



## **Trump’s Executive Order on the U.S. Refugee Program**

### **Purpose and Statement of Policy**

On January 20, 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order (EO), [Realigning the United States Refugee Program](#), suspending the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) as of January 27, 2025, at 12:01 am. The EO conflates the influx of asylum seekers and other migration flows with refugee resettlement and is predicated upon the argument that the U.S. has been “inundated with record levels of migration,” states and localities were not prepared for such arrivals, and some have issued emergency declarations in response to the arrivals.

The EO argues that the entry of additional refugees would be “detrimental to the interests of the United States.” The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS) may jointly make exceptions and admit refugees on a case-by-case basis when in the national interest, and there is no threat to America’s security or welfare.

In addition to halting refugee resettlement, the EO formally states that the policy of the U.S. is that public safety and national security are the highest priority of the refugee program, that refugees must be able to “fully and appropriately assimilate,” and that “the United States preserves taxpayer resources for its citizens,” when administering the program. The EO indicates that as a matter of policy, states and localities should have a role in determining the placement of refugees in their jurisdictions, referencing a policy from the first Trump administration that was [blocked](#) in the courts. The EO requires the DHS Secretary and Secretary of State to review existing laws to determine and devise a proposal to increase state and local involvement in refugee placement.

This policy statement could redefine the entire U.S. refugee program. The current refugee program was based on priority going to refugees at the most significant risk, often meaning those with threatening health conditions or persecution risks, criteria distinct from those set out in the EO. In addition, benefits provided under the refugee program, including the “initial refugee resettlement” program, English language assistance, and employment training, required funding and could be deemed to be inconsistent with the requirement of “preserv[ing] taxpayer resources.” However, they would undoubtedly promote the EO’s assimilation requirement.

The increasing involvement of states and localities in resettlement decisions, including a potential veto over resettlement in a jurisdiction, would also represent a significant change. While state and local input is already an integral part of the refugee program, allowing state and localities to decline placements would be a departure from nearly a half-century of practice. The Refugee Act of 1980, which created the modern

resettlement program, made the federal government the ultimate authority in the admissions and settlement of refugees in the United States.

### **Suspension, Reporting, and Impact**

The EO suspends decisions on refugee applications by the Department of State and revokes the Biden administration's EO 14013, which was issued to enhance the U.S. refugee program and plan for the impact of climate migration. The suspension of refugee admissions was described in the EO as beginning on the 27th, but instead, it was reported in the early hours of January 22nd that flights for refugees arriving in the U.S. had already been canceled.

Resumption of the refugee program is conditioned on reporting from the DHS Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of State, after 90 days and subsequently thereafter every 90 days on whether acceptance of refugees into the United States under the refugee program would be “in the interests of the United States,” consistent with the statement of policy above. The final decision to resume the program rests with President Trump after reviewing the report and based on whether resettlement is in the national interest.

The practical implication of the EO is that refugee arrivals will be indefinitely suspended. The EO requires a halt to refugee arrivals for at least three months, until at least May, and probably much longer, depending on the “national interests” assessments of the DHS Secretary, the Secretary of State, and President Trump. Barring a handful of refugees admitted on a case-by-case basis under an exception, refugee resettlement will stop for an extended period. This will have long-term implications in delaying future refugee arrivals, undermining longstanding U.S. commitments to refugee resettlement, and predating the [Refugee Act of 1980](#).