More of the same: Biden to admit fewer refugees than any president in U.S. history

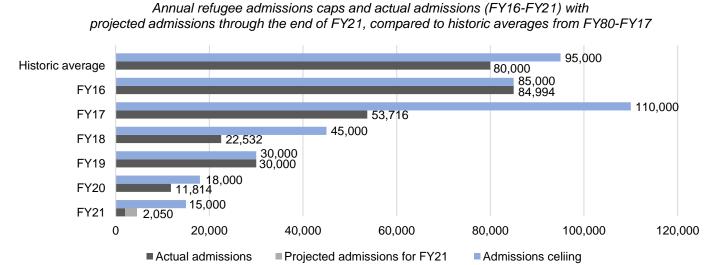## U.S. refugee admissions FY21 mid-year report

April 2021

Halfway through this fiscal year, **just 2,050 refugees** have been admitted to the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).[i] While the Biden administration has taken important steps to rebuild the USRAP – issuing the President's February Executive Order 14013, submitting a revised proposed Emergency Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for FY21, and conducting the required consultations with Congress – there has now been an unexplained and unjustified eight-week delay in issuing the revised refugee admissions policy. **This delay means that highly restrictive and discriminatory Trump-era policies remain firmly in place.** As a result, tens of thousands of already-cleared refugees remain barred from resettlement and over 700 resettlement flights have been cancelled, leaving vulnerable refugees in uncertain limbo.

President Biden should act quickly to sign his proposed Presidential Determination, overturning these discriminatory policies, increasing the refugee admissions cap for this year to 62,500 refugees from the historically low current cap of 15,000, and beginning the process of rebuilding the USRAP in earnest. As the administration detailed in its proposal, "To respond to all of these unforeseen and urgent situations, a revised target of 62,500 is proposed and is justified by grave humanitarian concerns and is in the national interest."

1. The Biden administration is on track to admit the lowest number of refugees of any president in history

Over the first half of this fiscal year, the precipitous downward trajectory of refugee admissions seen under the Trump administration endures. If the current pace of admissions continues – and if the Trump administration's admissions policies remain in place – **the Biden administration will admit an estimated 4,510 refugees in FY21**, less than half of the last year of the Trump administration and fewer than any President in history.

With more than 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement worldwide and fewer than 1% of all refugees ever considered for this life-saving program, no admissions slot should go unfilled.

Annual refugee admissions caps and actual admissions (FY16-FY21) with projected admissions through the end of FY21, compared to historic averages from FY80-FY17

Historic average: 95,000 / 80,000
FY16: 85,000 / 84,994
FY17: 110,000 / 53,716
FY18: 45,000 / 22,532
FY19: 30,000 / 30,000
FY20: 18,000 / 11,814
FY21: 15,000 / 2,050

■ Actual admissions　　■ Projected admissions for FY21　　■ Admissions celiing

2. The Biden administration is denying resettlement to refugees fleeing the world's worst displacement crises

In addition to the historically low refugee admissions cap of 15,000, current admissions policy (President Trump's October 2020 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for FY21) remains in effect. This policy precludes the resettlement of any refugee who does not fit into highly restrictive admissions categories and bans the resettlement of refugees from Somalia, Syria, and Yemen except in narrow cases. These categories have a strong impact on the composition of refugees admitted to the U.S., **with an exclusionary impact on Muslim refugees and those fleeing the world's worst crises in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East**.

Syrian refugees represent the population with the highest resettlement needs for the fifth year in a row – estimated at over 592,000 individuals in 2021 and accounting for over 40% of all needs globally. **Yet, just 42 Syrian refugees have been resettled to the U.S. this fiscal year. By contrast, 1,285 Syrian refugees were resettled in the first half of FY16.**

Refugees from **Yemen** – which has remained at the top of the IRC's Emergency Watchlist for three years – face a humanitarian crisis on the brink of catastrophe, harrowing violence, and the risk of famine. **Zero Yemeni refugees have been admitted this fiscal year.**

Africa has been the region with the highest resettlement needs in the world since 2017, with protracted refugee crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Sudan topping the list of resettlement needs. **Yet just 682 African refugees have been admitted this fiscal year, a 94% drop compared to the same time frame in FY16.**

Refugee admissions from the top five countries of origin by resettlement needs (FY16 Q1-Q2 and FY21 Q1-Q2)

