



FY2020 Refugee Ceiling and Allocations

November 7, 2019

On November 1, 2019, President Donald Trump issued a [Presidential Determination](#) setting the FY2020 refugee ceiling at 18,000. The refugee ceiling is the maximum number of refugees that can be admitted to the United States in a fiscal year. From the start of FY2020 until the signing of the Presidential Determination, no refugees could be admitted to the United States.

The FY2020 refugee ceiling of 18,000 is the lowest in the history of the U.S. refugee admissions program. The Trump Administration has reduced the refugee ceiling each year, setting it at 45,000 for FY2018 and 30,000 for FY2019. These ceilings are much lower than in previous years. Actual refugee [admissions in FY2019](#) totaled 30,000.

The [refugee provisions](#) in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) allow for the admission of a foreign national who meets the definition of a refugee, is “of special humanitarian concern to the United States,” and satisfies other criteria. The [INA defines a refugee](#), in main part, as “any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality ... and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, 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.” The [Department of State’s \(DOS’s\) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration \(PRM\)](#) coordinates and manages the U.S. refugee program. The [Department of Homeland Security’s \(DHS’s\) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#) is responsible for adjudicating refugee cases.

The INA authorizes the President to set the annual refugee ceiling after “[appropriate consultation](#)” between Administration officials and members of the House and the Senate Judiciary Committees. As part of the annual consultation process, the INA requires the President to report to the House and the Senate Judiciary Committees on the “foreseeable number of refugees who will be in need of resettlement” and the “anticipated allocation of refugee admissions.” The Administration is further required to provide the committees with “a description of the number and allocation of refugees to be admitted,” among other specified information. DOS, DHS, and the Department of Health and Human Services jointly issue an annual Proposed Refugee Admissions report to fulfill these consultation-related requirements.

The [Proposed Refugee Admissions report for FY2020](#) explains the need to set the refugee ceiling at 18,000 by referencing the separate asylum system: “This refugee admissions ceiling reflects the urgent need to address the border security and humanitarian crisis caused by the massive surge of aliens seeking protection at the U.S. southern border.”

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The report further states:

DHS continues to fill new positions within the USCIS Asylum Division devoted to eliminating the backlog of nearly 540,000 affirmative asylum cases expected at the end of FY 2019. In order to address this backlog and prevent it from again increasing, however, DHS will continue to shift some refugee officers to assist the Asylum Division.

In past fiscal years, the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions has provided a worldwide refugee ceiling and regional allocations (that is, allocations of the ceiling among the regions of the world). For example, the [FY2019 Presidential Determination](#) set a worldwide refugee ceiling of 30,000 and the following regional allocations: Africa (11,000), East Asia (4,000), Europe and Central Asia (3,000), Latin America/Caribbean (3,000), and Near East/South Asia (9,000).

Like the FY2019 Presidential Determination, the [FY2020 Presidential Determination](#) sets a worldwide refugee ceiling (at 18,000). It, however, does not allocate the ceiling among the regions of the world. Instead, it sets allocations by “population of special humanitarian concern” (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Allocation of Refugee Admissions for FY2020

Population of Special Humanitarian Concern	Allocation
Refugees who have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion. This includes refugees eligible for U.S. resettlement under the Lautenberg and Specter Amendments, which apply to certain religious minorities who are or were nationals of an independent state of the former Soviet Union, one of the Baltic states, or Iran.	5,000
Iraqi refugees with certain U.S. ties.	4,000
Refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras.	1,500
Other refugees, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees who are referred to the U.S. refugee program by a U.S. embassy in any location. Refugees who qualify for family reunification access to the U.S. refugee program or who are beneficiaries of following-to-join petitions filed by refugee family members in the United States. Refugees in Australia, Nauru, or Papua New Guinea who are referred to the U.S. refugee program under an arrangement between the United States and Australia. Refugees who were approved for U.S. resettlement and ready to travel to the United States as of September 30, 2019. 	7,500
Total	18,000

Source: White House, *Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020*, November 1, 2019.

In another refugee policy-related development, the President issued an [executive order](#) on September 26, 2019, on the initial placement of refugees in the United States. The order stated that “with limited exceptions, the Federal Government . . . should resettle refugees only in those jurisdictions in which both the State and local governments have consented to receive refugees.” Historically, arriving refugees have been placed in communities throughout the United States. In [FY2019](#), for example, refugees were resettled in all states (except Wyoming and Hawaii) and the District of Columbia. [The INA requires](#) federal officials to consult regularly with state and local governments and U.S. refugee resettlement agencies on “the intended distribution of refugees among the States and localities before their placement in those States and localities.”

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