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*"With over 65 million refugees worldwide, why are we still waiting for our new community members?"*

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## Where are the Refugees?

**The refugee resettlement program is facing its biggest threat. That threat is coming so incrementally, so administratively, few supporters are aware of how much is at stake.**

Anyone supportive of refugees and immigrants, anyone supportive of building welcoming communities, is well aware of the multiple Executive Orders – the Travel Bans – released throughout 2017 by the Trump Administration targeting refugees and other immigrants from predominately Muslim countries.

Most supporters are also aware that President Trump, in September, set what is the lowest-ever ceiling for refugee arrivals: 45,000 to be welcomed in fiscal year 2018 (Oct. 2017 – Sept. 2018). Since the refugee program began in 1980, the ceiling has never been set lower than 70,000.

With the dates of the “halt” on refugees from the Travel Ban in the past and vetting procedures reviewed, you’d think the refugee program is out of the woods. You’d be wrong.

**In the first four and a half months of fiscal year 2018, the United States has welcomed only 8,044 refugees total. Even at the lowest-ever ceiling of 45,000, by now we should have welcomed well over 17,000 refugees.**

If we continue at this pace, our country will only see 22,000 refugees arrive this year. And Georgia may just break 1,000 – less than one-third of our historic amounts.

So, where are the refugees? With over 65 million refugees worldwide, why are we still waiting for our new community members?

The answer is simple – they are still overseas: in camps, in processing centers, and in unsafe situations. If their family members managed to arrive before the bans, then they remain separated while they wait. And wait. And wait.

Many refugees have already been cleared through the two-plus-years long vetting process and are awaiting travel approvals. But when the refugee ceiling was cut from 110,000 to 50,000 in 2017, it left 50,000 pre-approved refugees waiting on resettlement. They are now in the pipeline for arrivals – meaning anyone else who would have come in after them is again delayed.

The refugee program has been stalled not just by lower arrival numbers, but with intentional administrative changes adding up to more red tape, fewer staff to process admissions, and “enhanced” security procedures.

Over the course of 2017, new vetting procedures were put in place to slow – or halt – the ability of many refugees to ever arrive in the U.S. New requirements include providing an additional five-years-worth of proof of addresses and birth certificates for all applicants. Both requirements are all but impossible for some fleeing countries in all-out war or in countries where documents like birth certificates aren't provided at all.

At the highest administrative levels, changes in leadership for the refugee program mean much of the institutional program knowledge goes away as well. Overseas staff has been cut, administrative staff has shifted, and all this means fewer refugees will see their cases processed in 2018 or in the near future.

When our country backs out on our commitment to welcome refugees, we lose our place as one of the world's humanitarian leaders. The refugees and immigrants who do call the U.S. home lose their chance to reunite with family members who are stuck overseas awaiting approval and processing.

Worst of all, our country and communities lose out on the many contributions – financial, cultural, political, and more – that refugees bring with them. Since 1980, over three million refugees have come to the U.S. through this program, bringing with them myriad skills, artistic talents, delicious foods, and friendly smiles that we miss out on every day when a refugee goes unwelcomed.

**We must hold our administration accountable and demand that all 45,000 of the refugees we have committed to take are actually welcomed in 2018. We must further push that this record-low ceiling is never repeated, and that we at least return to a ceiling of 70,000 in the coming years.**

Join us, our national partners, and welcoming communities across the U.S. in the social media campaign #WhereRtheRefugees and push your officials – especially President Trump – to make #RefugeesWelcome.

*Stephanie Jackson Ali is an organizer, advocate and educator with experience in the fields of consumer protection, women's rights, voting rights, HIV and immigrant and refugee advocacy. She is currently the Civic Engagement Manager at New American Pathways and the Vice Chair for the Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies where she has been since 2012. Her favorite role is helping to register new Americans to vote and taking first-timers to the Capitol to speak to their elected officials. When she's not working she's likely reading comic books with her trusty sidekick Zelda the Welsh Corgi.*