

## Refugee and Asylum Policy Paper

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### 1.Introduction

The landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and 1980 Refugee Act codified the right of any person who has been persecuted or has a well-founded fear of violence and persecution on account of five main factors: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, to seek safety in the United States. These people are known as “forcibly displaced.” Forcibly displaced people in the US fall into two main categories: refugees and asylum-seekers. Refugees apply for entry into the US and are approved for resettlement while outside of the US, which makes them different from asylum-seekers who apply at a port of entry or from inside the country.

The United States recognized the need for refugee programs following the devastation of World War II and the large population of displaced people, which was estimated to be over 60 million strong. It also acknowledged that many people who attempted to flee persecution at the hands of the Axis powers were turned away from safe countries. Refugee infrastructure and legal framework developed throughout the following decades as the country successfully welcomed waves of vulnerable people from all over the world. Modern conflicts, like civil wars in Syria and Libya and state violence in Venezuela and Myanmar, have resulted in the largest displaced population since World War II, now totaling 79.5 million, and proved challenging for refugee infrastructure to manage.<sup>1</sup> While the United States used to lead the world in refugee resettlement, it now faces international scrutiny for its historically low refugee cap.

### 2.Historical Overview of US Refugee Policy

#### Pre-1945 System

Refugees and asylum-seekers were not distinguished from other immigrants, and were processed using the same criteria and methods. For much of the US’s history there were few restrictions on immigration.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

## **1939-1945 World War II**

World War II had a profound impact on the international response to displaced people. An estimated 60 million people were homeless and displaced following the war.<sup>2</sup> This created the need for international recognition for displaced people and a system of relocating them. In addition, many persecuted people fleeing during World War II with credible cause found themselves turned away from safe countries. One example of this was a ship carrying 900 Jews fleeing Germany in 1939, which was sent back to Germany after making port in the US and asking for asylum.<sup>3</sup> More than half of the passengers who returned to Germany were killed. Stories like these created an international desire for asylum processes, so that the fate of those passengers would not be repeated. However, the international community has not always been able to live up to this goal.

## **1945 Presidential Directive on Displaced Persons<sup>4</sup>**

President Truman's directive created a plan for processing displaced people so they could enter the United States as immigrants. Through this program, a cohort of 40,000 displaced people were able to migrate to the US. It also created a path to citizenship for displaced people who had migrated previously.

## **1948 Displaced Persons Act<sup>5</sup>**

This act codified the notion that displaced people have a right to enter the US, which had not been established through law previously. It allowed for 350,000 displaced people to resettle in the US across four years.

## **1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>6</sup>**

This convention was held by the newly-created United Nations to create protocols for refugees following World War II. Initially, the protocols only referred to people who had been displaced by events prior to 1951 (i.e. World War II) but the purview was later expanded. The protocols designated several key definitions and laws which applied to all member states:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/what-is-a-refugee-facts>

<sup>3</sup> <https://americasvoice.org/blog/immigration-101-asylum/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/featured-stories-uscis-history-office-and-library/refugee-timeline>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/featured-stories-uscis-history-office-and-library/refugee-timeline>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

1. Defined refugee as a person who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
2. Created the international law that no person should be forced to return to a country where they fear threats to life or freedom.
3. Included important note that oftentimes people need to break immigration laws in order to claim asylum, and it is illegal to prosecute them for breaking those laws.
4. Set out expectations that refugees would be granted the same right to public services and work authorization as citizens of the host country.
5. Excluded people who commit serious crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity (crimes against humanity are deliberate acts which cause suffering or death on a large scale), from these protections.

The United Nations was the brainchild of the US and Great Britain, and was founded in San Francisco in 1945<sup>7</sup>. The text of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was drafted by a US representative to the Convention.

### **1965 Immigration and Nationalities Act Amendments<sup>8</sup>**

The amendments to the Immigration and Nationalities Act (originally passed in 1952) allowed for the conditional entry of people into the US who could credibly demonstrate they were persecuted or feared persecution on account of race, religion, or political opinion.

### **1967-8 United Nations Protocol and US Accession**

This protocol expanded the 1951 Convention policies towards all refugees, not just ones displaced from World War II. The following year, the United States acceded to the UN Protocol.

<sup>9</sup>

### **1980 Refugee Act<sup>10</sup> and Interim Regulations**

This act created a national structure for refugee resettlement through the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and made key elements of the UN Refugee Conventions US law. Even though the United States had acceded<sup>11</sup> to the UN Protocol on the Status of Refugees, the positions and commitments expressed in the protocol were not legally enforceable until they were written into US law. The Refugee Act wrote into law the UN definition of a refugee, and prohibited refoulement, the practice of returning an individual to a country where they are in danger of persecution.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/un>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-79/pdf/STATUTE-79-Pg911.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/R45539.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/the-refugee-act>

<sup>11</sup> Accede: in international law, to become party to an agreement or treaty

<sup>12</sup> <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/R45539.pdf>

The Act created the expectation that all refugees receive English language training, job placement assistance, and cash assistance for a limited time, with the goal of promoting economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. The number of refugees admitted into the country is set annually by the president.

