

The U.S. needs to accept more refugees

There's one clear way the world can help the Syrian people. The Trump administration is doing the opposite.

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Syrian refugees stand on the platform of a Hungarian railway station in 2015. [Some rights reserved](#) by [Mstyslav Chernov](#).

The world is in the midst of a refugee crisis, with the number of displaced persons totaling 60 million, the highest since World War II. Over the past year the United States has responded to this crisis in stunningly ungenerous fashion by sharply reducing the number of refugees it takes in. Once one of the most welcoming countries, the U.S. has become one of the least.

The Trump administration cut the targeted number of yearly refugee admissions in half, from 95,000 in previous years to 45,000 in 2018. And at the current pace, refugee experts say, the final tally for this year is likely to be half that figure. As a case in point: in the first three and a half months of this year, the U.S. admitted only 44 refugees from Syria—about one-twentieth of the number accepted in the corresponding period in 2016. While President Trump was celebrating the allied missile attack on Syria as a defense of the innocents in that country's civil wars, his refugee policy was dashing the hopes of Syrians who can't return to their ruined homes and whose desperate aim is to start a new life outside a refugee camp. As the U.S. steps back from the refugee crisis, it is less wealthy countries like Lebanon and Jordan that take on most of the burden.

The ostensible reason for the U.S. clampdown on refugees is national security. Administration officials made that argument before the Supreme Court on April 25 when they defended the latest version of the ban they have tried to impose on incoming travelers, especially those coming from Muslim-majority countries. The justices seem likely to accept the government's case that the president has the constitutional authority to make such judgments about security.

Yet the actual security risk posed by refugees is negligible. Each one undergoes an investigation by multiple agencies that can take as much as three years. It's generally widows, orphans, and those with medical needs or family connections in the U.S. who are deemed eligible to be resettled. A study by the Cato Institute of all refugees admitted since 2001 found not a single security failure. The report concluded that the chance of a refugee with terrorist sympathies entering the U.S. was one in 29 million. After the Trump administration opened a new clearing center for scrutinizing immigrants, allegedly to provide enhanced security, officials were unable to say what steps the center would take that weren't already part of standard procedures.

The security threat posed by immigrants in general has been exaggerated by the administration for domestic political reasons. Refugees are among those directly harmed by this policy. With its indifference, the U.S. loses the moral standing to encourage other countries to be hospitable. We lose the vitality that refugees bring to this country. Worst of all, we are gratuitously turning a cold shoulder to desperate people.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "Turning our backs on refugees."