.

The reality is that temporary assistance can last for decades with multiplying costs for refugee-hosting countries and major donors like the U.S. Today refugees are **displaced for 10 years** on average and many are displaced for over 20 years with no hope of a safe return. In stark contrast, refugee resettlement is a permanent solution with up-front costs that result in net benefits to the economy over the same 20-year period during which many refugees remain in limbo.

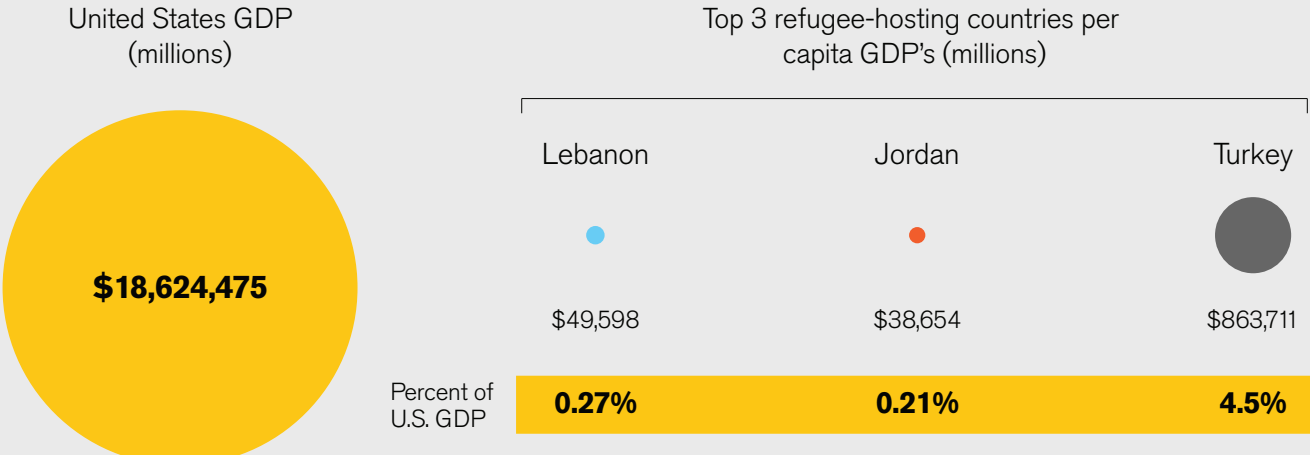
### Urgent action needed to speed up refugee admissions

This nation has long held a commitment to both security and compassion. When the U.S. retreats from its resettlement commitments, it is abandoning the most vulnerable, turning its back on important allies and going against its **national security interests** to advance stability and security in critical regions of the world.

**As Americans**, we should be advocates and speak up on behalf of refugees. We should welcome new families into our communities with open arms. We should educate ourselves and others on who refugees are, the horrors they are fleeing, and that their hopes and dreams are no different than ours. We should reach out to our elected officials and encourage them to support refugee-friendly policies and increased refugee admissions.

**Congress**, as the voice of the American people, must hold the nation and itself to the standard to which we would hold others. **After all, if there was a conflict in the U.S. forcing residents to flee their homes, two-thirds (67%) of Americans would expect Canada or Mexico to welcome them.** Congress has a responsibility through its oversight authorities to ensure the Administration picks up the pace on refugee admissions in FY18 and is on track to resettle even more in FY19. It is time that U.S. elected officials right the ship on refugee policies to reflect the critical national security and economic benefits that resettlement brings to the nation. Refugee resettlement, and corresponding U.S. interests, are at a critical juncture. The American people, and the world, are watching.

### GDP disparity: The U.S. needs to do its fair share



According to UNHCR, in 2016 the ratio of refugees relative to the national population was 1 in 6 for Lebanon, 1 in 11 for Jordan, and 1 in 28 for Turkey.

## Endnotes

- 1 The fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, arrivals data is for the first seven months of FY18 (October 1, 2017 - April 30, 2018) with a parallel year-over-year comparison to FY17 (October 1, 2016 - April 30, 2017).
- 3 The findings throughout this report are from a poll conducted May 15-16, 2018. For the survey, a sample of 1,005 adults ages 18 and over from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii were interviewed online, in English. The precision of this online poll is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points for all respondents surveyed.

## Acknowledgements

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The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 40 countries and in 27 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

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