In addition, the Refugee Act contained several key provisions:

1. Refugees became able to apply for lawful permanent residence (green cards) after one year in the country.<sup>13</sup>
2. The right of every person to refuge was established, regardless of the country or region they come from. This means that people could not be discriminated against in the refugee process based on their country of origin.<sup>14</sup>

### **1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and Implementation (IIRIA)**

This act expanded the definition of refugee to include individuals who had been victims of “coercive population control” in the form of a forced abortion or sterilization.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Read More**

- [Read more](#) about the 1951 UN Refugee Convention
- President Truman’s [message](#) about the importance of providing a safe home for refugees in the US following the refugee crisis of World War II
- The National Immigration Forum provides an excellent [fact sheet](#) about refugee resettlement

## **3. Background Information**

### **Refugees and the International System**

Displaced people are forced to leave their home due to “armed conflict, general violence, or human rights violations.”<sup>16</sup> At this time, the global displaced population is 79.5 million.<sup>17</sup> Internally displaced people (IDPs) have been forced to leave their home but have not crossed national borders, and remain in their country of origin. IDPs make up slightly more than half of the forcibly displaced population, at 45.7 million.<sup>18</sup> Once a displaced person crosses an international border into another country, they officially become a refugee and qualify for

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/R45539.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title8-section1101&num=0&edition=prelim>

<sup>16</sup>

[https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/internally-displaced-people.html#:~:text=Internally%20displaced%20people%20\(IDPs\)%20have.the%20reason%20for%20their%20displacement.](https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/internally-displaced-people.html#:~:text=Internally%20displaced%20people%20(IDPs)%20have.the%20reason%20for%20their%20displacement.)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

international protection. There are currently 29.6 million refugees<sup>19</sup> and an additional 4.2 million asylum seekers whose refugee status is still being determined.<sup>20</sup>

Refugees generally remain in the host country they have fled to, so long as that country is deemed safe. Refugees have three potential paths: wait out the conflict, integrate into the host country, or resettle into a safe third country. Most refugees wait out the conflict in their home countries in refugee camps or other temporary shelters, with the expectation of returning home when it is safe. However, many refugee-creating conflicts have become protracted, leaving hundreds of thousands of people stranded and unable to build lives for years or decades. For example, 2.6 million people have fled Afghanistan due to the conflict between the US-backed government and the Taliban which began with the 2001 US invasion.<sup>21</sup> Integrating into host countries is a desirable option for long-term refugees, but it is not always possible. Many host countries do not want displaced people to settle permanently, and severely limit the number of people who can seek employment or gain permanent residency. The third option, resettlement in a safe third country, is only available for the most vulnerable 1% of refugees who would likely never be able to return to their home countries, or are in danger in their host countries. “Third country” refers to the fact that the country of origin is the “first country” and the initial host country that a refugee crossed into is the “second country.”

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies refugees who qualify for resettlement every year, and makes their profiles available to the safe third countries, who decide which refugees and how many to resettle. Refugees are considered highly vulnerable if they:<sup>22</sup>

- Risk legal and physical danger in their current state. For example, if their host country has a close relationship with their home country or shares the viewpoint which led to their persecution, and could potentially return them to the home country. This could apply to someone who fled their home country due to religious persecution, and the neighboring country also persecuted people of their religion.
- Are survivors of violence or torture. Survivors of violence or torture often require mental and physical care to recover from their ordeal.
- Have a medical condition which *cannot* be treated in their current situation. This applies to life-threatening medical conditions where adequate treatment is not available or inaccessible in their host country.

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<sup>19</sup> This number includes internally displaced Venezuelans

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>21</sup>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/world/five-conflicts-driving-refugees.html#:~:text=Afghanistan's%20protracted%20war%20and%20the.their%20displacement%20to%20that%20time.>

<sup>22</sup>

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/resettlement/3d464e842/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-chapter-6-unhcr-resettlement-submission-categories.html>

- Are women or girls at risk. In many countries, women and girls are especially vulnerable due to sexual or gender-based violence, or face additional legal issues, especially if they are traveling without a male head of household.
- Seek reunification with a close family member who has already been resettled.
- Are at-risk children. Children who have been separated from their families or are traveling without protection are at risk of violence, exploitation, or legal challenges.
- Have a lack of durable solutions. Refugees in long-term refugee situations who are not eligible to integrate into their host country can apply for resettlement.

## Refugees and US Immigration

There are four channels for legal permanent immigration to the United States: forced displacement (refugee and asylum), diversity lottery, family sponsorship, or employment sponsorship. People entering the country due to forced displacement make up only a small fraction of the total number of people becoming permanent residents every year, as can be seen in Figure 1.

### Breakdown of Annual Legal Permanent Immigration to the US

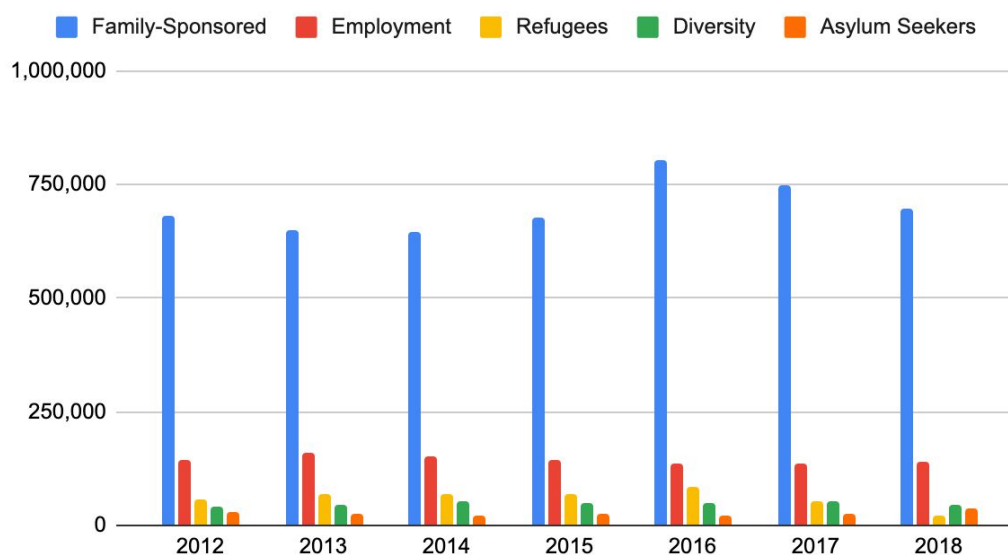


Figure 1: US Permanent Resident Statistics (2010-2018)<sup>23</sup>

For the past decade, refugees have made up between 5 and 10% of annual legal permanent residents.<sup>24</sup> To put this in context, for the past decade US refugee intake equaled between 0.009% and 0.039% of the US population annually. Another way to think about it is that

<sup>23</sup> Base data can be found in the Appendix

<sup>24</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful\\_permanent\\_residents\\_2018.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful_permanent_residents_2018.pdf)

the US population had a net increase of about 19.5 million in the last decade,<sup>25</sup> and during that same period the US accepted about 600 thousand refugees.<sup>26</sup>

### Read More

- For an overview of the legal immigration system and more information on each of the four main entry paths for permanent residents, read [this primer](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.
- [This interactive chart](#) demonstrates the annual number of people granted permanent residency in the US from 1820 to the present day.

