

# What does a Joe Biden presidency mean for refugees and asylum seekers?

It's up to all of us to ensure the U.S. never again turns its back on the world's most vulnerable people.

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The American people have spoken: the United States presidential election has been called for former Vice President Joe Biden. His victory follows four years of Trump Administration policies that have been devastating for refugees, asylum seekers, and other people fleeing crises.

As a candidate, Vice President Biden made bold commitments to reverse these policies. He pledged to create a task force dedicated to the 545 children separated from their families at the border whose parents cannot be found, and to reverse policies that have devastated asylum-seeking families. He also committed to raising the refugee admissions target to at least 125,000 refugees a year.

We cannot allow refugees, asylum seekers, displaced people and new Americans to pay the price of more divisive politics. Find out how we can hold the new administration to its promises and repair the damages of the last four years:

Here are four ways the Biden Administration can act:

## Reunite families and uphold the rights of asylum seekers

Seeking asylum—even during a pandemic—is legal. Turning away asylum seekers is not. But instead of offering a safe haven to people fleeing violence and persecution, the **Trump Administration's policies** have separated children from their parents, turned asylum seekers away, and sent desperate families back into danger.



"We were living a peaceful life," says Angelina, 38, who fled Guatemala with her three children. "Then, when they killed my brother, that's when everything was disrupted. Every two blocks sometimes you'd find a body. I decided [to leave] because of that situation and also to give [my children] a better life."

Photo: Andrew Oberstadt/IRC

When President-elect Biden takes office, we need change on day one. Because the stakes are so high, **we're calling on all of our supporters to join us today** in asking our nation's leaders to do the following:

- **Repair the broken asylum system. Invest in a new system that keeps asylum seekers safe until their case is heard.** Asylum seekers have a right to have their cases heard without having to put their lives at further risk. Under the Trump Administration, many have found themselves in detention centers with track records of neglect for sanitation, medical care and personal safety or turned away at the border and sent into dangerous conditions in Mexico.
- **Recognize that seeking asylum is legal. Halt deportations without due process.** The Trump Administration is using COVID-19 as an excuse to deport asylum seekers, often sending people straight from overcrowded detention centers and worsening the pandemic in the process.

- **Recognize that creating camps at the border puts people in harm's way and is a COVID risk.** Through its “Remain in Mexico” policy, the administration has forced asylum seekers to wait in Mexico to make their case. It then used the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse to close the border all together—without giving asylum seekers any opportunity to request sanctuary. Although local communities in northern Mexico have made valiant efforts to welcome those turned away, services are overwhelmed and asylum seekers often find themselves at risk of the same type of violence they fled.
- **Understand that families must be kept together.** In June 2018, Americans were horrified to learn that, through a policy called “zero tolerance,” the Trump Administration was separating parents at the border from their children, including babies less than one year old. An estimated 5,000 children were torn from their parents under this policy, which referred all adults apprehended at the border for criminal prosecution with no exceptions. Although a federal judge halted “zero tolerance,” the parents of 545 children have still not been found.

## Rebuild the refugee resettlement program

The Trump Administration has **turned its back on refugees**, most recently by setting yet another record-low refugee admissions target of 15,000 for fiscal year 2021.

On World Refugee Day (June 20), then-candidate Joe Biden committed to restoring the U.S.'s legacy of welcome by raising the refugee admissions target to 125,000. He also promised to work with Congress to ensure the U.S. admits a minimum of 95,000 refugees each year. That number represents the average under both Democratic and Republican administrations; before the Trump Administration, the refugee admissions program had enjoyed strong bipartisan support.

At the IRC, we'll partner with the Biden Administration to uphold the new president's commitment to restore America's proud, bipartisan tradition of welcome.

## Lead the global response to COVID-19

As the world struggles to deal with the **fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic**, the needs of the most vulnerable must not be neglected or forgotten. To defeat the coronavirus anywhere, we need to defeat it everywhere.

The world has felt the absence of U.S. leadership during this pandemic. The Biden Administration must lead by example through fast and flexible financing to front-line humanitarian responders, global coordination to ensure supplies and help get to the people who need it most, and global leadership to secure ceasefire agreements to reach people in need.



“COVID impacts every home,” says Dr. Rasha Rashed, an IRC reproductive health manager in Yemen. “It’s like the war. In every home there is someone who has lost their father or mother or brother or husband or son.”

Photo: Kellie Ryan/IRC

## **Address the modern face of humanitarian crisis: climate change.**

Climate change exacerbates ongoing crises such as conflict, hunger, and forced displacement. It is already impacting communities the IRC serves in African countries such as Niger and Chad, northern Central America, South Asia, and the Middle East. In

fact, in 2019, more than half of the countries most vulnerable to climate change were also experiencing humanitarian crises.

When it comes to climate change, the cost of failure is too high for the U.S. to sit on the sidelines. The Biden Administration must act and call for bold and urgent action from countries around the world.