

## **Policies Affecting Refugees in the United States: Suspension of Admissions, Re-Vetting, and New Detention Authority**

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Recent policy changes implemented by the Trump administration have significantly reshaped the United States' approach to refugee protection, both for individuals seeking resettlement abroad and for refugees already living in the United States. These policies include the suspension and restructuring of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), expanded travel bans, the re-examination of previously approved refugee cases, and new detention authority for refugees who have not yet adjusted to lawful permanent resident status.

Together, these changes have disrupted refugee processing overseas, delayed or halted immigration benefits for refugees in the United States and introduced new enforcement mechanisms affecting individuals who were previously admitted and resettled through the refugee program.

This explainer provides an overview of these policies and their potential impact on refugees and refugee communities.

### **Suspension and Restructuring of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program**

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order titled "**Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program**," which effectively suspended refugee-related funding, refugee processing, and refugee admissions to the United States. Later, on October 31, 2025, the administration issued another executive order establishing a refugee admissions ceiling of **7,500 for fiscal year 2026**, with admissions largely limited to white South African applicants. By comparison, the refugee admissions ceiling for fiscal year 2024 under the Biden administration was **125,000**. These changes have effectively halted the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for most nationalities.

The executive orders are currently being challenged in federal court, including in *Pacito v. Trump*, a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of refugees whose travel was canceled

after the January 20 order took effect. Plaintiffs argue that the administration violated the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Administrative Procedure Act by halting refugee processing without lawful justification. As of March 5, 2006, the 9<sup>th</sup> Cir. Court held that while the government's policy suspending the refugee program is not unlawful for refugees outside of the United States, the government must continue to provide refugees that have already been admitted to the United States with refugee services. The case is still pending and will be scheduled for a final hearing.

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## **Who Is Affected by the Suspension of USRAP?**

The suspension has affected a large number of refugees who were already in the admissions pipeline. According to the facts presented in *Pacito v. Trump*, more than **125,000 refugees had already been vetted and approved for resettlement** before the program was suspended. Many of these individuals have completed years of security screening, interviews, and medical checks. In addition, **tens of thousands more refugees** in earlier stages of the process are now unable to proceed with interviews, security checks, or travel preparation because the program remains frozen.

## **Expanded Travel Bans**

In 2025, the administration also expanded travel restrictions that affect refugee admissions and family reunification. Executive Order 14161, issued on January 20, 2025, suspended entry for nationals of countries that the administration labeled as having inadequate vetting systems. On June 4, 2025, [Presidential Proclamation 10949](#) expanded these restrictions to **19 countries**, primarily in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In December 2025, the administration added **20 more countries and the Palestinian Authority** to the list.

Because many refugees originate from these regions, the travel bans disproportionately affect refugee populations. These restrictions block travel for already-approved refugees, disrupt family reunification pathways, and create uncertainty for individuals who have completed the refugee screening process but are unable to enter the United States. Advocates and service providers have also reported confusion and inconsistent implementation across affected communities.

## **Re-Vetting of Previously Resettled Refugees**

In November 2025, reports emerged that the Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued an internal memorandum instructing USCIS employees to **pause the adjudication of refugee-based adjustment of status applications** (green card applications filed by refugees after arrival in the United States).

The memorandum also directed USCIS to **re-examine refugee applications that were filed before individuals entered the United States**, effectively reopening prior refugee determinations. Approximately **233,000 refugees who entered the United States between January 20, 2021, and February 20, 2025**, may be affected by this policy.

USCIS may schedule refugees for new interviews to reassess their eligibility for refugee status. If USCIS determines that an individual did not meet the legal definition of a refugee at the time of admission, the agency may initiate proceedings to terminate that person's refugee status.

If refugee status is terminated, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may initiate removal proceedings in immigration court.

In addition, the government has indicated that it may also review cases involving refugees who have already obtained lawful permanent resident status and may rescind those green cards if it determines the individual was not eligible at the time of approval.

## **Operation PARRIS and the Re-Vetting Process**

On January 9, 2026, DHS launched **Operation PARRIS (Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening)** in Minnesota, marking the beginning of a nationwide re-vetting effort. The administration has stated that the operation initially focuses on approximately **5,600 refugees in Minnesota who have not yet adjusted to lawful permanent resident status**, but the program is expected to expand to other states. USCIS indicated that it would compile a list of cases to prioritize for re-interviews and work with its Office of Policy and Strategy to develop additional guidance.

In January 2026, DHS and ICE began arresting and detaining refugees pursuant to Operation PARRIS. Reports from community organizations suggest that implementation has been uneven and, in some cases, chaotic. Many refugees were sent to other detention facilities in other states. On February 27, 2026, a District Court in Minnesota in *U.H.A. v. Bondi*, issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the government from arresting or detaining refugees in Minnesota and ordered the release any refugees that had been detained pursuant to Operation PARRIS to be released. Notably, the order in *U.H.A. v. Bondi*, only applies to refugees in Minnesota.

