



Why is the president banning refugees? What happens next?

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The United States has historically welcomed refugees fleeing war and persecution and given them a chance to rebuild their lives in safety. However, the executive order on refugees signed by President Donald Trump on Jan. 27 suspended the entire refugee resettlement program for 120 days for a security review and barred refugees fleeing the war in Syria from entry to the U.S. indefinitely.

The International Rescue Committee, which has **resettled** 400,000 refugees in the U.S. since World War II, swiftly **called for an “urgent rethink,”** warning that the order would increase the suffering of some of the world's most vulnerable people while doing nothing for American security.

The executive order **resulted in chaos** at airports across the country as refugees who were already in the air when it was signed were detained and in some cases sent back to the crises they had fled. The order hit a roadblock on Jan. 28 when a federal judge in New York issued a temporary stay following a suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of two Iraqi refugees detained at New York's John F. Kennedy airport. This ruling stopped the refugees and others being detained at the airports from being deported.

IRC resettlement and policy experts have answered some of the questions you may have about the executive order:

Why is the White House halting refugee resettlement for 120 days?

The Administration has an unfounded belief that there is no proper security screening for refugees. It says it needs four months to review **existing security procedures.**

But aren't refugees already extremely vetted?

Yes. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group to enter the U.S. The **resettlement process** can take up to 36 months and involves screenings by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense, the State Department and the National Counterterrorism Center / U.S. Intelligence Community.

Refugees undergo biographic and biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic document testing, and in-person interviews. Syrian refugees must go through an additional layer of screening.

Read one Syrian refugee's account of the extremely rigorous vetting process she and her family went through before arriving in the U.S.

See some **myths and facts about refugee resettlement**.

How many people will this order affect?

The Trump Administration policy will exacerbate the suffering of an estimated 60,000 vulnerable refugees who have been security vetted and are awaiting resettlement to the U.S.

Some 65 million people are currently displaced around the world. We are facing the most serious displacement crisis we've known since World War II.

After nearly six years of war in Syria, its neighbors can no longer absorb more refugees. The need for resettlement in safe third states is more necessary than ever — so President Trump's executive order will affect the lives of the few lucky enough to be given this chance in the U.S.

What will happen to refugees already approved for resettlement who haven't yet arrived?

The halt in the resettlement program may force refugees who already went through the rigorous screening process and who were set to arrive in the U.S. soon to instead wait months and even years to go through fingerprinting, interviews, health screenings, and multiple security checks all over again, all while their lives are in danger.

In the wake of the executive order, many vetted refugees bound for the U.S. have been barred from boarding flights overseas, despite holding visas. Until a federal judge issued a temporary halt on deportations under the order on Jan. 28, some were returned to the dangerous situations they were trying to escape.

What does the executive order mean for refugees already in the U.S.?

Refugees already in the U.S. who have been waiting to be reunited with family members still in danger may never have that opportunity, or their reunion may be delayed for months or years.

How many refugees will be admitted in 2017, once resettlement resumes?

The lowest number in a decade: Although the U.S. was scheduled to admit **up to 110,000 refugees** in fiscal year 2017, the Administration plans to slash that number to 50,000.

Why does the executive order ban Syrian refugees, specifically?

On the campaign trail and now in the White House, Trump has made unfounded claims that refugees from war-torn **Syria** are a security threat. He has called them “a Trojan Horse” that would make America vulnerable to terrorism.

In fact, refugees coming to the U.S. are fleeing the same violent extremism that the U.S. and its allies are fighting in the Middle East and elsewhere. Based on recent data, the majority of those selected for resettlement in America are women and children.

Approximately 10,000 of the refugees who arrived in the U.S. in 2016 were from Syria. Syrian refugees must already go through an additional layer of screening on top of the already-rigorous vetting all refugees go through. This "enhanced review" process creates extra review steps with intelligence agencies and Department of Homeland Security officers who have particular expertise and training in conditions in Syria and the Middle East.

These additional reviews must take place before the refugee officer conducts the final in-person interview. This means that not only is there an extra layer of scrutiny — which the government believes is necessary because of the complexity of the conflict in Syria — but the process may also take longer due to this extra step.

This enhanced review makes it even more difficult for those who would do America harm to get through, while making it a more arduous process for all of the innocent refugees.

Are other countries part of the ban?

The executive order bars both citizens and refugees from seven Muslim-majority countries that have been linked to concerns about terrorism from entry into the United States for 90 days. These countries are Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, **Somalia** and **Yemen**. **[Learn more.](#)**

The president has talked about a “Muslim ban.” Is that in the executive order?

The executive order indicates that the U.S. will prioritize religious minorities over all other refugees. Barring refugees from certain countries like Syria and showing a narrow preference for religious minorities is tantamount to a Muslim ban.

What about people from banned groups who have helped the U.S. military?

There are thousands of **Afghans** and **Iraqis** whose lives are at risk because of the assistance they offered U.S. troops stationed in their countries. This Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) population makes up one quarter of all the refugees the IRC would be resettling this year.

Among those with SIV status who arrived shortly after the executive order was signed was an Iraqi interpreter who had worked for the U.S. Army for a decade. He was separated from his wife and children and **detained** at JFK airport in New York until a federal judge ordered his release on Jan. 28 following the ACLU suit.

What's wrong with barring refugees from certain countries or religions if it makes us feel safer?

These bans fly in the face of America's best values of freedom, fairness, and compassion, and they represent an abandonment of America's role as a humanitarian leader.

By relinquishing its responsibility to some of the world's most vulnerable people, the U.S. forgoes its moral authority to call upon **Europe as well as poorer countries** to provide shelter.

Will the refugee ban make America safer?

No. According to the Cato Institute, the chances that a U.S. citizen will be killed by a refugee are one in 3.6 billion; an American is more likely to be killed by lightning than by a terrorist attack executed by a foreigner.

Refugees are already the most vetted group to enter the U.S. and the bans outlined in the executive order will not improve national security.

In fact, barring certain groups from entry because of their religion or country of origin could have the opposite effect: Far from protecting America from extremism, a ban on Syrian and Muslim refugees is a propaganda gift to those who would plot harm to the U.S.

Also—we must remember that support for refugees is not charity; it is a contribution to the global stability on which all countries depend.