## 4.Current Policies

### Number of Refugees Accepted into the US

The annual number of refugees accepted into the US for resettlement is decided by the President, and then individual refugees are approved by the State Department's Bureau of Populations, Refugees, and Migration.<sup>27</sup> The decision is "justified by humanitarian concern or otherwise in national interest."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/12/new-estimates-show-us-population-growth-continues-to-slow.html>

<sup>26</sup>

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united>

<sup>27</sup>

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-should-america-take-more-refugees-get-facts-refugee-cap>

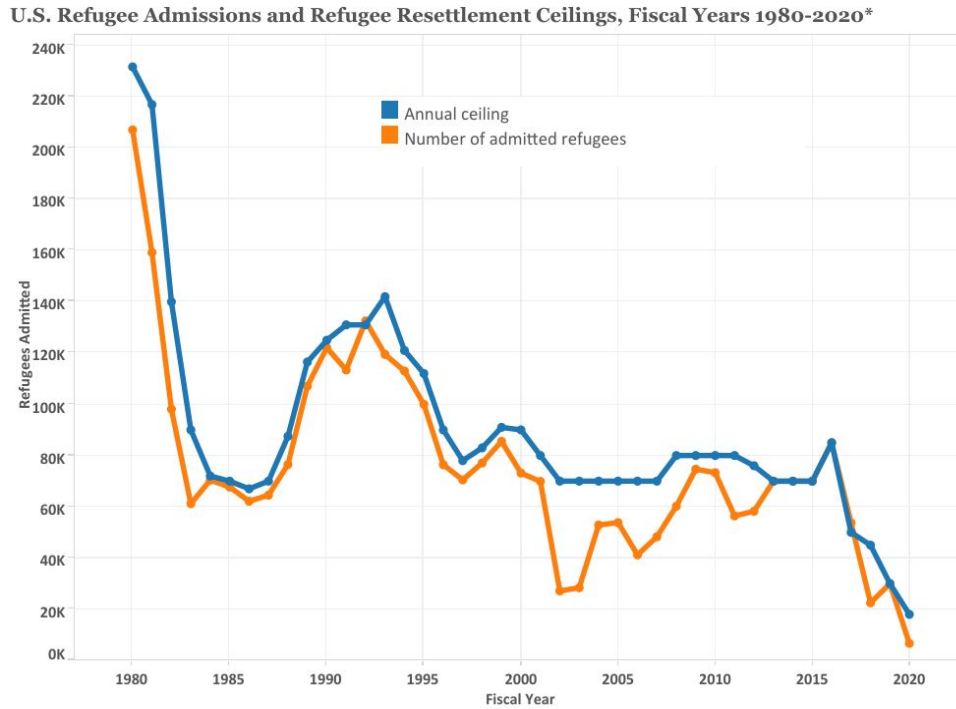


Figure 2: US Refugee Admissions (1980-2020)<sup>29</sup>

The US has led the world in refugee resettlement, accepting more refugees historically than any other country.<sup>30</sup> Usually, the President and his advisors decide how many people to take based on the number of displaced people globally. According to the Pew Research Center, “on average, between 1982 and 2016, the US resettled 0.6% of the global’s total refugee population every year,”<sup>31</sup> keeping in mind that only the most vulnerable 1% are even eligible for resettlement.<sup>32</sup> This amounted to 69% of total refugee resettlement during that time period.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1990s, the global population of displaced people ballooned due to the fall of the Soviet Union, and the US responded by increasing its refugee intake accordingly, nearly

<sup>29</sup>

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united>

<sup>30</sup>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/12/u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-even-as-global-number-of-displaced-people-grows/>

<sup>31</sup>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/12/u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-even-as-global-number-of-displaced-people-grows/>

<sup>32</sup>

<https://www.rescue.org/frequently-asked-questions-about-refugees-and-resettlement#:~:text=When%20conditions%20in%20countries%20of.unable%20to%20accept%20refugees%20permanently.>

<sup>33</sup>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/12/u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-even-as-global-number-of-displaced-people-grows/>



doubling its refugee intake. Following the example of the United States, the rest of the world stepped up as well and absorbed the displaced population. With the global displaced population reduced, the 1990s and 2000s saw a decrease in refugee intake.<sup>34</sup> However, the US has not responded to the current refugee crisis in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa where 79.5 million people are displaced, the most in recorded history, and 29.6 million are refugees.<sup>35</sup> Only the most vulnerable refugees are selected for resettlement. Despite these recent developments, US refugee intake is the lowest it has ever been, with 30,000 refugees admitted in 2019 and a ceiling of 18,000 for 2020, which is roughly 0.005% of the US population.<sup>36</sup> See how the US compares to other highly developed countries in Figure 3.

