

State Department Removes 2017 and 2018 US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) FAQs

Website Monitoring Brief

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Sunlight Foundation's Web Integrity Project

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This brief is accompanied by a blog post, "[State Department Removed from Its Website Authoritative Refugee Factsheets Cited in Court Filings.](#)"

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is an interagency program, managed by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the State Department, through which refugees outside the United States are resettled to the United States.¹ The Bureau publishes a "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs" factsheet on their website, with a new factsheet often being released each year or two containing updated statistics or descriptions. The content and format of the FAQ factsheets dates back to the George W. Bush administration.

The 2017 and 2018 versions of the FAQ factsheet were removed from the state.gov website. The 2018 version, which was available online for four or five months, was removed in May or June of 2018. Prior, the 2017 version had been removed (in December 2017 or January 2018).

Currently, there are no USRAP FAQ factsheets on state.gov. The FAQ factsheets were important documents, lacking political or legalistic language, that have been cited numerous times, including as authorities in amicus curiae briefs of organizations supporting judicial challenges to President Trump's immigration-related executive orders.

Recent History of USRAP

USRAP has had a relatively tumultuous few years under the Trump administration. Just days after his inauguration, on January 27, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order, which, among other immigration-related actions, purported to suspend USRAP for 120 days, mandate a review of the program's vetting processes, prohibit the admission of Syrian nationals, and limit the number of refugee admissions to 50,000 ([Executive Order 13769](#)). The admission ceiling

¹ Liam Thornton [Q&A: what legal obligation does the US have to accept refugees?](#) *The Conversation* (January 27, 2017).

was a significant reduction from previous years. In fiscal year 2016, the U.S. [resettled 84,995 refugees](#) as part of the USRAP program. For fiscal year 2017, the Obama administration had initially [set a ceiling of 110,000](#) refugees.

The implementation of Executive Order 13769 was delayed by litigation, and President Trump signed another executive order in March 2017 ([Executive Order 13780](#)). EO 13780 contained provisions to the same effect as EO 13679 (at least as they related to USRAP), but in terms that addressed some of the concerns expressed by the judiciary. After a series of court challenges, the Department of State [suspended the USRAP program](#) for 120 days on June 28, 2017.

Trump ordered USRAP resumed on October 24, 2017, with additional screening or “vetting” measures in place ([Executive Order 13815](#)). The USRAP program resumed and the new vetting and security measures were announced by the Department of Homeland Security in [October 2017](#) and [January 2018](#). A total of 53,716 refugees were resettled as part of USRAP in FY2017, falling to 22,491 in FY2018. The FY2019 quota was set at 30,000.²

Removal of USRAP FAQ factsheets from the State Department Website

A lengthy question-and-answer factsheet containing answers to fifteen questions, entitled “[U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs](#)” ([Webpage 1](#)), was removed from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration website on state.gov between [May 21, 2018](#) and [June 21, 2018](#). The FAQ factsheet as the 2018 version (dated February 1, 2018 and first captured by the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine on [February 18, 2018](#)) of a regularly published set of answers to questions about the rules and processes relating to the resettlement of refugees in the United States.

Earlier, the 2017 version of the FAQ factsheet was removed. The 2017 version of the “[U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs](#)” ([Webpage 2](#)) was identical to the 2018 version save its date and the presence of the sentence “Our newest program is a program for Central American Minors (the CAM program) with a lawfully present parent in the United States”. The 2017 FAQ factsheet was removed between [December 28, 2017](#) and [January 31, 2018](#). Initially, the URL returned an “access denied” (403) error, but by [May 21, 2018](#) a redirect was established to the 2018 FAQ factsheet. The 2017 FAQ factsheet was dated January 20, 2017 (the first day of the Trump administration) and was first captured by the Wayback Machine on [January 22, 2017](#).

The removal of both the 2017 and 2018 FAQ factsheets means that there is no USRAP FAQ factsheet on state.gov.

Importance of the USRAP FAQ factsheets

The USRAP FAQ factsheets were presented in a way that avoided politicized language and legalese, and appeared to be intended for broad public consumption. Based on how often the

² Congressional Research Service [Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy](#) (Updated December 18, 2018).

FAQ factsheets were cited, they were likely well-respected and authoritative statements about USRAP.