Country of origin	FY16 (Q1-Q2)	FY21 (Q1-Q2)	Percent difference
1. Syria	1,285	42	-97%
2. DRC	4,040	555	-86%
3. South Sudan	93	0	-100%
4. Afghanistan	1,050	90	-91%
5. Sudan	460	12	-97%

3. Despite surging need for protection across the Americas, the Biden administration is not utilizing resettlement as a critical tool to offer refuge to the most vulnerable

Refugee resettlement is one part of a comprehensive approach to meet the global displacement crisis, in the Americas and across the world. In February, President Biden rightfully announced a multi-pronged approach toward managing forced displacement in the Americas with Executive Order 14010, which includes the expansion of resettlement opportunities in the region. This directive is timely: the number of refugees in the Americas predicted to need resettlement is estimated to have increased to 29,374 people from 2020 to 2021, a 489% increase.

Yet, this fiscal year, just 139 refugees from the Northern Central American countries of **El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras** have been resettled to the U.S. Only 1 **Venezuelan** refugee has been resettled, despite these nationals representing 72% of all resettlement needs in the Americas.

By delaying critical policy changes and stalling the rebuilding of the USRAP, **the administration is ignoring a critical tool for addressing the refugee crisis in the hemisphere**. In order to credibly encourage countries

in the region to strengthen their own capacity to welcome asylum seekers and resettle refugees, it is necessary for the U.S. to restore its own protection systems.

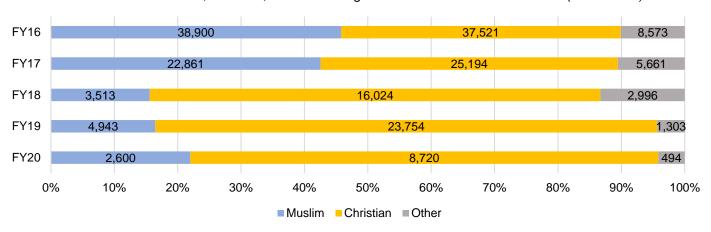*Projected resettlement needs in 2021 and refugee admissions (FY21 Q1-Q2) from the Americas*

Country of origin	Resettlement needs	FY21 (Q1-Q2)
The Americas	29,195	141
Countries of concern		
El Salvador	850	89
Guatemala	4,020	16
Honduras	1,075	34
Venezuela	21,239	1

4. Muslim refugees are disproportionately impacted by Trump-era admissions policies

The current admissions policies have amounted to a **de facto ban on many Muslim refugees**. These policies, in the sordid tradition of the Muslim and Africa Ban, have undeniably discriminatory impacts along lines of nationality and religion.

Because the State Department no longer releases demographic data on refugee admissions, we do not have data on the religious adherence of refugees resettled to the U.S. over the first half of this fiscal year. However, data collected over the last four years suggests a strong trend line: **admissions of Muslim refugees dropped from 46% of all admissions in FY16 to just 22% in FY20**.

Admissions of Muslim, Christian, and other refugees as a share of total admissions (FY16-FY20)

5. Admissions of refugees from countries subject to "extreme vetting" remain at a near halt

Current refugee security vetting practices have ground admissions of certain refugees to a near complete stop. Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs) are an additional security mechanism to screen refugees through a multi-agency process beyond the standard security vetting for refugees. In October 2017, the Trump administration expanded automatic SAO clearance requirements for certain demographic profiles from a set of **largely Muslim-majority** countries and stateless Palestinians**.**

The International Refugee Assistance Project found that this policy change amounted to an exploitation of "extreme vetting" practices to decimate refugee processing. **In the first half of FY21, 16% of all refugee arrivals came from these countries, compared to a share of more than 40% in the first half of FY16.**

Admissions of refugees requiring SAO checks (FY16 Q1-Q2 and FY21 Q1-Q2)

Country of origin	FY16 (Q1-Q2)	FY21 (Q1-Q2)	Percent difference
Egypt	13	0	-100%
Iran	1,419	47	-97%
Iraq	4,194	187	-96%
Korea, North	11	0	-100%
Libya	0	0	0
Mali	4	0	-100%
Palestine	17	3	-82%
South Sudan	93	0	-100%
Somalia	4,521	**37**	-99%
Sudan	460	12	-97%
Syria	1,285	42	-97%
Yemen	3	0	-100%

[i] Refugee admissions data in this report is sourced from the U.S Department of State's Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS). All refugee admissions data for FY21 is from October 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021. Global resettlement needs statistics are sourced from the UNHCR Global Projected Resettlement Needs 2021 report.