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## Refugee Resettlement for Fiscal Year 2026: Refugee Populations At-Risk

The Trump administration should restart resettlement with a strong initiative to bring to safety Afghan, Nicaraguan, Sudanese, South Sudanese, and other at-risk refugees who qualify under the law as refugees. Refugees often face the threat of further persecution, violence, severe deprivation, or return to persecution while awaiting resettlement. For example, Afghan refugees left waiting in Pakistan and other places face the [escalating](#) danger of forced return to Taliban persecution. Human Rights First supports Refugee Council USA's recommendation that the U.S. resettle 125,000 refugees during fiscal year 2026, a level of commitment commensurate with the number of refugees conditionally approved by U.S. agencies but left stranded by the administration's resettlement freeze in 2025.

Refugee resettlement is not only a lifeline for those fleeing harm, but also essential to U.S. national interests. It helps ease pressures on frontline host countries, promotes stability, and increases receiving states' capacity to continue to support large displaced and refugee populations. As UNHCR has reported, nearly 70 per cent of refugees find safety in the country next door to their own, and most are hosted by low- and middle-income nations. Resettlement tangibly demonstrates to developing front-line host nations that they do not bear this responsibility alone.

The U.S. refugee resettlement program should not be misused to facilitate the migration of people who do not qualify as refugees and exclude at-risk refugees due to racial preferences (eg, primarily restricting use of resettlement to white Afrikaners).

### Refugee populations at risk

The Trump administration should honor U.S. commitments and save lives by prioritizing the resettlement of refugees who face real dangers of persecution, including those who were conditionally approved for U.S. resettlement but left stranded by the administration's 2025 resettlement ban. Human Rights First urges the United States to relaunch a strong resettlement initiative for refugee populations including:

- **Afghan refugees in [danger](#) of Taliban persecution and retaliation** including: family members of U.S. servicemembers; refugees who worked with the U.S. military or U.S. government; journalists; people facing religious persecution; human rights defenders; ethnic minorities; LGBTQ persons; civil society leaders; women's rights advocates; Afghans who previously worked with the pre-2021 Afghan government; Afghan national security forces; international military forces or those who were associated with international organizations; and women and girls facing persecution under oppressive new laws and the systematic denial of rights.

Warning that the Taliban have completely eradicated religious freedom in Afghanistan, the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) on August 27, 2025, urged U.S. resettlement of Afghans at risk of religious persecution, including religious minorities, women, and other refugees who will be targeted for religious views that differ from the Taliban. In Pakistan, U.S. refugee resettlement previously played a crucial role in [helping](#) to secure access to asylum and reduce risks of refoulement.

- **Nicaraguans [targeted](#) due to political dissent or religious views**, some of whom continue to be at risk after escaping to countries nearby. While Costa Rica (a country of only 5.1 million) [hosts](#) about 200,000 Nicaraguans, some Nicaraguans continue to be in danger in Costa Rica or other countries, and resettlement is urgently needed for some of these refugees. The [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) documented that the Ortega-Murillo regime arbitrarily detains people who oppose the government, and [Amnesty International](#) has documented torture and inhumane treatment of people detained. The [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) has [raised alarm](#) about Nicaragua’s “[abysmal](#)” religious freedom conditions, the full-scale shuttering of Catholic Church activities, mass imprisonments, and the targeting of Catholic, Evangelical, and other religious groups. In June 2025, a Nicaraguan exile was [murdered](#) in Costa Rica. The UN Group of Human Rights experts on Nicaragua condemned the murder, expressed [profound concern for the security](#) of exiled Nicaraguans, and stressed that the government uses threats, harassment, and other tactics to target Nicaraguans who have fled the country. UNHCR [assesses](#) that about 19,300 refugees in Costa Rica are in need of resettlement. Its report went on to explain that some refugees there face “high risk of transnational persecution” and that “[v]iolent attacks targeting Nicaraguans residing abroad [have](#) been reported in Honduras and Costa Rica.”
- **Refugees who fled political, religious, and other persecution in Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Eritrea**, including rape survivors, people targeted for abductions, and refugees facing physical safety concerns. UNHCR estimates resettlement needs of 258,190 for South Sudanese, 246,790 for Sudanese, 179,560 for DRC, and 103,685 for Eritreans. Fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, along with other factors, has displaced more than 8 million people in Sudan since March 2024, including South Sudanese, Eritreans, and Ethiopians. Refugee communities in Sudan face the threat of gender-based violence, human trafficking, and human rights violations often with ethnic motivations, while UNHCR and its partners “are struggling to generate the funding for the humanitarian response, including food assistance.”
- **LGBTQI+ refugees who continue to face persecution, violence, and other harms due to their sexual orientation or gender identity in the current host country.** LGBTQI+ refugees continue to face safety risks in Libya, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, and other