The 2018 FAQ factsheet was only online for four or five months, but, even in that short time, a Google search of the URL reveals that it was cited by numerous academic publications. The 2018 FAQ factsheet was cited in peer reviewed articles about [policy](#), [medical care for refugees](#), and [family-professional partnerships](#), as well as a law review article on [refugee children](#) and edited collections about the [medical care of underserved populations](#) and [developmental disabilities](#). The 2018 FAQ factsheet was also cited in [a senior thesis](#), [a master's thesis on dance/movement therapy](#), and a [Ph.D. dissertation in nursing](#). It was also cited by think tanks, including the [Migration Policy Institute Europe](#) (in research funded by the European Union) and the [Center for Migration Studies](#).

The 2017 FAQ factsheet, which was available online for about a year, was even more extensively cited in academia and was a key authority relied on in amicus curiae briefs of organizations supporting judicial challenges to President Trump's immigration-related executive orders. The first few pages of (many) Google search results reveal these citations:

- **Peer-reviewed articles:** Articles in the [International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling](#) and [Migration Studies – Review of Polish Diaspora](#).
- **Law review articles:** Articles from the [Harvard Law Review](#) and [Wyoming Law Review](#).
- **Edited collections:** Articles in edited collections on [civic education](#) and [education of refugees](#).
- **Theses:** A senior thesis on [resettlement of Hmong refugees in Minnesota](#), master's theses on [U.S. refugee policy](#) and [resettlement of refugee children](#).
- **Think tank and policy analyses:** Analysis from the [Cato Institute](#), a discussion paper from the [Institute of Labor Economics](#), and a research paper from the [Penn Institute for Urban Research](#).
- **State government:** Minnesota's Office of the Legislative Auditor cites a lengthy passage in a [special review of data available on the fiscal impact of refugee resettlement](#).
- **Materials from groups providing support to refugees:** A guide from the [Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area](#) and a guide from [Tent](#) about hiring refugees.
- **Amicus curiae briefs:**
 - Challenging EO 13,769 in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit:
 - [Interfaith group of religious and interreligious organizations](#)
 - Challenging EO 13,769 in the U.S. District Court, District of Columbia:
 - [HIAS](#)
 - Challenging EO 13,769 in the U.S. District Court, Southern Maryland Division:
 - [Interfaith group of religious and interreligious organizations](#)
 - Challenging EO 13,769 in the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York:
 - [Former National Security Officials](#)
 - [Interfaith group of religious and interreligious organizations](#)
 - Challenging EO 13,780 in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit

- [HIAS, International Rescue Committee, and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#)
- [American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children](#)
- [Human Rights First](#)
- Challenging EO 13,780 in the U.S. District Court, Southern Maryland Division:
 - [Former National Security Officials](#)

History of the USRAP FAQ factsheets on State Department Website

The "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs" factsheets were detailed, but relatively basic, statements of the rules and processes around refugee resettlement in the United States. The 2017 and 2018 versions provided answers to these questions:

- "What is the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and which agencies participate in it?"
- "Who exactly is eligible for refugee resettlement in the U.S.?"
- "Who are the "most vulnerable" refugees that the United States admits?"
- "How does the U.S. Government decide who qualifies for refugee status under this program and who doesn't?"
- "How does the USRAP work overseas? Can you provide an overview?"
- "What happens to refugees once they are admitted to the U.S.? Who works with them domestically?"
- "How much time does the entire refugee resettlement process typically take?"
- "Are there educational or language requirements for the refugees the U.S. Government considers for admission?"
- "Where do the UNHCR and DHS interviews take place?"
- "How much does the resettlement program cost?"
- "Does the Department of State track refugees once they enter the U.S.?"
- "Do potential or current refugee resettlement communities have a say in where and whether refugees are resettled in their communities?"
- "Can refugees' nuclear and/or extended family join them? Can refugees petition for other family members to join them after they arrive in the U.S.?"
- "Do refugees automatically become U.S. citizens?"
- "Can you describe the security screening process in more detail?"

The content on the USRAP FAQ factsheets originated in material posted on the "[Refugee Admissions and Resettlement](#)" page during an overhaul of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration website at the end of the George W. Bush administration. The overhaul took place between [September 25, 2008](#) and [October 14, 2008](#) and introduced answers to the following questions on the "[Refugee Admissions and Resettlement](#)" page:

- "Who exactly is eligible for resettlement?"
- "Tell me more about how the resettlement program works."
- "How long will the whole process take?"

