

# Presidential Determination and Refugee Admissions

August 2019



Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.

A **refugee** is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>1</sup>

## Global Refugee Numbers

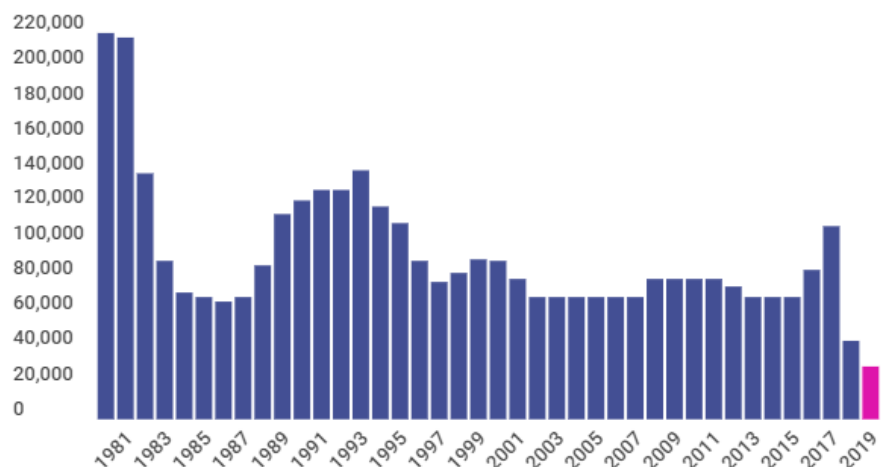
The world is facing the worst refugee crisis in global history. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there are **more than 70.8 million** forcibly displaced people worldwide. Of that, **25.9 million are refugees**, about half of whom are children under the age of 18. UNHCR has stated that 1.44 million refugees will be in urgent need of resettlement in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

## The Presidential Determination

The United States has always had a proud tradition of welcoming refugees. This country was founded as a safe haven for people escaping religious persecution, and time and time again, refugees have found freedom and prosperity in the U.S. The United States system for deciding how many refugees to resettle each year was formally established nearly four decades ago when Congress unanimously passed **The Refugee Act of 1980**.<sup>3</sup>

The legislation provided a roadmap for what we now call the “Presidential Determination,” or simply the “PD,” and codified America’s commitment to protecting refugees. The law states that before the beginning of each new fiscal year (October 1), the President must consult with Congress to issue a Presidential Determination, or the number of refugees that can be resettled in the United States that fiscal year. This PD does not dictate how many refugees will end up arriving, but it sets a goal for the government and refugee resettlement agencies like HIAS to strive to reach together.

## Presidential Determination 1980-2019



Since 1980, the **average PD has been set at 96,229 refugees**. The average number of actual arrivals each year has been 85,000. Prior to 2018, the PD only dipped below 70,000 once, in 1986, when it

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (2019). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018*.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/the-refugee-act>

was set at 67,000. The past two years, however, have seen historically low PD numbers. The 2018 PD was 45,000, and only 22,491 refugees actually arrived to the U.S. **The 2019 PD is 30,000, the lowest in USRAP's history.**

### **More than Numbers**

The PD is about more than numbers. Through resettlement, America offers safety and freedom to refugees who have left everything behind. Less than one percent of the more than 20 million refugees in the world will end up being resettled in a third country. In the face of the largest global refugee crisis in history, the PD directly represents the United States' capacity for offering safe haven to refugees.

The Presidential Determination is also about America's international leadership. America has a proud legacy of welcoming refugees and the rest of the world pays attention to the example we set. Because so many other countries are currently hosting massive numbers of refugees and displaced people, the United States must share some responsibility in order for other countries to continue doing their part.

*Founded in the 1880s to help resettle Jews fleeing persecution, HIAS is the world's oldest refugee agency. Today, guided by our Jewish values and history, we bring more than 130 years of expertise to our work providing services to all refugees in need of assistance, regardless of their national, ethnic, or religious background. To learn more about our work visit us at [HIAS.org](https://www.hias.org)*