Country	Number of Refugees Accepted in 2019	Population Size	Refugee Intake as a Percentage of Population
United States	30,000	328.20 million	0.009
United Kingdom	19,480 <sup>37</sup>	66.65 million	0.029
France	39,570 <sup>38</sup>	66.99 million	0.059
Spain	37,314 <sup>39</sup>	46.94 million	0.079
Germany	82,847 <sup>40</sup>	83.02 million	0.099

Figure 3: Refugee Intake as a Percentage of Population

### Origin of Refugees

In recent years, the main country of origin for refugees resettled in the US has been the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Myanmar and Ukraine.<sup>41</sup> The US has

<sup>34</sup>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/12/u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-even-as-global-number-of-displaced-people-grows/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>36</sup>

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united>

<sup>37</sup>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2019/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#:~:text=The%20UK%20offered%20protection%20%E2%80%93%20in,compared%20with%20the%20previous%20year>

<sup>38</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=FR>

<sup>39</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=ES>

<sup>40</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=DE>

<sup>41</sup>

[https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states-2018#Refugee\\_Arrivals\\_and\\_Countries\\_of\\_Origin](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states-2018#Refugee_Arrivals_and_Countries_of_Origin)

consistently accepted large numbers of refugees from Asia, and in the 90s accepted many European refugees after the fall of the Soviet Union. Due to violent conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of refugees from Africa has slowly increased over the last three decades. The following graph demonstrates the change in country of origin of refugees in the US.

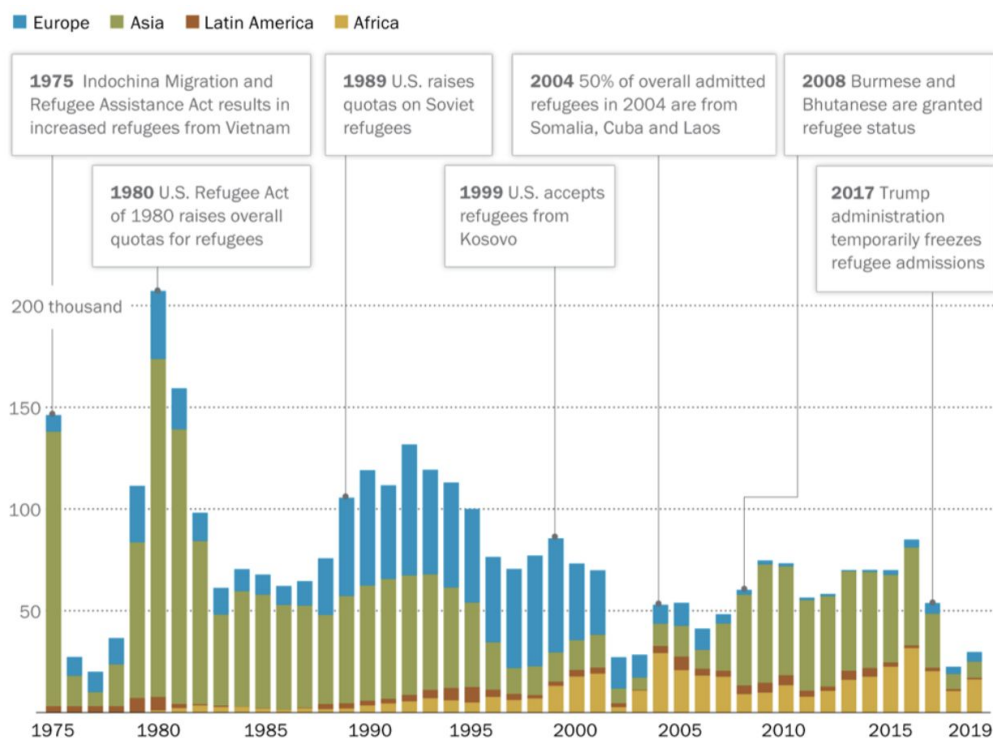


Figure 4: Origin of Refugees to the US (1975-2019)<sup>42</sup>

## Resettlement Process

Refugees are registered and vetted by the United Nations, and go through further screenings and background checks once they are selected for the US by the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department, and other agencies.<sup>43</sup> The process takes an average of two years. After refugees arrive in the US, they are resettled by one of nine national non-profit organizations which work closely with the federal government and local partner organizations all over the country. The federal government allocated \$2,125 per refugee to the national organizations in 2019, to support housing, language training, medical care, and provide a stipend until the refugees are financially independent.<sup>44</sup> This relatively small amount can be supplemented by national nonprofit fundraising and donations, and refugees are also eligible for

<sup>42</sup>

[https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/ft\\_19-10-07\\_refugees\\_shifti ng-origins-refugees-us-since-1975/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/ft_19-10-07_refugees_shifti ng-origins-refugees-us-since-1975/)

<sup>43</sup> <https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>

<sup>44</sup>

<https://www.state.gov/funding-opportunities/funding-opportunity-announcements/fy-2019-notice-of-funding-opport unity-for-reception-and-placement-program/>

some social welfare programs, unlike other immigrants. After one year in the US, refugees are required to apply for a green card (a.k.a. permanent residence in the US).<sup>45</sup>

