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# Trump announces lowest refugee admission cap in US history at 7,500

The US president says his country will prioritise white South Africans in the refugee process, in a move decried by advocates as blatantly political.

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Martin Bernstein, 95, whose parents were refugees, attends a February 25 protest against Donald Trump's refugee policies in Seattle, Washington [File: Ryan Sun/The Associated Press]

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Instead, priority for the 7,500 available slots would be given to white Afrikaners from South Africa.

“The admissions numbers shall primarily be allocated among Afrikaners from South Africa pursuant to Executive Order 14204 and other victims of illegal or unjust discrimination in their respective homelands,” the document said.

Trump has [repeatedly said](#) white South Africans are being persecuted in the Black-majority country, a claim rejected by South Africa’s government and top Afrikaner officials.

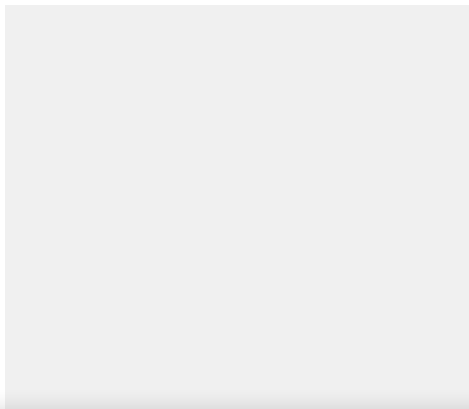
Thursday’s filings also indicated that the Trump administration would narrow the groups that handle refugee services moving forward.

Refugee resettlement grants and contracts that currently go to an array of public and private organisations will instead be rerouted to the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services.

“The transfer ensures better alignment of resources, oversight, and accountability [of] resettlement activities that take place entirely within the United States,” a separate declaration said.

Trump’s refugee cap is the lowest since Congress passed the [Refugee Act of 1980](#), which codified a formal process for admitting and relocating refugees to the US.

Since then, at least two million refugees have arrived through the US Refugee Admissions Program or USRAP. Trump sought to suspend the programme upon taking office, prompting a successful legal challenge from immigrant rights groups.

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Thursday's cap of 7,500 is only a fraction of the 125,000 refugees allowed to enter under former President Joe Biden during his final year in office. The new, lower cap is set to last from October 2025 through September 2026.

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According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently 42.7 million refugees globally.

The US Refugee Act allows presidents to set a cap on the number of annual refugee admissions, but there is no bottom limit. That has long sparked concerns that Trump, who slashed admissions during his first term, could effectively grind USRAP to a halt.

### 'Downfall for a crown jewel'

In a post on the social media platform X, Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, a senior fellow at the American Immigration Council, noted that Trump's declaration appeared to shift the definition of whom Washington considers to be a refugee.

"Trump's new refugee determination appears to call for admitting refugees who wouldn't meet the definition of refugee — someone who faces persecution (not 'discrimination') on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion," he wrote.

He added that, for decades, the US refugee programme has admitted "people fleeing ethnic cleansing and other horrors".

"Now it will be used as a pathway for White immigration," he said. "What a downfall for a crown jewel of America's international humanitarian programs."

The International Refugee Assistance Project, meanwhile, said that Trump did not appear to follow the required congressional consultation process before announcing the cap. The group dismissed the move as baldly political.

"Today's announcement highlights just how far this administration has gone when it comes to abandoning its responsibilities to displaced people around the world," the organisation's president, Sharif Aly, said in a statement.

"America's refugee program was built to reflect our values, and the thousands of individuals we've closed our doors to represent thousands of missed opportunities of people who could have strengthened a local community or economy," the statement said.

Trump's declaration did not give a reason for the massive cut in refugee admissions, saying only that the number was "justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest".

The US president has led a massive crackdown on all forms of immigration since taking office, but some advocates had hoped that the refugee

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The [cross-aisle support](#) has been buoyed in recent years by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, with many politicians supporting pathways to immigration for Afghans who worked alongside the US military or allied forces and companies.

Many Afghans have relied on the refugee programme while other specialised immigration programmes remain constricted or backlogged.

Since taking office for a second term, Trump, however, has focused heavily on white Afrikaners. In February, for instance, Trump issued Executive Order 14204 to cut aid to South Africa, on the basis that it demonstrated “shocking disregard” for Afrikaners.

That order also prioritised humanitarian relief, including refugee admissions, to white South Africans, on the basis that they were “victims of unjust racial discrimination”.

The first plane carrying white South Africans admitted under the new programme landed in the US in May.

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