

Executive Order on Refugee Resettlement

January 2025

What is an executive order (EO)?

An [executive order](#) is a written directive that assigns actions on specific issues to various federal departments. An executive order uses the President's [executive authority](#) and is outside of legislation approved by Congress. All executive orders must be published in the Federal Register with certain exceptions.

What is the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program?

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), formalized by the Refugee Act of 1980, is a public-private partnership between the federal government, states and localities, and nonprofit partners to vet, process, resettle, and support arriving refugees.

What is the process for refugees to come to the United States?

Refugees pass rigorous background and health checks and are interviewed overseas to determine their status as a refugee facing persecution in their home countries.

Through the USRAP, the U.S. federal government partners with nonprofit organizations to provide integration support to refugees, such as English language classes and job training, to ensure their self-sufficiency.

What is the EO that Trump signed on resettlement? What does it do?

"[Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program](#)" is an executive order signed by President Trump on January 20, 2025. The EO indefinitely suspends the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program on January 27 at 12:01 A.M. Eastern. After that time, refugees will not be admitted or resettled into the country except in case-by-case exceptions. No decisions on refugee applications will occur during the suspension.

How long will refugee admissions be suspended under this EO?

The USRAP suspension is indefinite. Within 90 days of the January 20 executive order, the Secretaries of Homeland Security (DHS) and State will submit a report through the Homeland Security Advisor to the President to advise on whether a resumption of refugee arrivals is in the national interest. The Secretaries of Homeland Security and State will continue submitting reports on a potential USRAP resumption every 90 days until the President determines a resumption is in the national interest.

What will determine if the program is resumed?

Section 2 of the order says U.S. policy on refugees must:

- Ensure the public safety and national security of the United States

- Only admit refugees who can “fully and appropriately assimilate” into the country
- Ensure that U.S. taxpayer resources are preserved
- Grant state and local jurisdictions a role in the process of determining refugee placement and resettlement

The Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, must weigh these factors in their recommendation to the President through the Homeland Security Advisor that USRAP admissions be resumed.

How will exceptions to the suspension of refugee arrivals be granted?

The Secretaries of State and Homeland Security may jointly decide to admit refugees to the United States on a case-by-case basis if they determine their entry is in the national interest and does not pose a threat to U.S. security or welfare. It is unclear how this process will be implemented.

This EO discusses state and local engagement in resettlement. What does that mean?

Under the USRAP, the federal government requires resettlement agencies to formally consult with local stakeholders in the resettlement process to help coordinate systems for new arrivals, such as schools and health care. These consultations already take place formally on a quarterly basis and informally on a continuous basis in accordance with [federal law](#). The EO calls for a proposal to encourage greater state and local involvement in the process for determining refugee placement or resettlement.

Has this sort of suspension occurred before?

President Trump issued a similar pause for the refugee program upon taking office in January 2017 through Executive Order 13769, “[Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States](#).”

What was the impact of EO 13769 on the USRAP?

EO 13769 sought to suspend all refugee admissions for 120 days. EO 13769—and its subsequent iterations—resulted in a weaker refugee resettlement system.

Was there litigation related to the first Trump administration’s EO?

EO 13769 was initially blocked in court but still resulted in canceled flights and reduced resettlement. It was rescinded and replaced by a new order amid the legal challenges.

Could there be litigation on this Executive Order?

Yes. Litigation could be undertaken by an impacted refugee, their family, or possibly even an impacted organization.

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