



NOVEMBER 2025

Update on the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

What is the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program?

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) was established when Congress passed the bipartisan Refugee Act of 1980. Prior to this, refugees were resettled in the United States on a largely informal and ad hoc basis,¹ and the reception of refugees by American communities was coordinated by faith-based and secular groups, including the Catholic Church.

USRAP is the formal process by which people are legally resettled in the United States as refugees. Resettlement through USRAP is distinct from the U.S. asylum process. Any person resettled through USRAP is first screened, vetted, and approved by the U.S. government while outside of the United States. They also receive medical evaluations, a cultural orientation, and other services that maximize their ability to integrate successfully into, and contribute productively to, American communities.

Who is resettled through USRAP?

Only two groups are resettled through USRAP. The first consists of those who qualify for refugee status under U.S. law,² which requires a person to be outside of the United States and: (1) of special humanitarian concern to the United States; (2) have been persecuted, or have a well-founded fear persecution, due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group; (3) not “firmly resettled” in another country; and (4) legally admissible to the United States. The second group resettled through USRAP consists of Iraqi and Afghan nationals approved for a special immigrant visa because they assisted the U.S. missions in Iraq or Afghanistan.³

Are refugees currently being resettled?

For the most part, no refugees are being resettled through USRAP at this time. On January 20, 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order on “[Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program](#)”.⁴ This executive order indefinitely suspended USRAP, pending a review of the program by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State and a determination by the President that the program serves the national interest. To date, no such determination by the President has been publicly announced. Additionally, President Trump signed a proclamation on

However, President Trump subsequently signed a separate executive order on “[Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa](#)”,⁵ which instructed the Secretary of State and Secretary of

¹ See U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Refugee Timeline*, <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/stories-from-the-archives/refugee-timeline> (last updated Jan. 24, 2025).

² See 8 U.S.C. 1157.

³ See ANDORRA BRUNO, CONG. RSCH. SERV., R43725, IRAQI AND AFGHAN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAMS, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43725> (last updated Jan. 15, 2025).

⁴ Exec. Order No. 14,163, 90 Fed. Reg. 8459 (2025).

⁵ Exec. Order No. 14,204, 90 Fed. Reg. 9497 (2025).

Homeland Security to “take appropriate steps, consistent with law, to prioritize humanitarian relief, including admission and resettlement through the United States Refugee Admissions Program, for Afrikaners in South Africa who are victims of unjust racial discrimination.” Since then, the State Department has facilitated the resettlement of a small number of Afrikaners (estimated to be fewer than 200 in total),⁶ with the first group arriving in May.⁷

During 2025, a small number of refugees have been admitted to the United States pursuant to the lawsuit *Pacito v. United States*, in which several organizations are challenging the suspension of USRAP, but admissions associated with the litigation have been discontinued.

Additionally, a small number of Afghan SIV holders have been self-traveling to the United States once they are issued a visa. As mentioned above, these people are technically classified as special immigrants, not refugees, even though they are eligible for substantially the same services as people granted refugee status. However, until recently, their arrival was not being coordinated with local resettlement agencies by the federal government, contrary to past practice.

What is the future of refugee resettlement?

On September 30, 2025, President Trump signed the [Presidential Determination \(PD\) on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2026](#),⁸ which began on October 1. The PD serves as the annual cap for the number of refugees who can be resettled through USRAP in a given fiscal year. The FY 2026 PD allows up to 7,500 refugees to be resettled, the lowest ceiling since the program was created by Congress in 1980. It states, “The admissions numbers shall primarily be allocated among Afrikaners from South Africa pursuant to Executive Order 14204, and other victims of illegal or unjust discrimination in their respective homelands.” However, no refugees were resettled between October 1 and November 12 during the lapse in federal funding. It remains unclear how many of the possible 7,500 slots will be utilized during FY 2026 and whether anyone besides Afrikaners will be resettled.

The statute pertaining to the presidential determination requires the President to undertake “appropriate consultation” with the House and Senate Judiciary Committees of Congress prior to the signing of the PD.⁹ However, members of Congress have [alleged](#) that this consultation did not occur, putting into question the legality of the PD itself.¹⁰

What is the Catholic Church’s position on refugee resettlement?

Guided by Sacred Scripture, particularly the teachings of Christ (e.g., Matthew 25:31–46), and tradition, the Catholic Church has long advocated in support of refugee protection, including resettlement of those unable to return to their countries of origin. In the aftermath of World War II,

⁶ U.S. Embassy and Consulates in South Africa, *Refugee Admissions Program for South Africans* (Nov. 4, 2025), <https://za.usembassy.gov/refugee-admissions-program-for-south-africans/>.