- “Is this like a visa lottery? How do you decide who gets in and who doesn’t?”
- “Is my family eligible to join me? Nuclear and extended family?”
- “What if someone in my family doesn’t get the visa? Can he or she reapply?”
- “If I go to the US as a refugee, do I automatically become a US citizen?”
- “What benefits do I get in the US?”
- “Where can I get more advice about applying for resettlement?”

The Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (IAWM) captures the page’s evolution. The content was adopted (see: IAWM from [November 2, 2009](#)), expanded ([July 2, 2011](#)), and adapted into a stand-alone FAQ factsheet during the Obama administration. The stand-alone FAQ factsheet was republished regularly with updated and gradually expanding information. Obama administration FAQ factsheets are stored in the State Department’s archived [2009 - 2017 website](#):

1. 2013 [“U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs”](#)
2. 2014 [“U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs”](#)
3. 2016 [“U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs”](#)

The 2017 FAQ factsheet, presumably drafted during the Obama administration, contains more content than previous years, with additional detail about security screening, the cost of the program, and the rarity of resettlement from the country of first refuge. The 2017 FAQ factsheet appears to be written for Americans, which is a different audience than previous versions, which appeared to be aimed at potential applicants.

Technical Documentation

Note: *This brief links to captures of pages from the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (IAWM). IAWM displays time in GMT, but WIP reports dates and times in EST/EDT (GMT -5/GMT -4).*

Agency details: According to [its website](#), the Department of State “leads America’s foreign policy through diplomacy, advocacy, and assistance by advancing the interests of the American people, their safety and economic prosperity.” The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, a bureau within the Department of State, [describes its mission](#) as promoting “U.S. interests by providing protection, easing suffering, and resolving the plight of persecuted and forcibly displaced people around the world.” The Bureau manages the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which is an interagency program that resettles refugees in the United States.

Communications about changes: No known communication.

Known archives: The webpages detailed in this brief have been archived as part of the [Library of Congress Web Archives Collection](#).

Webpage 1: “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs” (2018)

- URL: <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2018/277838.htm>
- Changes occurred between [May 21, 2018](#) and [June 21, 2018](#).
- An archived version of the page from April 23, 2018, collected as part of the Library of Congress Web Archives Collection is available at <http://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20180423222410/https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2018/277838.htm>.

Webpage 1 Details:

1. Between [May 21, 2018](#) and [June 21, 2018](#), the "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs", dated February 1, 2018, was removed from the Department of State website:
 - a. Webpage 1 was first captured by the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine on [February 18, 2018](#).
 - b. The page contained questions and answers to fifteen questions related to the administration of USRAP.
 - c. After the removal of the factsheet, the URL for the page [led to a notice](#) that “The page you’re looking for may have been moved or renamed.”
 - i. On [May 15, 2019](#), state.gov was overhauled and the URL for Webpage 1 began [URL leading to a notice stating](#):

“We apologize for the inconvenience... We recently redesigned State.gov. Many pages are now on our most recent Archive page. Please use our search, browse further via our navigation, or return to the Home page. Still can’t find it? Send us a message using our Contact Us form. A URL is helpful when reporting site problems. Thank you for visiting State.gov.”
 - ii. After the Web Integrity Project sought comment from the State Department on June 19, 2019, the State Department established a redirect from Webpage 1 to the “State.gov Website Modernization” page. (See the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine capture from [June 20, 2019](#).)

Screenshot 1: The top portion of the 2018 “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs” page on [May 21, 2018](#), captured by the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine.

INTERNET ARCHIVE Wayback Machine <https://www.state.gov/jprm/releases/factsheets/2018/277838.htm> Go FEB MAY AUG 21 2018 2019

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U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs

Fact Sheet
BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION
February 1, 2018

What is the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and which agencies participate in it?

Every year, the United States provides opportunities to thousands of the world's most vulnerable refugees to resettle in the U.S., in a program endorsed by each President annually since 1980 through a Presidential Determination and notification to Congress. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is in keeping with our proud history of being a nation of immigrants and refugees, and is an important, enduring demonstration of our commitment to international humanitarian principles.

The United States is the largest refugee resettlement country in the world, admitting approximately two-thirds of all refugee resettlement referrals worldwide each year.

The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is committed to the effectiveness of the USRAP, and regularly assesses refugee populations worldwide to maintain the integrity of the program and to ensure that the program is responsive to the resettlement needs of the most vulnerable refugees.

