

July 28, 2026

## U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in FY2025 and FY2026

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is in uncharted territory. It has been suspended since late January 2025. Under the suspension, only refugees who qualify for an exception are being admitted to the United States. The refugee ceiling (the maximum number of refugees that can be admitted) for FY2026 is currently 17,500, the lowest in the history of the USRAP. As of June 30, 2026, FY2026 refugee admissions totaled 7,730. **Figure 1** shows annual refugee ceilings and admissions since FY1980, when the first refugee ceiling was set.

### USRAP Suspension

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued E.O. 14163, “Realigning the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.” In the E.O., the President stated that “entry into the United States of refugees under the USRAP would be detrimental to the interests of the United States.” He said he was therefore directing that refugee entry be suspended, subject to exceptions, until he determined that the resumption of the USRAP was in the national interest. The exceptions language in the E.O. provides that:

the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security may jointly determine to admit aliens [foreign nationals] to the United States as refugees on a case-by-case basis, in their discretion, but only so long as they determine that the entry of such aliens as refugees is in the national interest and does not pose a threat to the security or welfare of the United States.

E.O. 14163 was followed in early February 2025 by E.O. 14204, “Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa.” This E.O. directs the Secretary of State and the Secretary of 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.

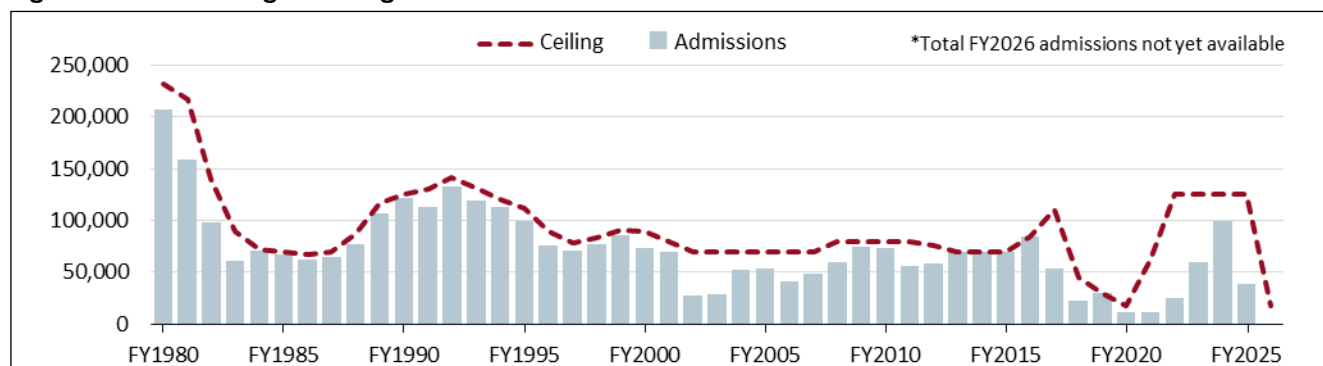
### Annual Refugee Ceilings

The Refugee Act of 1980 added a new Section 207 to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) on the admission of refugees, codified, as amended, at 8 U.S.C. §1157. It also added a definition of the term “refugee” to the INA, which states, in brief, that a refugee is a person who is typically outside their country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return to that country “because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Under the INA, the President is responsible for setting a refugee ceiling before the beginning of a new fiscal year after “appropriate consultation” with Congress. “Appropriate consultation” is defined in the INA, in part, as “discussions in person by designated Cabinet-level representatives of the President” with members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the House Judiciary Committees. (There is no statutory requirement, however, that the President’s proposal receive congressional approval.) Following consultations with Congress, the President issues a presidential determination setting and allocating the refugee ceiling for the upcoming fiscal year.

For FY2025, as for FY2022 through FY2024, President Biden set the refugee ceiling at 125,000 (**Figure 1**) and, in keeping with historical practice, allocated the refugee numbers for these years by worldwide region. For FY2026, President Trump initially set the refugee ceiling at 7,500. He directed that these “admissions numbers shall primarily be allocated among Afrikaners from South Africa pursuant to E.O. 14204, and other victims of illegal or unjust discrimination in their respective homelands.”

**Figure 1. Annual Refugee Ceilings and Admissions**



**Source:** CRS presentation of data from presidential determinations and emergency presidential determinations on refugee admissions; and from U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

## Emergency Refugee Determinations

The INA authorizes the President to increase the refugee ceiling during a fiscal year in the event of “an unforeseen emergency refugee situation” where “the admission of certain refugees is justified by grave humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest.” In such a case, the President may issue an emergency presidential determination to make additional refugee numbers available for the current fiscal year after consultation with Congress.

