



**Statement for the Record of  
Community Change Action and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) Action  
Submitted to House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and  
Citizenship  
For the Hearing: “The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program”  
on Thursday, February 27, 2020, 2 p.m.**

Community Change and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) write in unqualified support of refugees and a robust refugee system in the United States. We applaud this committee’s prioritization of our nation’s valuable—and increasingly under attack—refugee program. We look forward to continued legislative advocacy for a fair and generous refugee system through a substantial increase in the refugee cap and increased oversight over this administration’s deconstruction of our refugee system.

Community Change is a national organization whose mission is to build the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low-income people of color, to change their communities and public policies for the better. FIRM, a project of Community Change, is the largest national immigrant grassroots coalition, led by 47 member organizations across 35 states.

Since 1975, over three million displaced people have found a new home in the United States.<sup>1</sup> According to the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 70.8 million people are currently displaced worldwide, with 25.9 million people designated as refugees. Even with the participation of the United States with 134 other countries in refugee resettlement, only 3.6 percent of refugees are able to resettle safely in another country.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this significant need and our nation’s historic commitment to refugee resettlement, the Trump administration has crippled the U.S. refugee system to an unprecedented degree. In 2017, President Trump announced a full suspension of the refugee program for 120 days and indefinitely suspended entry for Syrian refugees.<sup>3</sup> When the program resumed, Syria and ten other countries were subject to an additional ban, renewed and expanded as recently as earlier this year, hampering our refugee resettlement program for Muslim and African majority countries in particular.<sup>4</sup>

The administration also instituted “extreme vetting” measures for refugees, a vague policy decision rooted in baseless assumptions connecting the refugee program to fraud and terrorism.<sup>5</sup> Even before these so-called security measures, wait times for resettlement in the

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<sup>1</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, *Key facts about refugees to the U.S.*, Pew Research Center, Oct. 7, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Figures at a Glance*, UNHCR, June 19, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

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

<sup>4</sup> *Timeline of the Muslim Ban*, American Civil Liberties Union, accessed Feb. 25, 2020, <https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban>.

<sup>5</sup> Dan De Luce and Julia Ainsley, *Trump admin rejected report showing refugees did not pose major security threat*, NBC News, Sept. 5, 2018

United States historically took anywhere from 18 to 24 months, as the refugee application already involves one of the most intensive vetting processes of our immigration system.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to pursuing new and damaging policies that undermine the U.S. refugee system, the Trump administration has dramatically cut down the ceiling for refugee admissions to their lowest levels in the history of the refugee system. The President set the cap for 2020 to an all-time low of 18,000 admissions, which follows two previous all-time lows in 2019 (30,000) and 2018 (45,000).<sup>7</sup>

These dramatic reductions operate in tandem with the elimination or reduction of other forms of humanitarian relief, from the end to the Central American Minors (CAM) program to the start of the Remain in Mexico program to only name a few. The cumulative effect of all of these changes is profound and has caused serious damage to the system as a whole.

The welcoming spirit of this nation is deeply rooted in the values of family, equality and opportunity, all of which are undermined when we close our shores to those who need a new start in a safe place. Refugees have always and continue to contribute to our communities, from enriching what it means to be American to bolstering the economy. Refugees have higher rates of both employment and entrepreneurship than the U.S.-born population, and they continue to alleviate population decline and establish vibrant new communities in struggling cities across the country.<sup>8</sup> Many of the FIRM Network member organizations were founded to assist refugees, and they continue to support refugees to this day. We at Community Change and FIRM find the current state of the U.S. refugee program to be wholly unacceptable.

We call on Congress to restore the refugee cap to its previous levels and immediately end the practice of “extreme vetting,” as the vetting process for refugees is already one of the most rigorous in our immigration system. Congress must also exercise increased oversight over the administration’s continued erosion of the refugee program, as is its prerogative as a legislative check to executive power.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record.

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/trump-admin-rejected-report-showing-refugees-did-not-pose-major-n906681>; Security screening of refugees admitted to the U.S, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed Feb. 25, 2020, <https://refugees.org/explore-the-issues/our-work-with-refugees/security-screening/>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Syrian Processing-Frequently Asked Questions, Department of State, BPRM Refugee Processing Center, March 11, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2016/254651.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Immigrants as Economic Contributors: Refugees Are a Fiscal Success Story for America*, National Immigration Forum, June 14, 2018, [https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-refugees-are-a-fiscal-success-story-for-america/#\\_ednref1](https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-refugees-are-a-fiscal-success-story-for-america/#_ednref1); Matthew La Corte, *Refugees Are Revitalizing Some Great American Cities Facing Decline*, Niskanen Center, June 21, 2016, <https://niskanencenter.org/blog/refugees-revitalizing-great-american-cities-facing-decline/>.