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## **Syrian refugees: U.S. was not doing its ‘fair share’ before Trump shut the door**

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Prior to President Donald Trump’s executive order indefinitely banning Syrian refugees, the U.S. took in fewer than 17,000 refugees out of 4.9 million registered by the U.N.

The number of people demonstrating at airports across the U.S. over the weekend exceeded – by a lot – the number of refugees resettled in the U.S.

“The refugees we have accepted represent less than one-third of a percent of the Syrian refugees in the world,” Noah Gottschalk, senior humanitarian policy adviser for Oxfam America, told Humanosphere. “The rhetoric of politicians to justify their anti-refugee policies has been deliberately manipulative. It’s time for that to stop.”

The U.S. is not doing its “fair share” when it comes to resettling Syrian refugees, according to an Oxfam [analysis](#). It’s not alone. Wealthy countries have resettled less than 3 percent of the 4.9 million Syrian refugees [registered](#) by the U.N. The majority are living in neighboring countries Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Oxfam argued that wealthy countries should take in at least 10 percent of the total to relieve the pressure on Syria’s neighbors. With more than 1 million Syrian refugees, the group is now 20 percent of Lebanon’s total population. The U.S. has a population more than 60 times bigger than Lebanon but resettled fewer than 17,000 Syrians. It is roughly 10 percent of the total Syrian refugees the U.S. should take in, according to Oxfam.

“For a long time, Boise, Idaho, accepted more Syrian refugees than New York City and Los Angeles combined,” said Gottschalk.

A conference in London last February paved a new path for the international community to respond to the Syria crisis. Governments and other groups pledged \$6 billion for 2016 and an additional \$6.1 billion for 2017 to 2020 in humanitarian assistance. There was a recognition that more needed to be done to help refugees, but pledges to increase the number of people resettled [did not materialize](#).

Actions over the past year have restricted entry to refugees and migrants. A criticized deal between the European Union and Turkey to stem the flow of people to Greece led to an increase in crossings elsewhere and the deadliest year for migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean. Backlash spread across Europe. Sweden reduced the number of refugees it resettles and Hungary's border closures mean some 6,400 refugees are stuck in the middle of winter.

Trump's executive order is yet another blow to Syrian refugees who face extreme hardship. The other provisions in the order that put a hold on other refugee groups and travelers from entering the country harm more people.

"People who say they support refugee resettlement, in general, need to understand this does potentially irreversible harm to the system by shutting it down," said Gottschalk. "It does potential damage to the tens of thousands of refugees in the pipeline from around the world."

Oxfam has worked on refugee resettlement for roughly 40 years and it is not a partisan issue, he said. Presidents from both major parties provided support. President Ronald Regan made a series of statements as a candidate and while in office supporting migrants and refugees.

"Our nation is a nation of immigrants. More than any other country, our strength comes from our own immigrant heritage and our capacity to welcome those from other lands," said Regan in July 1981. "No free and prosperous nation can by itself accommodate all those who seek a better life or flee persecution. We must share this responsibility with other countries."

Gottschalk saw the mass demonstrations in major cities and smaller communities across the U.S. on Sunday as the continued public support for refugees. Politicians from both political parties issued statements condemning the executive order. And the libertarian think tank the Cato Institute published arguments for repealing the immigrant and refugee ban.

"I think that American to support refugee resettlement. It's in our DNA. It's in our culture. It's what makes our country what we are," said Gottschalk.

"We have statements about welcoming refugees going all the way back to George Washington. What I see in these protests is the silent majority being awakened. Once they see these actions threatening our values, they begin to speak up."