## **Detention of Refugees Who Have Not Adjusted Status**

On February 18, 2026, the Department of Homeland Security issued a memorandum titled **“Detention of Refugees Who Have Failed to Adjust to Lawful Permanent Resident Status”** that rescinded a 2010 memorandum (known as the “Chaparro memo”) and issued a revised new directive that authorizes Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to **arrest and detain refugees who have not yet applied for adjustment of status to lawful permanent resident**, pursuant to section 209 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Under the directive,

- refugees may be detained for the purpose of inspection and examination to determine whether they should be granted adjustment of status or whether their refugee status should be terminated
- If DHS determines that a person was not eligible for refugee status at the time of admission or obtained status through fraud or misrepresentation, the agency may terminate refugee status and place the individual into removal proceedings
- Unlike prior practice—where individuals were generally issued a notice to appear or a notice of intent to terminate status—this memorandum allows detention to occur **before the review process is completed**
- Previously, detention in these circumstances was typically limited to **48 hours** Under the new policy, detention may continue until the inspection and examination process is completed, which could take significantly longer

## **Government Rationale for the New Detention Policy**

According to DHS, the memorandum was issued to advance four primary objectives:

- Preventing fraud and ensuring eligibility for refugee status
- Protecting national security
- Promoting public safety
- Ensuring compliance with immigration laws and policies

However, advocates have raised concerns that the policy represents a significant departure from long-standing refugee protection practices in the United States.

A refugee's status does not expire, and individuals admitted as refugees entered the country lawfully. Critics argue that detaining refugees prior to a formal termination process raises serious due process concerns.

If implemented broadly, the policy could also lead to prolonged detention due to backlogs in interviews and adjudications, as well as well-documented issues in detention facilities, including overcrowding, language barriers, and limited access to legal counsel.

Several class action lawsuits have been filed on behalf of refugees impacted by the government's new detention policies. Additionally, on March 5, 2026, several organizations filed a class action [lawsuit](#) against the government asking for the rescission of several of the government's new policies, including those referenced in this guide. No order has been issued by the court as of the date of this writing.

## **What These Policies Mean for Refugees**

### **Refugees Outside the United States:**

For refugees abroad, the suspension of USRAP means:

- The United States has largely stopped accepting new refugee applications from most nationalities.
- The 2026 admissions program will accept **only 7,500 refugees**, primarily white South Africans.
- Pending refugee cases remain in the system but are frozen indefinitely.
- Already-approved refugees may still be unable to travel because of travel bans.

The State Department continues to process certain **follow-to-join refugee petitions** (Form I-730), which allow spouses and minor children of admitted refugees to reunite with their families in the United States. However, these applications may be denied if the family member is from a country subject to the travel ban.

## **Refugees Already in the United States:**

U.S. immigration law requires refugees to apply for lawful permanent residence after **one year of physical presence in the United States**. Although USCIS has paused adjudication of refugee adjustment applications, the agency must still **accept filings** for future processing. Refugees should expect:

- Longer processing times for green card applications
- Delays in other immigration benefits
- Possible re-interviews to reassess refugee eligibility

In some cases, USCIS may issue notices to terminate refugee status or rescind permanent resident status if the agency determines that the original refugee determination was incorrect.

## **Practical Steps Refugees Should Consider**

Refugees and their families may wish to take the following steps:

- **File for adjustment of status.** Even though adjudication is paused, refugees who are eligible should still file applications to adjust to lawful permanent resident status.
- **File refugee family petitions (Form I-730).** Eligible refugees should file petitions for spouses and unmarried children under age 21 within the required **two-year filing deadline**, even if processing may be delayed.
- **Organize and safeguard immigration documents.** Refugees should maintain copies of all immigration records, including applications, approvals, notices, and correspondence from government agencies. It is recommended to keep both physical and digital copies.
- If documents have been lost, individuals may consider filing a **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** request to obtain copies of their immigration records.

- **Seek legal advice before responding to government requests.** Anyone scheduled for an interview, biometrics appointment, or re-examination should consult with an immigration attorney or Department of Justice–accredited representative.
- **Be cautious with phone requests for information.** If contacted by someone claiming to represent USCIS or another government agency, individuals should request the caller’s name, agency, and contact information before providing any details.
- **Know your rights during enforcement encounters.** Individuals have the right to remain silent, the right to refuse consent to a search, and the right to request an attorney before signing any documents.

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## **Safety Planning for Refugees Facing Possible Detention**

Refugees who may be affected by the February 18 detention memorandum should consider developing a safety plan.

This may include:

- Ensuring that a trusted person knows the individual’s **A-number** so they can help locate them if detained.
- Identifying a trusted caregiver for minor children in case of detention.
- Discussing temporary guardianship arrangements and ensuring schools or medical providers have appropriate contact information if necessary.
- Identifying an attorney or legal representative who can file a habeas petition in the event of detention

Nonprofit organizations, social services, and legal service providers in many states offer assistance with safety planning and legal referrals.