

## The Refugee and Travel Bans: One Year Later

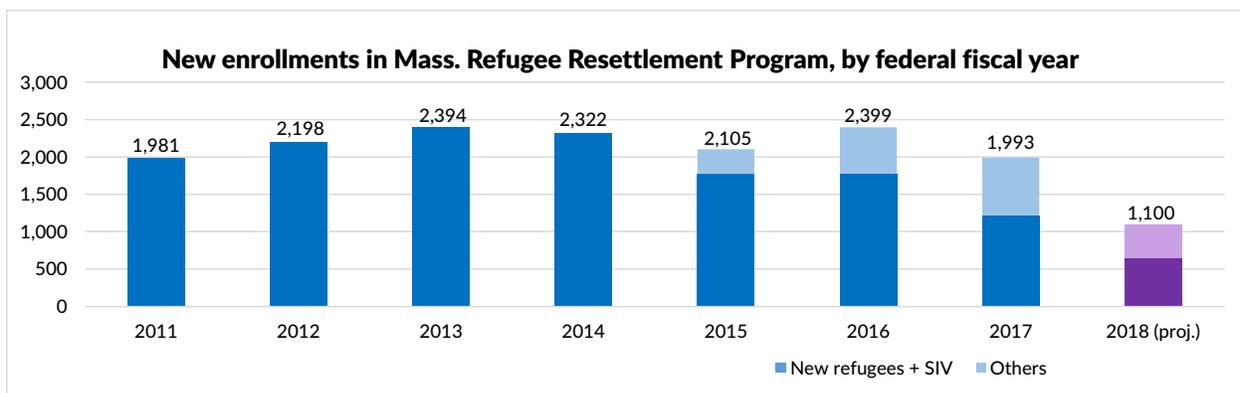
On January 27, 2017, President Trump barred citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries – and all refugees – from entering the U.S., with the stated goal to “protect the American people from terrorist attacks.”<sup>1</sup> Thousands of protesters took to the streets and filled airports, including Boston Logan, to show solidarity and provide legal assistance to detained travelers.

A year of heated court battles ensued, going all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In response to legal challenges and court rulings, a second version of the ban was issued in March, then a third in September – this time covering citizens of Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Chad and North Korea, plus some Venezuelans.<sup>2</sup> A challenge to that version is pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Refugee admissions, which were stopped for four months starting in June, resumed in late October, but with enhanced security procedures<sup>3</sup> and a ceiling of 45,000 for fiscal 2018 – the lowest cap since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980.<sup>4</sup> This was a sharp turnabout from President Obama’s decision to set the fiscal 2017 cap at 110,000, up from 85,000 in fiscal 2016, in recognition of the global refugee crisis.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the Trump administration has sought to limit the rights of asylum-seekers, detaining even families and children and deriding the protections they’re entitled to as “loopholes.”<sup>6</sup> Another key humanitarian program, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), is being dismantled, with Nicaraguans, Sudanese, Haitians and Salvadorans all set to lose protection, and no new applications from Syrians being accepted.<sup>7</sup>

On the ground, the refugee situation is even worse. The International Rescue Committee has estimated that based on current trends, just over 21,000 refugees will actually be resettled in fiscal 2018.<sup>8</sup> The Mass. Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI), which resettled 1,219 refugees in fiscal 2017 – down from 1,777 in 2016 – and was allocated 955 spots for 2018, **now expects to resettle only 650 refugees this fiscal year.**<sup>9</sup>



Source: Personal communication by Falah Hashem, ORI Chief of Staff. Totals at top, and dark bars for 2011–2014, include refugees as well as Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Cuban/Haitian entrants, secondary migrants, trafficking victims and asylees. For 2015–2018, we have disaggregated data enabling us to distinguish between refugees and SIVs, and all others.<sup>10</sup>

All of this comes at a time when the world is witnessing the **highest levels of displacement on record**. The UN Refugee Agency reports that 65.6 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of 2016, including 22.5 million refugees – yet only 189,300 refugees were resettled in 2016.<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of displaced people are living in camps or other precarious conditions, mainly in countries close to their homeland.

**We’re at a critical moment.** We cannot sit quietly as our federal government shuts the door on desperate people, demonizes immigrants and refugees, and openly promotes Islamophobia and all forms of bigotry. This is why MIRA has joined the nationwide **We Are All America** campaign, to affirm our historical role in refugee protection and work to build broad public support for those seeking freedom and safety in the U.S.