countries where they are targets of violence and/or same-sex conduct is criminalized or socially stigmatized. Across Latin America, LGBTQI+ refugees have faced risks of persecution even after fleeing their home countries. Refugees who fled persecution in Nicaragua have, for example, reported continuing threats and violence in countries of asylum in the region.

- **Venezuelan refugees and resettlement in the Americas.** Resettlement in the Americas has served to alleviate pressure on host countries that continue to support large refugee populations, encourage access to lawful residency, regularization, and other rights in such countries, and create additional asylum opportunities, as UNHCR has [explained](#). Resettlement has provided life-saving protection to human rights defenders, individuals collaborating with authorities against criminal groups, women and girls who have survived sexual violence, and other refugees at risk of brutal violence, exploitation, or refoulement to persecution. For 2026, UNHCR projects that there will be 172,200 individuals in need of resettlement in the region, including in Ecuador (46,200), Peru (31,300), Colombia (30,000), and Costa Rica (19,300), which would save lives and also provide critical support to countries that host large numbers of refugees.
- **Refugees at risk of refoulement to political, religious, or other persecution in China,** including [Uyghur](#) and other refugee populations who are not protected from refoulement or arbitrary detention by other countries in the region.
- In the midst of the broader return of thousands of refugees to Syria, **some Syrian refugees cannot safely repatriate due to the ongoing danger of religious, ethnic, or other persecution,** and/or cannot safely remain in neighboring countries. UNHCR has identified a range of Syrian refugees in need of resettlement including: members of religious and ethnic minority groups, including those at risk due to conflict with the Sunni majority, such as Kurds or Yazidis; persons contravening strict Islamic rules, including secular individuals who take a stand against an overly strict role of religion in public life; LGBTQI+ refugees; refugees at risk due to fighting between Turkish-affiliated armed groups and the Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria targeting civilians; women and girls with specific risk profiles, including victims of forced marriage, domestic violence, sexual violence and single mothers without male “protection.” UNHCR has [explained](#) that resettlement availability for some will not deter those choosing to return to Syria.

### **Strong Goal for Fiscal 2026**

A strong U.S. resettlement goal in 2026 will save lives, fulfill U.S. commitments, and demonstrate that the U.S. honors its promises to people who placed their trust in us. The United States should set a fiscal year 2026 level of 125,000 refugees in order to fulfill its commitment to refugees stranded in the U.S. pipeline and to better respond to the very real global resettlement needs. About 120,000 people who had been conditionally approved for resettlement were stranded

overseas in dangerous conditions in the wake of the Trump administration's executive order freezing U.S. refugee resettlement. Thousands of Afghans who had worked with the United States or had other U.S. ties were in the U.S. pipeline at the time the resettlement ban was issued. In Pakistan, UNHCR estimates that approximately 215,000 refugees, almost all from Afghanistan, require resettlement.

Globally, UNHCR has [assessed](#) that over 2.5 million refugees around the world are in need of resettlement in 2026. In its March, 2025 annual report, USCIRF recommended that the United States "[r]esettle refugees who have fled countries with the most egregious forms of religious persecution, in cooperation with like-minded countries and through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and other humanitarian protection programs, and maintain a robust annual USRAP admissions ceiling for refugees in order to contribute to alleviating the ongoing crisis involving around 43.7 million refugees worldwide—many of whom escaped religious persecution."