

**Statement for the Record**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on**  
**“Living Up to America’s Promise: The Need to Bolster the U.S. Refugee**  
**Admissions Program”**  
**March 22, 2023**

The National Immigration Forum (Forum) for forty years has advocated for the value of immigrants and immigration to the nation. The Forum plays a leading role in the national debate about immigration, knitting together innovative alliances across diverse faith, labor, law enforcement, security, veterans, and business constituencies in communities across the country. Coming together under the Forum’s leadership, these alliances develop and execute legislative and administrative policy positions and advocacy strategies. Leveraging our policy, advocacy and communications expertise, the Forum works for comprehensive immigration reform, sound border security policies, balanced enforcement of immigration laws, and ensuring that new Americans have the opportunities, skills, and status to reach their full potential.

The National Immigration Forum appreciates the opportunity to provide its views on the need to bolster the U.S. refugee resettlement program, which provides vulnerable individuals fleeing violence with safe haven in the United States. The refugee resettlement program is a long-standing humanitarian effort consistent with our nation’s core values. Our nation, in turn, has benefitted from resettled refugees who make positive contributions within our local communities and to the U.S. economy. For these reasons, the Forum strongly supports continued refugee resettlement and exploring ways to improve and expand refugee resettlement efforts in the United States.

The refugee resettlement system has struggled to rebuild from COVID-19 and Trump-era budgetary and capacity cuts. As a candidate, President Biden had [pledged](#) to raise the resettlement ceiling to 125,000 and to reverse a trend of historic resettlement lows set by the previous presidential administration. On September 20, 2021, President Biden submitted [a report](#) to Congress documenting his intention to raise the annual refugee resettlement ceiling to 125,000 refugees for fiscal year (FY) 2022 and in October, 2021 the administration publicly followed through on that promise. [For FY2023](#), the Biden Administration again set the resettlement ceiling to 125,000 refugees.

While there have been some encouraging successes, including new and exciting [private sponsorship efforts](#), much work remains to be done to rebuild the refugee resettlement program. Even as refugee resettlement agencies have made progress rebuilding capacity, the Biden administration has lagged in resettling refugees, and has continued to fall far short of its targets. Experts [estimated](#) that even with the many challenges faced by the refugee resettlement program, the U.S. should have been able to resettle 50,000 refugees by the end of FY2021. Instead, the U.S. resettled just 11,411 in FY2021. In FY2022, the number of refugees resettled increased slightly to 25,465. Five months into this current fiscal year, the U.S. has only resettled 12,307 refugees and is on track to resettle approximately 29,537 refugees in FY2023, far from the 125,000 ceiling.

Congress and the Biden administration must work together to continue to rebuild the U.S. refugee resettlement program. As the Forum has [noted previously](#), there are multiple steps the

U.S. can take to address the refugee resettlement backlog and expedite the refugee admissions program to ensure that 125,000 is an achievable goal for annual refugee resettlement:

1. Provide needed funding and support to proactively secure and rebuild the domestic resettlement infrastructure. Create funding mechanisms that provide resettlement agencies the long-term stability and confidence to build capacity and open offices around the country.
2. Rebuild capacity at USCIS to conduct circuit rides. Ramp up both in-person and virtual circuit rides to over 200 a year. Expand the number of Authorized Refugee Corp Staff to five hundred and beyond. This would include providing supplemental funding to USCIS to expand their capacity.
3. Empower a central entity to better coordinate efforts and trim unnecessary steps in the refugee vetting process. The National Vetting Governance Board (NVGB) has the potential to play a critical oversight role in refugee vetting procedures.
4. Create new ways to enter the U.S. refugee admissions process and regrow the pipeline. Create additional NGO referral pathways and establish additional, more expansive P-2 direct access programs.
5. Surge resources and staffing to underfunded divisions. In the summer of 2021, the administration surged staffing to the division involved in processing Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), and SIV grants shot up from under 300 a month to over 3,000. The administration should do the same for poorly staffed divisions involved in refugee processing.
6. Improve transparency and report out metrics related to progress in rebuilding the resettlement system. Provide monthly updates on how many refugees are in various stages of the pipeline and describe steps taken by the NVGB.

The Forum also recommends that Congress and the Biden administration:

7. Assure the success of U.S. private refugee sponsorship programs by making them [additive](#) to the existing refugee resettlement process and include clear, straightforward requirements and oversight mechanisms for potential sponsors, while providing transparent data and outcome reporting that ensures problems can be swiftly addressed.
8. Consider adopting a [new refugee admissions methodology](#) that adapts to global resettlement needs through tying refugee settlement levels to refugees in need of resettlement (RINOR).

The Forum believes that a generous and efficient U.S. refugee resettlement policy not only helps protect the world's most vulnerable populations from violence but also strengthens the economy and helps to promote a diverse and vibrant U.S. workforce. Resettled refugees make an important contribution to the economic health of our nation, as taxpayers, consumers, business owners and workers. In fact, [U.S. businesses](#) have taken a leadership role in recognizing the value of refugees for economic growth, investing millions of dollars in programs that seek to [train](#) and employ qualified refugees to fill workforce gaps.

Finally, the Forum notes that the public continues to show strong support for refugee resettlement. According to a [recent poll](#) by the Forum and the Bullfinch Group, 68% of Americans support "the U.S. providing refuge for individuals and families fleeing serious persecution and torture." In addition, 71% agree that "welcoming newcomers to our communities is an American value."

Given the contributions made by refugees, the importance of refugee resettlement in upholding American values, and continued public support for refugees, it is even more important that Congress and the Biden administration work together to rebuild and improve U.S. refugee resettlement.