While the Department of State manages the overall USRAP, multiple federal government agencies are involved in the refugee admissions and resettlement process, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), specifically U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

The USRAP has over thirty years of experience screening and admitting refugees. No traveler to the United States is subject to more rigorous security screening than the refugees the U.S. Government considers for admission. Only after the U.S. Government's rigorous and lengthy security screening process has been completed and an applicant is not found to pose a threat does the U.S. Government grant that individual refugee admission to the U.S. Security screening of all refugees involves multiple U.S. agencies, including the Departments of State, Homeland Security (DHS), and Defense, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, The National Counterterrorism Center, the Terrorist Screening Center, and two federal intelligence agencies.

Who exactly is eligible for refugee resettlement in the U.S.?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for providing life-saving assistance to refugees around the world. Many of the world's refugees are unable to return home or permanently integrate into the country where they have sought refuge (known as the country of first asylum). For a small number, generally less than one percent, UNHCR identifies those refugees who are most in need of resettlement to a third country – typically more developed countries, further from conflict regions, such as the United States.

UNHCR uses six criteria to determine if a refugee is an appropriate candidate for third country resettlement. For more information on UNHCR standards and criteria for determining resettlement as the appropriate solution for refugees, please refer to the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, available online [here](#).

Who are the “most vulnerable” refugees that the United States admits?

There is no standard profile. Vulnerability is assessed on a case by case basis, and is generally understood as individuals who are not able to safely and voluntarily return home, are not thriving in their country of first asylum, and are not expected to be able to locally integrate in that country in the future.

Extremely vulnerable individuals may include female-headed households, victims of torture or violence, religious minorities, LGBT refugees, or people who need medical care that they cannot receive in their country of origin or the country of first asylum.

How does the U.S. Government decide who qualifies for refugee status under this program and who doesn't?

Webpage 2: “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs” (2017)

- URL: <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2017/266447.htm>
- Changes occurred between [December 28, 2017](#) and [January 31, 2018](#).
- An archived version of the page from August 25, 2017, collected as part of the Library of Congress Web Archives Collection is available at <http://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20170825004714/https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2017/266447.htm>.
- There are no known public federal web archives of Webpage 2. Private nonprofit Internet Archive preserves versions of the page on its [Wayback Machine](#).

Webpage 2 Details:

1. Between [December 28, 2017](#) and [January 31, 2018](#), the "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs" page, dated January 20, 2017, was removed from the Department of State website:
 - a. Webpage 2 was first captured by the Wayback Machine on [January 22, 2017](#).
 - b. The page contained questions and answers to fifteen questions related to the administration of USRAP.
 - c. Webpage 2 was identical to [Webpage 1](#), save its date and the presence of the sentence “Our newest program is a program for Central American Minors (the CAM program) with a lawfully present parent in the United States.”
 - d. The URL for the page initially led to an “[access denied](#)” (403) error, but by [May 21, 2018](#) a redirect was established to Webpage 1.
 - i. After the removal of Webpage 1 (by June 21, 2018), [the URL for Webpage 2 continued to redirect to Webpage 1](#), which contained the notice saying “The page you’re looking for may have been moved or renamed.”
 - ii. On [May 15, 2019](#), state.gov was overhauled. [The URL for Webpage 2 continued to redirect to Webpage 1](#), which contained a notice stating:

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 - iii. After the Web Integrity Project sought comment from the State Department on June 19, 2019, the State Department established a redirect from Webpage 2 to the “State.gov Website Modernization” page. (See the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine capture from [June 20, 2019](#).)

Screenshot 2: The top portion of the 2017 “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs” page on [December 28, 2017](https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2017/266447.htm), captured by the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine.

INTERNET ARCHIVE
Wayback Machine

https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2017/266447.htm

366 captures
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How does the U.S. Government decide who qualifies for refugee status under this program and who doesn’t?



**Web Integrity
Project**

The **Web Integrity Project** is a project of the Sunlight Foundation.

Our mission is to monitor changes to government websites, holding our government accountable by revealing shifts in public information and access to web resources, as well as changes in stated policies and priorities. We work with journalists to make our findings public, and we produce policy analyses to evaluate and recommend changes to web governance practices and help ensure access to valuable web resources.

We would like to thank our team of volunteers and our partners at the [Internet Archive's Wayback Machine](#).