

# Trump administration announces record low cap on refugees allowed into the US

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On Monday, the Trump administration announced it will be setting the cap on the number of refugees allowed into United States in the fiscal year 2019 at 30,000. This marks a record low for the 43-year old refugee resettlement program, following the earlier historic low in 2018 of just 45,000 refugees, already less than half of the cap of 115,000 in 2017. As of now, with less than two weeks to go before the end of the fiscal year, the United States is on track to admit less than 21,000 refugees.

The US is drastically reducing its refugee intake at a time when the United Nations has reported an all-time high of more than 68 million displaced people, including 25 million refugees. A majority of refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan. As of this year, it is reported that nearly 5 million Syrians live as refugees in neighboring countries, such as Lebanon and Turkey. In 2018, the United States accepted just 60 Syrian refugees, and is on track to admit 744 Afghans and 12 South Sudanese.

Announcing the new limit on Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo defended the administration's position, citing "America's generosity" in providing "billions of dollars in aid" and claiming that most refugees in any case prefer to stay closer to their home countries rather than "come to America." Pompeo also cynically declared that it was more important to end conflicts than accept new refugees.

Given the role of American imperialism in destabilizing the Middle East and stoking the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan, such statements can only be treated with absolute contempt. The callousness of reducing refugee resettlement caps at a time of increasing and acute global need has absolutely nothing to do with vague claims of "generosity" or concern for where refugees would like to be resettled. This is in fact

yet another step in Trump's racist war against immigrants that is being waged with increasing brutality.

Trying to present the reduction as a positive measure, Pompeo declared that the administration would use resources freed up from refugee resettlement to facilitate the asylum adjudication process. As of now, there are nearly 800,000 asylum seekers in the United States whose applications have not been processed. The Trump administration claims it will process 280,000 applications in 2019.

Rather than let in more people, Pompeo stated the government would focus on those who were already in the country "in consideration of both US national security interests and the urgent need to restore integrity to our overwhelmed asylum system...The ultimate goal is the best possible care and safety of these people in need, and our approach is designed to achieve this noble objective...We are and continue to be the most generous nation in the world."

The correlation that Pompeo and supporters of the Trump administration seek to make between refugees and asylum seekers is a false equivalence. The main commonality between the two groups is that they are comprised largely of working class men and women who have been driven from their homes due to war, violence and brutal poverty. However, as legal categories, these are very distinct groups. Refugees are those whose applications are vetted and who are granted admission to a country while abroad, whereas asylum seekers are those who enter the country prior to making an application. Unlike with refugees, there is no official cap on asylum seekers.

In the United States, the resources and funding for the two streams of immigrants has historically been distinct. While the State Department handles refugee

admissions, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice process asylum applications. However, hardliners in the Trump administration, foremost the fascistic senior policy advisor Stephen Miller, have consistently tried to link the two within a broader anti-immigrant framework.

Asylum seekers in the United States are primarily from Central and South America—the undocumented migrants who have been the primary targets of the cruel and inhumane immigration regime that is taking shape under the Trump administration.

In his prepared statement to the press, Pompeo said that the 30,000 cap “must be considered in the context of the many other forms of protection and assistance offered by the United States,” and that while “some would categorize the refugee ceiling as the sole barometer of America's commitment to vulnerable people around the world,” that “would be wrong.”

The irony of Pompeo’s statement is hard to miss. The Trump administration has systematically undermined most of the existing forms of “protections and assistance” for vulnerable populations at all levels.

In addition to all its other well-documented attacks, the administration has also narrowed the definition of who qualifies for asylum, going so far as to curtail the Temporary Protected Status program for over 428,000 immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan. Given this, to claim that reducing the number of refugees allowed into the country will help facilitate better treatment of asylum seekers is an outright lie.

While the lowering of the cap on refugees may not be the “sole barometer,” it definitely underscores the administration’s commitment to the ongoing war on immigrants and the working class as a whole.



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