⁷ Press Release, U.S. Department of State, Welcoming Afrikaner Refugees Fleeing Discrimination (May 12, 2025), <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/05/welcoming-afrikaner-refugees-fleeing-discrimination>.

⁸ Presidential Determination No. 2025-13, 90 Fed. Reg. 49,005 (2025).

⁹ 8 U.S.C. § 1157.

¹⁰ Press Release, House Committee on the Judiciary Democrats, Ranking Members Raskin, Jayapal, Durbin, and Padilla Condemn Trump Administration’s Unlawful Refugee Cap (Oct. 30, 2025), <https://democrats-judiciary.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/ranking-members-raskin-jayapal-durbin-and-padilla-condemn-trump-administration-s-unlawful-refugee-cap>.

Pope Pius XII described the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as the archetype of every refugee family.¹¹ In 1948, well before USRAP was established and just one year after the National Catholic Resettlement Council (NCRC) was created to coordinate the U.S. Catholic Church's domestic reception and integration efforts for those displaced by World War II, 105 out of 119 Catholic dioceses in the United States at the time had a resettlement director appointed by the local bishop.

In response to the FY 2026 PD, Bishop Mark Seitz, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Migration, [stated](#):

For over 45 years, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been, and continues to be, a safe and secure legal pathway for people from around the world who meet the requirements for humanitarian protection. It is a vital mechanism through which our nation can exist as a beacon of hope for those facing persecution and promote respect for the sanctity of human life. What President Reagan said in 1981 about refugee policy being 'an important part of our past and fundamental to our national interest' very much rings true today. With the Administration signaling a severely limited continuation of this historically bipartisan program, we urge due consideration for all those who have long awaited their opportunity for relief. We also pray for the broad, indefinite suspension of refugee admissions to be lifted, and we implore the President to make the program available to those truly in need.¹²

In an [August 2025 letter](#), Bishop Seitz also encouraged Congress to preserve funding for life-saving humanitarian protections, including refugee resettlement.¹³

In April 2025, the USCCB [announced](#) that it would discontinue its formal participation in USRAP as a national resettlement agency.¹⁴ However, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the USCCB, made clear that decision would not equal "walking away from helping refugees and others. The Catholic Church will find new means to help those we have served in the past and will serve in the future."¹⁵ Many Catholic charities agencies, parishes, and the faithful continue to accompany refugees throughout the country. In November 2025, the U.S. bishops issued a "special message", in which they [stated](#): "We note with gratitude that so many of our clergy, consecrated religious, and lay faithful already accompany and assist immigrants in meeting their basic human needs. We urge all people of good will to continue and expand such efforts."¹⁶

¹¹ See *Exsul familia* (1952) (often referred to as "the Church's Magna Carta for Migrants").

¹² Press Release, USCCB, Refugee Resettlement Must Remain a Safe and Secure Legal Pathway, Says Bishop Seitz (Oct. 31, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/refugee-resettlement-must-remain-safe-and-secure-legal-pathway-says-bishop-seitz>.

¹³ Letter to Congress from Bishop Mark Seitz (Aug. 28, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/USCCB%20Letter%20to%20Congress%20on%20Migration-Related%20Appropriations%20for%20FY%202026.pdf>.

¹⁴ Press Release, USCCB, The Government's Decisions Have Forced USCCB to Reconsider How to Serve the Needs of Those Seeking Safe Harbor from Violence and Persecution, says Archbishop Broglio (Apr. 7, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/governments-decisions-have-forced-usccb-reconsider-how-serve-needs-those-seeking-safe>.

¹⁵ Timothy P. Broglio, *Why Catholic Bishops Are Ending Our Refugee Work with the Government*, WASH. POST (Apr. 7, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/04/07/usccb-bishops-refugee-resettlement-funding/>.

¹⁶ Press Release, USCCB, U.S. Bishops Issue a "Special Message" on Immigration from Plenary Assembly in Baltimore (Nov. 12, 2025) <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/us-bishops-issue-special-message-immigration-plenary-assembly-baltimore>.

How can I support refugees?

- The USCCB has launched [The Cabrini Pledge](#) as an invitation for American Catholics to reflect on our immigrant heritage and a call to deeper engagement with our faith in response to current events.
- Through the [USCCB's Justice for Immigrants \(JFI\) campaign](#), Catholics and others of good will can be part of a national network focused on education, creating political will for just and humane policies, and advocating for meaningful reforms to the U.S. immigration system.
- The [USCCB's Action Center](#) can be used by constituents to connect with their members of Congress on issues of importance to them.
- Many [Catholic Charities agencies](#) provide opportunities to volunteer with refugees and others in need of support at the local level.
- [Praying for refugees](#) and the safety of those displaced from their homes is always an important and worthwhile action.