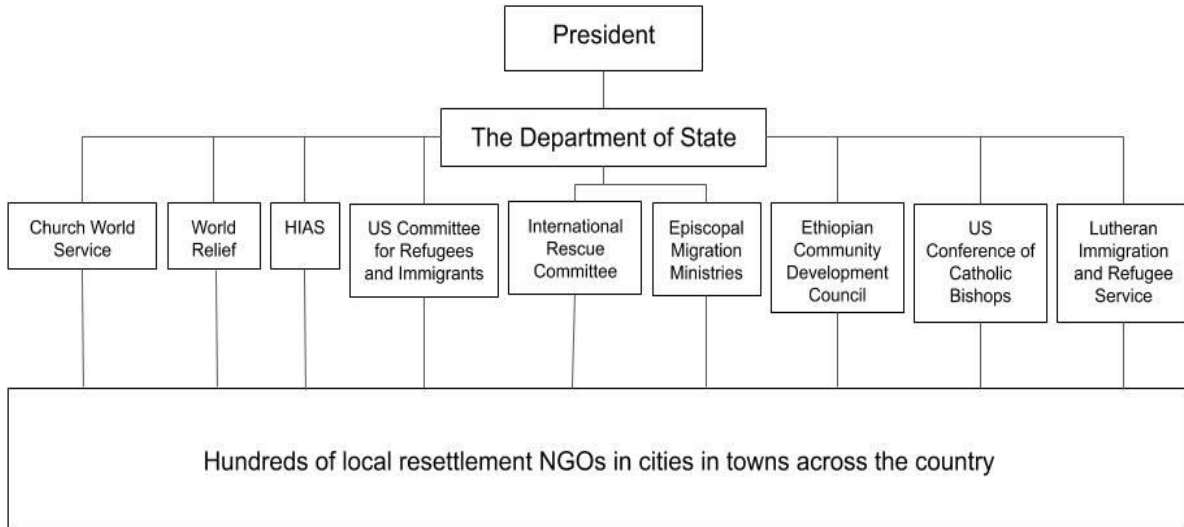


Figure 5: Structure of US Refugee Resettlement

Top 10 States for Refugee Resettlement in the United States (2002 - 2018)

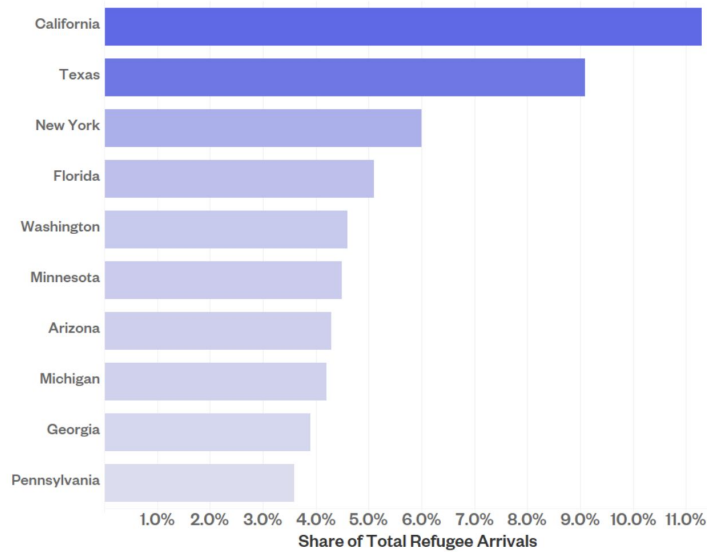


Figure 6: Top 10 States for Refugee Resettlement (2002-2018)<sup>46</sup>

Figure 6 demonstrates that while refugees are resettled in states across the country, they have been concentrated in high-population states like California, Texas, and New York since 2002.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-eligibility/green-card-for-refugees>

<sup>46</sup> [https://data.newamericaneconomy.org/en/refugee-resettlement-us/#exploratory\\_tool](https://data.newamericaneconomy.org/en/refugee-resettlement-us/#exploratory_tool)

## Cost to the Public

Refugees represent a significant up-front cost for the federal government, but this cost is offset over time by their tax contributions. The initial costs include the resettlement grant of roughly \$2,000, as well as reliance on public services and the social safety net at higher rates than Americans born in the US. With all of the costs combined, the total cost of hosting a refugee for their first 20 years in the US (the time period where they are the least financially-independent) averages to \$107,365.<sup>47</sup>

Estimates of refugee tax contributions indicate that resettled refugees contribute more in taxes to state and federal governments across their first 20 years than they receive in services. On average, refugees contribute \$128,689 in taxes during their first 20 years, meaning they pay \$21,324 more than they receive in benefits.

## Displaced People Outside the United States

As discussed in the Background section, the burden of displaced people primarily falls on the developing world. While the US leads in global refugee resettlement, only the most vulnerable 1% of refugees are eligible for resettlement. The other 99% of displaced people are hosted by neighboring countries with the expectation that they will return home when possible. Charities and international aid organizations work to supply refugees with necessities like shelter, food, emergency healthcare, and education which are often beyond the capacity of host countries. The US is a major funder of international aid, and annually supports the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (a main aid provider and coordinator) with close to \$1.7 billion.<sup>48</sup> However, current funding levels fall short of meeting the most basic needs of many displaced individuals.<sup>49</sup> UNHCR estimates indicate that it has only 3/5th of the funding necessary to fulfill its mission.<sup>50</sup> This stems from decreased funding from other countries, as well as greater pressure on the resources from the growing displaced population.

## Read More

- [Pew Research Center](#) discusses the historical relationship between US refugee intake and the global displaced population using graphs and visuals
- View [this interactive map](#) demonstrating where refugees are resettled across the US
- Read an [overview of refugee policy](#) in the US from the Migration Policy Institute

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23498.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/donors.html>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/01/27/sharing-the-burden-of-the-global-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2019>

## 5. Policy Alternatives

The following policy alternatives are identified so that readers can easily develop their position on different aspects of refugee policy. They are not ordered in terms of priority.

### Number of Refugees Accepted Annually

The primary policy debate relates to the number of refugees welcomed into the country. Those who believe in lowering the number of refugees accepted into the US have three main arguments.

