

Refugee advocates commend Biden for increased goal

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Evangelical Christian and other advocates for refugee resettlement applauded President Biden's increase of this year's admission cap after objecting to his much [lower goal](#) less than three weeks ago.

Biden announced May 3 his revision of the refugee admissions ceiling to 62,500 for the 2020-21 fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30. He had signed a presidential determination on admissions April 16 that kept the goal for this fiscal year at 15,000, the ceiling established by the Trump administration in its final year.

Criticism of what refugee advocates called a broken promise by Biden swiftly ensued, and the White House said later the same day the president would establish a final, larger admissions cap for the fiscal year by mid-May. Biden announced in February the ceiling would be 62,500 for this year and 125,000 for the 2021-22 fiscal year.



Russell Moore

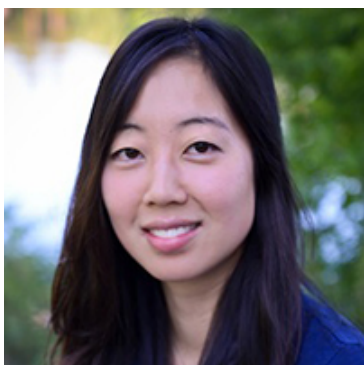
Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, expressed gratitude for Biden's revised goal.

“This action is the first step in bringing admissions back to the historical average and our nation back to our own ideals as a beacon of freedom,” Moore said. “There are real people facing slaughter, including persecuted Christians and other imperiled religious minorities, and this decision means that we will soon be able to welcome and protect them as our new American neighbors.”

Eric Costanzo, lead pastor of South Tulsa (Okla.) Baptist Church, said in a release from the National Immigration Forum he is grateful the president “listened to the voices of hundreds of evangelical pastors and leaders asking him to keep his promise to resume and increase resettlement of refugees who are deeply loved by Christ and are to be deeply loved by his church.”

‘A necessary first action

Jenny Yang, senior vice president of advocacy and policy for World Relief, said Biden’s new decision “is a necessary first action.”



Jenny Yang

“There is much work still to be done to rebuild the resettlement infrastructure and restore refugee processing,” she said, but World Relief looks forward to partnering with the administration in that effort.

World Relief is an evangelical organization that works with the U.S. State Department to resettle refugees, many of whom are Christians and other religious adherents persecuted for their faith.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom welcomed the change. The revision “supports the dignity and human rights of the unprecedented number of people worldwide who have been forcibly displaced by religious conflict or persecution,” USCIRF Chair Anurima Bhargava said. “Providing a safe haven for more of these refugees this year protects religious freedom and is consistent with American values.”

‘Rebuild what has been broken’

While announcing the revised admissions ceiling for this year, Biden said in a written statement the “sad truth is that we will not achieve 62,500 admissions” for 2020-21. The new cap, however, will “reinforce efforts” to reach the goal of 125,000 next year, he said.

“We are going to rebuild what has been broken and push hard to complete the rigorous screening process for those refugees already in the pipeline for admission,” Biden said.



Biden’s shifting goals followed four years of record-low ceilings established by President Trump—from 45,000 refugee admissions in the 2018 fiscal year to 30,000 in 2019 to 18,000 in 2020 and 15,000 in the current year.

In the decade prior (2008-17), the United States welcomed an average of about 67,000 refugees each year, according to the Pew Research Center. The number of admissions often is less than the ceiling. The record high for the cap and admissions is 232,000 and 207,000, respectively, in 1980, Pew

reported.

The United States' reduction in the ceiling has come at a time when conflicts in multiple countries have resulted in massive numbers of refugees. As of mid-2020, an estimated 26.3 million people were considered refugees, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. More than 80 million people, including 30 to 34 million children, were forcibly displaced, the UNHCR reported.



A Syrian refugee family lives in a tent provided by the United Nations. (BP File Photo)

Only 2,050 refugees were admitted to the United States through the first six months of the 2020-21 fiscal year, the International Rescue Committee reported in April. At that rate, the total of 4,100 for the year would be the smallest in U.S. history. Because of Biden's failure to act earlier, the travel plans of more than 700 refugees approved for resettlement were canceled, according to organizations that support refugee resettlement.

The United Nations has defined a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion," according to its 1951 Refugee Convention.

The federal government's resettlement of refugees is distinct from its efforts on the Mexican border to address the waves of children and adults seeking asylum in this country.

Refugees must pass a stringent screening process that includes multiple biometric and biographic checks and an interview before being eligible to enter the United States, according to 2020 guidelines by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The processing time before refugees enter this country averages 18 months to three years, World Relief reported.