Emergency presidential determinations to increase the refugee ceiling were issued in FY1988 (President Reagan), FY1989 (President George H.W. Bush), FY1999 (President Clinton), and FY2021 (President Biden). In addition, in FY2021 President Biden issued a second emergency refugee determination to reallocate the FY2021 refugee ceiling (originally set by President Trump) by region; in his original FY2021 presidential determination, President Trump had instead allocated the FY2021 refugee admissions numbers among “refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States.”

The most recent emergency presidential determination was issued by President Trump in May 2026. It raised the FY2026 refugee ceiling from 7,500 to 17,500. According to the determination:

an unforeseen emergency refugee situation now exists due to recent increases in the incitement of racially motivated violence on the part of the Government of South Africa and leaders of prominent political parties in South Africa, as well as new disruptions of United States Refugee Admissions Program operations in South Africa.

The determination specifies that the “additional admissions shall be allocated among Afrikaners from South Africa, consistent with the directives in Executive Order 14204.”

## Historical Ceilings and Admissions Levels

As shown in **Figure 1**, there has been considerable variation in the refugee ceiling and refugee admissions over time. From FY1980 to FY2026, the ceiling has ranged from 17,500 in FY2026 to 231,700 in FY1980 in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. From FY1980 to FY2025 (the most recent year for which full-year admissions data are available), refugee admissions ranged from 11,411 in FY2021 to 207,116 in FY1980.

The years since FY2018 have seen some of the lowest refugee ceilings and admissions numbers in the history of the USRAP. Prior to FY2018, the refugee ceiling was set at or above 67,000 each year, most commonly in the 70,000-80,000 range. During this pre-FY2018 period, refugee admissions exceeded 41,000 each year except FY2002 and FY2003 (in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the USRAP was temporarily suspended while procedures were reviewed and new security measures were adopted). In most years since FY2018, either the refugee ceiling or refugee admissions (or both) were below 39,000. FY2023 and FY2024 were exceptions; in these years, the refugee ceiling was 125,000, and refugee admissions totaled about 60,000 and 100,000, respectively.

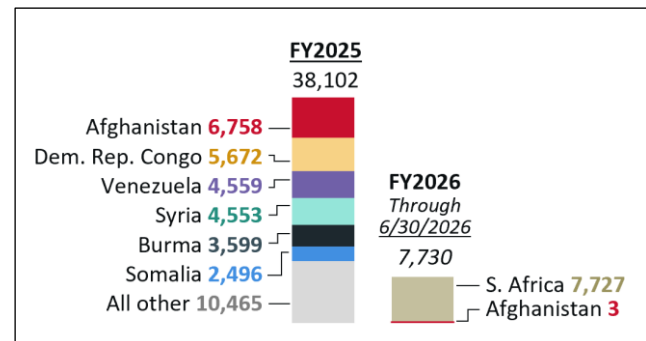
## USRAP in FY2025 and FY2026

There was a significant decrease in the refugee ceiling from FY2025 to FY2026. Based on available data as of June 30, 2026, there has also been a sizeable drop in refugee admissions (**Figure 2**). As noted, the FY2025 refugee ceiling was 125,000. A total of 38,102 refugees were admitted to the United States in FY2025. More than 98% (37,596) of these refugees were admitted in the first four months of the fiscal year (September 2025-January 2026), mainly during the Biden Administration.

Refugees admitted during FY2025 represented more than 65 countries of nationality. **Figure 2** provides FY2025 admissions numbers by country of nationality. It identifies the top six countries of incoming refugees; these countries accounted for about 73% of total FY2025 admissions.

The FY2026 refugee ceiling, as increased in May 2026, is 17,500. During the first three-quarters of FY2026 (through June 30, 2026), the United States admitted a total of 7,730 refugees. As shown in **Figure 2**, these refugees were nationals of two countries; all were South African except for three who were Afghan.

**Figure 2. Refugee Admissions by Nationality for FY2025 and FY2026**



**Source:** CRS presentation of data from U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

## Refugee Resettlement

Refugees who were admitted to the United States in FY2025 and the first three quarters of FY2026 were placed across the country through a federal program that provides initial resettlement assistance. This was formerly known as the Reception and Placement Program and was administered by the U.S. Department of State. At the end of FY2025, it was transferred to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. It is now called the Program of Initial Resettlement.

In both FY2025 and FY2026 (through June 30, 2026), arriving refugees were resettled in 49 states. In FY2025, all states except Wyoming received refugees. In FY2026, all states except Hawaii received refugees. In FY2025, resettlement numbers for individual states ranged from 1 refugee resettled in Hawaii to more than 3,900 refugees resettled in Texas. In FY2026, these numbers ranged from 2 refugees resettled in Delaware to more than 900 refugees resettled in Texas.

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