1. Cost to the public: Many people are under the impression that refugees are a net drain on the federal budget, rather than a net positive (as discussed in the Current Policies section) so they argue that the United States should divert refugees resettlement spending to other programs which benefit American citizens, or else either pay down the deficit or lower taxes. Putting aside that factually-inaccurate argument, there is a real debate around whether the US should invest in refugees, or divert that money towards investing in its own citizens. Refugee resettlement requires an up-front investment of \$2,000, plus \$107,365 in social services across their first 20 years in the country. As refugees become increasingly more self-sufficient, they contribute more in taxes than they consume in public services, and contribute \$128,689 across that same time period. That investment could instead go to improving an American citizen's schooling, healthcare, or subsidized housing, all investments which would likely pay dividends as well.
2. Crime: Some Americans have concerns that accepting refugees of a variety of countries of origin and religions could lead to increased crime rates. In 2017, President Trump signed an executive order titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" which, among other actions, lowered the annual refugee cap, froze resettlement for 120 days, and indefinitely banned refugees from Syria.<sup>51</sup> However, the United States has resettled more than 3 million refugees and not a single one has committed a terrorist attack.<sup>52</sup> Refugees undergo a rigorous, years-long background check conducted by the US government and international organizations, to ensure that no one with links to terrorist organizations or who has committed crimes in their country of origin, are ever resettled in the US.<sup>53</sup> There are also concerns that refugees might perpetrate other types of crimes. An extensive study by the New American Economy Research Fund found that of the 10 cities who resettled the most refugees from 2006 to

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<sup>51</sup>

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/02/01/2017-02281/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states>

<sup>52</sup> <https://worldreliefseattle.org/information-and-statistics-refugee-crisis>

<sup>53</sup> <https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>

2015 (as a proportion of their population), 9 actually experienced a sharp decrease in violent and property-related crime.<sup>54</sup> While the entire country experienced a decrease in violent and property crimes during this time period, the trends in these 9 cities demonstrate a more significant decrease than the rest of the country.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the cities most impacted by refugee populations saw decreases, rather than increases in crime, regardless of the country of origin of the refugees.

3. Loss of “American culture”: Some are concerned that immigration and changing demographics diminish American culture. In this context, “American culture” is associated with ethnic whiteness, the English language, Christianity, and a shared respect for the ideals of the Constitution. Although refugees make up about 5-10% of total immigrants to the US, they are often made the face of America’s demographic changes. For the last several decades, refugees have been primarily non-white and have not spoken English as their first language. In addition, they frequently come from countries without the same democratic principles as the US, so some are concerned that refugees will not value the ideals of the Constitution. However, a plurality of refugees in the US are Christian.<sup>56</sup>

There are five main arguments for increasing the US’s refugee intake.

1. Maintaining population growth: Immigration is essential to maintain economic growth in the US. The 2010 decade experienced the lowest population growth since the first recorded census in 1790, due to low birth rates and limited migration, especially in the latter half of the decade.<sup>57</sup> This has major implications for the economic prospects of the country. The aging population is relying more and more on government programs like Social Security and Medicare, while an ever-smaller workforce will continue contributing to the economy and paying into those programs. Concerns over population shrinkage have led to projections of low economic growth in the coming decades, assuming there is no change in immigration policies.<sup>58</sup> One benefit of immigration is that it boosts America’s declining population with new additions to the labor force, relieving the pressure on the natural-born population of supporting retirees. There are other options to keep government programs financially solvent under the strain of an aging population,

<sup>54</sup> <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/is-there-a-link-between-refugees-and-u-s-crime-rates/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/crime-trends-1990-2016>

<sup>56</sup>

[https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states-2018#Religious\\_Composition\\_of\\_Refugees](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states-2018#Religious_Composition_of_Refugees)

<sup>57</sup>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/population-change-and-the-projected-change-in-congressional-representation/>

<sup>58</sup>

<https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/us-population-growth-lowest-since-1918-negative-economic-impact-demographics-2020-1-1028810617#>

like raising payroll taxes which pay into Medicare and Social Security, pushing back the retirement age, or decreasing benefits for retirees.<sup>59</sup>

2. Entrepreneurship and innovation: Refugees contribute to their host countries through entrepreneurship and innovation, and are more entrepreneurial than the domestic-born population. The National Bureau of Economic Research found that immigrants represent 25% of the entrepreneurs in the United States, despite being only 15% of the population.<sup>60</sup> Refugees are even more entrepreneurial than other immigrants.<sup>61</sup> The attributes required to be a successful entrepreneur track closely with the experiences of displaced people, from resourcefulness to willingness to take risks. This is important because when refugees start businesses, they employ other Americans and create new jobs which create more opportunities for the natural-born population. Research from the nonpartisan Center for Economic Research indicates that diversity of birthplace in a country promotes economic growth and complexity.<sup>62</sup> Migrants bring new ideas and perspectives, and are essential for transmitting knowledge across borders.
  
3. Resettlement and urban rejuvenation: Many cities in the Midwest and Great Lakes regions have experienced economic and population decline since deindustrialization during the 20th century.<sup>63</sup> Refugee resettlement has proven to be a successful method of urban rejuvenation in those cities. Cities like Utica, NY<sup>64</sup> and St. Louis, MO<sup>65</sup> accepted thousands of refugees to increase their population and bring in federal aid funding, which stimulated the economy and reversed population decline. In small metropolitan areas across the region (like Lincoln NE, Manchester NH, and Erie PA) refugees have “revitalized distressed neighborhoods by starting businesses and restoring homes,” causing declining cities to actively seek refugees from national resettlement agencies.<sup>66</sup> In a time when declining industry, population, and quality of life has characterized the region, refugee resettlement has proved to be one of the few consistently-effective countermeasures.
  
4. Nation of immigrants: Some argue that immigration and, specifically, refugees, are essential to the national identity of the United States. Since the founding of the country,

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/why-the-united-states-needs-more-immigrants>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22385.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE\\_Refugees\\_V5.pdf](https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf)

<sup>62</sup>

<https://www.cesifo.org/en/publikationen/2019/working-paper/does-birthplace-diversity-affect-economic-complexity-cross-country>

<sup>63</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/rust-belt-states>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/02/how-refugees-continue-boosting-new-yorks-rust-belt-economy.html>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/14/st-louis-missouri-syrian-refugees>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/from-there-to-here-refugee-resettlement-in-metropolitan-america/>

the United States has stood as a beacon of freedom and opportunity, and attracted migrants from around the world in search of a better life for themselves and their families. While many countries define themselves in terms of a religion or ethnicity, the American national identity is often connected to the shared experience of immigration. Every citizen apart from Native Americans are either themselves an immigrant, or descended from immigrants, many feeling persecution in their country of origin. Because of this, some believe that, regardless of the other benefits, it is essential to continue accepting new refugees as Americans.

