FAQ: President Biden’s Executive Order 14013: “Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration”

What is the refugee purpose of Executive Order (EO) 14013 issued on February 4, 2021?
To rebuild and enhance the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Over the 40-year history of USRAP the annual refugee admission goal had averaged 95,000 refugees. By Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 the prior administration reduced the refugee admission goal, the Presidential Determination (PD), to 15,000.

Did EO 14013 change the FY 2021 refugee admission goal?
No, the EO did not reset the FY 2021 refugee admissions goal, the PD. However, during a February 4 speech at the State Department, President Biden committed to an admission goal of 125,000 for FY 2022. He also said that after consulting with Congress, as required by statute, his administration would raise the FY 2021 PD above its current level, making what he called a “down payment” toward reaching the FY 2022 PD. Reportedly the Administration plans to reset the FY 2021 admission goal to 62,500 refugees.

Why should we rebuild the refugee program?
As Catholics, we recognize the right to life and innate dignity of every human being and are thereby called to protect and welcome refugees. As Americans, the refugee program demonstrates American generosity and our core national values as a beacon of hope for people fleeing persecution. It serves U.S. strategic interests by promoting stability in conflicted regions and facilitates international collaboration to address migration crises. Additionally, refugees contribute much to U.S. communities.
What refugee policies are articulated in EO 14013?
The EO calls for:

- avoiding and minimizing delays in refugee resettlement;
- ensuring program integrity and national security through efficient, meaningful, fair security vetting and sound fraud detection;
- providing procedural safeguards for refugee applicants;
- administering humanitarian programs in a transparent, accountable way;
- reuniting families since it is in the national interest;
- exploring humanitarian protection for those not covered by the USRAP;
- restoring and expanding USRAP with technology and do so through community and private sponsorship while still partnering with resettlement agencies; and efficiently run the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program.

What EOs and Memorandum are revoked by this order?
EOs 13815 and 13888 and the March 6, 2017, Presidential Memorandum Implementing EO 13815 are revoked. EO 13815 was an extension of EO 13780, the original refugee ban, that greatly restricted access to resettlement, as was the memorandum. EO 13888 required consent from state and local officials to do initial resettlement in a locale. USCCB/MRS opposed both orders (see Letter Supporting the NO BAN Act and the FAQ on EO 13888). Within 90 days, the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security must report to President Biden whether to maintain, reverse or modify any actions relying on the EOs or memo.

Are there improvements to the Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program?
Afghan and Iraqi SIV processing and the SIV application approval process will be reviewed and recommendations made for improvement. New SIV nationalities will be identified and recommended.

Are there steps in EO 14013 to improve security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program?
These are some of the steps: designate a team of senior refugee processing leaders from each federal agency involved in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), led by a Senior Director of the National Security Council; report on current fraud detection and recommend improvements; expand Vetting and Adjudication Capacity via Technology; analyze the Security Advisory Opinion process data and recommend improvements; and adjust Special Advisory Opinion populations and procedures.

What is the purpose of EO 14013 related to climate change?
There is documented impact of climate change on migration. EO 14013 requires a study on the impact of climate change on migration, including forced migration, internal displacement, and planned relocation. It must include the international security impacts of climate change, options to identify, refer, protect and provide durable solutions for people displaced by climate change, and recommendations for mitigating the impacts of climate change through foreign assistance.

What does Catholic social teaching say about refugees and climate change?
Catholic teaching states that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore entitled to the right to life, dignity and respect. The Catholic Church views assisting those in need as a fundamental Christian duty that is derived directly from the words and the life of Christ, who himself was a migrant and part of a refugee family. As Christians, we are called to welcome our new neighbors with the same love and compassion that we would want ourselves to be shown in a time of persecution. We must remember that refugees from all over the world who are sent to our communities are fleeing life threatening danger, exploitation, and persecution. Pope Francis urges us to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate them.

Regarding the Church’s concern about the effect that environmental degradation will have on human beings, Popes Paul VI,[1] John Paul II,[2] and Benedict XVI [3] all articulated the Church’s deep concern about the effects on human beings of environ-
mental degradation. Pope Francis reiterated the importance of supporting individuals affected by climate change and environmental damage when he lamented the “tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever.”[4]

For more information on refugees and climate change, see JFI Refugees and Environmental Migrants.

Endnotes


