

Facts you need to know about refugees

Deanna Pan

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The United States Refugee Act of 1980, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, defines “refugee” as any person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of national origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that in 2015 a record 65.3 million — or one in every 113 people on Earth — displaced from their homes by war, violence or persecution.

According to the [U.S. Department of State](#), less than 1 percent of the world’s refugees are identified by UNHCR as most in need of resettlement to a third country, such as the United States.

Refugees are the "most heavily vetted of any people" who enter the U.S., according to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), a pro-immigration think tank. After UNHCR refers a refugee to the U.S. for resettlement, the average processing time before the U.S. will grant the refugee admission is about 18 to 24 months. During that time, refugees are subjected to multiple background checks, in-person interviews and biometric screenings involving up to eight U.S. government and intelligence agencies.

In fiscal year 2016, the U.S. resettled nearly 85,000 refugees. More than half of them came from the Democratic Republic of Congo (16,370), Syria (12,587), Myanmar (12,347) and Iraq (9,880). In that same period, 350 refugees resettled in South Carolina.

A [study](#) by the conservative-leaning Cato Institute found that of the 3.2 million refugees admitted to the U.S. between 1975 and 2015, only 20 — or roughly 0.00062 percent — became involved in terrorism. Of those 20, just three successfully carried out their attacks. According to [Cato's study](#), the likelihood of being killed by a refugee terrorist on American soil is one in 3.64 billion per year.

President Donald Trump’s executive order suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days for refugees from all countries. Syrian refugees, however, have been banned indefinitely. The order also halves the ceiling on the number of refugees who can enter the U.S. from 110,000 to 50,000 in fiscal year 2017. So far this fiscal year, the U.S. has admitted nearly 30,000 refugees.

The refugee admissions program may resume on May 27 after the Secretary of State, Secretary of Homeland Security and Director of National Intelligence have determined what additional security protocols are necessary to ensure the safety of American citizens.