5. Global displaced population: Based on the US's traditional goal of resettling around 0.5% of UNHCR-designated refugees, current levels fall far below the norm. As discussed in the Current Policies section, the cap is usually based on the total population of displaced peoples, and so dropping the cap to unprecedentedly-low numbers while the number of displaced people is greater than any time since the end of World War II represents a break from tradition. In addition, the American example pushes other countries to up their resettlement numbers as well, so increasing US resettlement when the need is so great would have a multiplying effect within the developed world.

### **Improving the Resettlement Process: Looking to Germany**

Refugees in the US already have a demonstrated track record of success, but some argue that a more comprehensive and supportive resettlement program would allow the US to gain an even greater benefit from refugees. Germany is a model country for refugee resettlement because it offers intensive integration courses to facilitate a successful transition. Refugees receive hundreds of hours of German language training, as well as lessons in German history and culture.<sup>67</sup> The US does not have a nationwide integration strategy. Language courses and training in US culture and history are offered through a patchwork system of NGOs depending on the availability of funds and volunteers. In addition, Germany provides optional vocational training to direct refugees towards the sectors of the German economy where they are most needed.<sup>68</sup> In Germany's case these industries include auto mechanics and construction; sectors which the German workforce has migrated away from. In the US, for example, the home healthcare industry is in crisis due to lack of workers, and that problem is likely to worsen as more Baby Boomers retire and require home health care.<sup>69</sup> One potential option is to offer free or inexpensive training for resettled refugees to enter sectors like the home healthcare industry and take up the jobs that Americans require but are unwilling to fill. This strategy has tradeoffs; the upfront cost of resettlement increases, as does the refugee's contribution to the US economy.

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/living-in-germany/german/integration-courses/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://tcf.org/content/report/germanys-syrian-refugee-integration-experiment/?agreed=1&agreed=1>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/09/us-home-healthcare-system-is-in-crisis-as-worker-shortages-worsen.html>



## Supporting Displaced Peoples Around the World: The Global Compact on Refugees

As of 2018, 6.7 million refugees from Syria fled the country and 85% were hosted by neighboring countries.<sup>70</sup> Turkey hosts 3.6 million, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in the world. The most generous host country per capita is Lebanon, whose population is currently comprised of 14% refugees, which is the equivalent of the US taking in 55 million refugees.<sup>71</sup> By 2019 more than 4.5 million Venezuelans were forced to leave their homes, and 1.6 million were given shelter in Colombia.<sup>72</sup>

Refugees in these countries do not receive resettlement support or language training. They often live in refugee camps with little access to education, healthcare, or security, and oftentimes are not permitted to work out of concerns that they will lower wages for citizens. This is a fundamentally different situation from US resettlement, where refugees are an economic asset. Rather than being spread across the country based on the area best suited to accept them, massive populations are concentrated in small areas and oftentimes actively discouraged by the host country from integrating, out of fear that they will not return to their home country when the conflict dies down. The difficulties of life as a displaced person in a developing country are made worse by the fact that many of the displacing conflicts have become protracted, leaving people trapped in refugee camps for years or even decades.

In response to this crisis, the United Nations proposed the Global Compact for Refugees in 2018.<sup>73</sup> The Compact advocates for an international plan to support developing countries bearing the burden for the refugee crisis. A key aspect of the plan include preferable trade agreements to counter the economic costs, targeting sectors with high concentrations of refugees. In exchange, the host countries would work to better integrate the refugee populations, and the refugees would be more self-sufficient and less burdensome. The European Union implemented this strategy in an agreement with Jordan which gave Jordanian industrial export companies employing refugees greater access to EU markets.<sup>74</sup> However, this is not a catch-all solution to the challenge, because many refugee-hosting countries have strained relations with the United States. This makes them unlikely candidates for preferential trade agreements. For example, 88% of the 2.7 million refugees who fled Afghanistan were hosted by Iran and Pakistan by the end of

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<sup>70</sup>

[https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/#:~:text=For%20the%20fifth%20consecutive%20year,Pakistan%20\(1.4%20million\)](https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/#:~:text=For%20the%20fifth%20consecutive%20year,Pakistan%20(1.4%20million))

<sup>71</sup>

<https://www.statista.com/chart/8800/lebanon-has-by-far-the-most-refugees-per-capita/#:~:text=Turkey%20hosts%20the%20most%20refugees.per%201%2C000%20of%20its%20inhabitants.>

<sup>72</sup>

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2020/2/5e3930db4/unhcr-welcomes-colombias-decision-regularize-stay-venezuelans-country.html>

<sup>73</sup> [https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR\\_English.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf)

<sup>74</sup>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-the-eu-and-turkey-can-promote-self-reliance-for-syrian-refugees-through-agricultural-trade/>