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The We Are All America Coalition has developed a platform for protecting refugees, upholding human rights and restoring core American values, with the goal of building strong bipartisan support for inclusive and welcoming policies. The platform includes actions on multiple levels: welcoming refugees; protecting asylum-seekers; advocating for TPS holders; keeping families together; supporting all newcomers regardless of religion, race or country of origin; building inclusive communities; advancing opportunities for newcomers; uplifting the experiences and leadership of those most impacted; and organizing grassroots support.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Massachusetts Refugee Resettlement Program: A snapshot<sup>13</sup>**

Our Commonwealth's refugee resettlement program is housed in the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI). Working closely with agencies across the state, it coordinates a range of services for refugees, asylees, and others who have been granted protection by the U.S. government.

In federal fiscal year 2017, the program newly enrolled 1,219 refugees and 774 people with other qualifying statuses. They came from all around the world, with the largest shares from Haiti (29%), Iraq (12%), Bhutan (8%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (7%), Somalia (7%), Syria (7%) and Ukraine (6%).

Two-thirds of the refugees resettled in fiscal 2017 already had family in Massachusetts – up from half or less in the two previous years. Most of those resettled (62%) were aged 18–50; another 23% were aged 5–17, while much smaller numbers were under 5 or older than 50.

New arrivals are resettled all across the state, with the distribution changing slightly year by year. In fiscal 2017, 61% of new arrivals were resettled in Eastern Mass., 17% in Central Mass., and 22% in Western Mass. The cities with the largest shares of resettlements were Boston (18%), Worcester (17%), Lowell (8%), Springfield (8%), West Springfield (6%), Lynn (5%) and Westfield (5%).

*This briefing was written by Marion Davis for a roundtable discussion in Boston on February 5, 2018, as part of a We Are All America Week of Action.*

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<sup>1</sup> "Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," White House, Jan. 27, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Presidential Proclamation Enhancing Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry Into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public-Safety Threats," White House, Sept. 24, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-enhancing-vetting-capabilities-processes-detecting-attempted-entry-united-states-terrorists-public-safety-threats/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Improved Security Procedures for Refugees Entering the United States," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Oct. 24, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/10/24/improved-security-procedures-refugees-entering-united-states>.

<sup>4</sup> "Trump Administration To Drop Refugee Cap To 45,000, Lowest In Years," NPR News, Sept. 27, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/2017/09/27/554046980/trump-administration-to-drop-refugee-cap-to-45-000-lowest-in-years>.

<sup>5</sup> "Remarks by President Obama at Leaders Summit on Refugees," White House, Sept. 20, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/20/remarks-president-obama-leaders-summit-refugees>.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., "Immigrant and refugee children and families are not 'loopholes'," Kids in Need of Defense, Jan. 30, 2018, <https://supportkind.org/media/immigrant-refugee-children-families-not-loopholes/>.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview from MIRA and the latest TPS updates, see <http://www.miracoalition.org/tps>.

<sup>8</sup> "IRC: Trump Administration on Track to Miss Own Target for Refugee Admissions," International Rescue Committee, Jan. 25, 2017, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-trump-administration-track-miss-own-target-refugee-admissions>.

<sup>9</sup> Numbers provided by Falah Hashem, ORI Chief of Staff, via personal communication. Due to small differences in reporting, these numbers do not perfectly correspond with U.S. Department of State data posted at <http://ireports.wrapsnet.org>, though the trend lines are clearly aligned. Totals include Special Immigrant Visa holders from Iraq and Afghanistan, but not Cuban/Haitian entrants, secondary migrants, trafficking victims or asylees, none of which fall under the 955 allocation (see next note).

<sup>10</sup> A refugee is defined as a person who cannot return to his or her country because of well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. A refugee receives this status before entering the U.S. Asylees meet the same definition, but are already within the U.S. when they apply for and receive asylum. Their immediate family may be granted derivative asylee status overseas. In addition to these two categories, ORI oversees the resettlement of certain Cuban and Haitian nationals; Vietnamese children fathered by a U.S. citizen and born in 1962–1976; certified victims of severe forms of trafficking; and certain Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrants who were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government.

<sup>11</sup> See UN Refugee Agency, Figures At A Glance, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

<sup>12</sup> See We Are All America, <http://www.weareallusa.org/platform>.

<sup>13</sup> Numbers provided by Falah Hashem, ORI Chief of Staff, via personal communication.