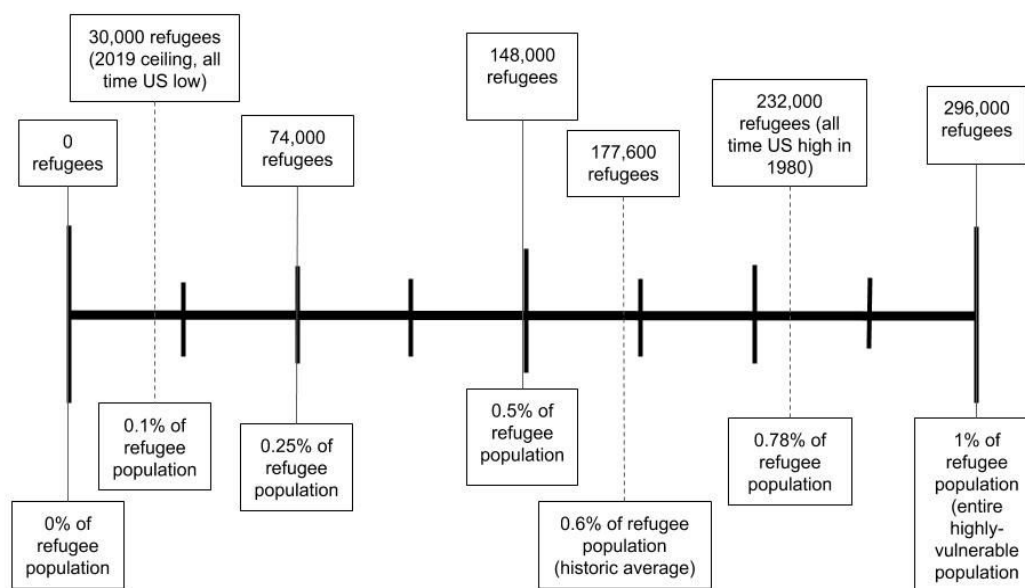
2018.<sup>75</sup> It follows that only countries who have working relationships with the US and are not designated as state-sponsors of terror would be eligible.

### Read More

- Read the “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” [executive order](#)
- Read a Brookings report, [Refugees as Assets not Burdens](#).
- Check out the [report](#) from New American Economy which discusses the relationship between refugee resettlement and decreased violent crime
- Learn more about refugee resettlement and urban rejuvenation from [the Brookings Institute](#), [the Guardian](#), and [CNBC](#).
- Learn more about Germany’s innovation [refugee integration program](#)
- View this [interactive map](#) which shows which countries are hosting the global population of refugees
- Read the United Nations’ [Global Compact on Refugees](#)

### 6.Reflection Questions

1. Should the number of refugees resettled annually take into account the global displaced population, or should domestic factors (like budget and population growth) be the only deciding factors?
2. How many refugees should the US resettle annually?



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[https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/#:~:text=For%20the%20fifth%20consecutive%20year,Pakistan%20\(1.4%20million\)](https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/#:~:text=For%20the%20fifth%20consecutive%20year,Pakistan%20(1.4%20million))

3. Is it important for refugees to integrate into American culture? If so, should funding be increased for refugee resettlement to support integration training?
4. Should the US provide economic benefits to support countries sheltering large refugee populations?

Potential Reform	Do I support it?
Increase refugee intake	
Decrease refugee intake	
Invest in a national refugee integration program	
Increase support for refugee-hosting developing countries (Global Compact on Refugees)	

## 7. Appendix

Figure 1: US Permanent Resident Statistics (2010-2018)

	2012 <sup>76</sup>	2013 <sup>77</sup>	2014 <sup>78</sup>	2015 <sup>79</sup>	2016 <sup>80</sup>	2017 <sup>81</sup>	2018 <sup>82</sup>
Family-Sponsored	680,799	649,763	645,560	678,978	804,793	748,746	695,524
Employment	143,998	161,110	151,596	144,047	137,893	137,855	138,171

<sup>76</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful\\_Permanent\\_Residents\\_2012.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful_Permanent_Residents_2012.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful\\_Permanent\\_Residents\\_2015.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful_Permanent_Residents_2015.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful\\_Permanent\\_Residents\\_2015.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful_Permanent_Residents_2015.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful\\_Permanent\\_Residents\\_2015.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Lawful_Permanent_Residents_2015.pdf)

<sup>80</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful\\_permanent\\_residents\\_2018.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful_permanent_residents_2018.pdf)

<sup>81</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful\\_permanent\\_residents\\_2018.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful_permanent_residents_2018.pdf)

<sup>82</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful\\_permanent\\_residents\\_2018.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/lawful_permanent_residents_2018.pdf)

Refugee	58,179 <sup>83</sup>	69,909 <sup>84</sup>	69,975 <sup>85</sup>	69,920 <sup>86</sup>	84,989 <sup>87</sup>	53,691 <sup>88</sup>	22,405 <sup>89</sup>
Diversity	40,320	45,618	53,490	47,934	49,865	51,592	45,350
Asylum	29,367 <sup>90</sup>	25,199 <sup>91</sup>	23,296 <sup>92</sup>	25,971 <sup>93</sup>	20,455 <sup>94</sup>	26,199 <sup>95</sup>	37,567 <sup>96</sup>

Refugee and asylum data is individually cited, and all other data comes from the Department of Homeland Security Immigration Statistics Yearbook which is cited in the year row of the chart.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016%20Yearbook%20of%20Immigration%20Statistics.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016%20Yearbook%20of%20Immigration%20Statistics.pdf>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016%20Yearbook%20of%20Immigration%20Statistics.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016%20Yearbook%20of%20Immigration%20Statistics.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016%20Yearbook%20of%20Immigration%20Statistics.pdf>

<sup>88</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee\\_and\\_asylee\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee_and_asylee_2019.pdf)

<sup>89</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee\\_and\\_asylee\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee_and_asylee_2019.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees\\_Asylees\\_2013.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees_Asylees_2013.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees\\_Asylees\\_2013.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees_Asylees_2013.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees\\_Asylees\\_2016\\_0.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees_Asylees_2016_0.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees\\_Asylees\\_2016\\_0.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees_Asylees_2016_0.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees\\_Asylees\\_2016\\_0.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Refugees_Asylees_2016_0.pdf)

<sup>95</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee\\_and\\_asylee\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee_and_asylee_2019.pdf)

<sup>96</sup>

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee\\_and\\_asylee\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee_and_asylee_2019.pdf)