

y 2020: Four decades of presidential leadership on refugee protection, until now

While the timeline below is not exhaustive, it illustrates the bipartisan commitment to welcoming refugees, and the critical decisions presidents on both sides of the aisle have made to respond to humanitarian crises and further U.S. interests. They have used all the tools at their disposal, including increasing the annual refugee admissions ceiling or adjusting the ceilings' regional allocations in response to needs. These decisions helped save lives.

Jimmy Carter (1977 – 1981)

Highest admissions ceiling: **231,700**

1980

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the U.S. resettles hundreds of thousands of displaced Vietnamese refugees.⁴ To standardize this largescale humanitarian initiative, President Carter signs the **Refugee Act of 1980** into law, with near unanimous bipartisan support, creating the refugee resettlement program we have today.⁵ With its enactment, the U.S. adopts the United Nation's official definition of a refugee and transitions resettlement to a needs-based system.

Ronald Reagan (1981 – 1989)

Highest admissions ceiling: **140,000**

1982

President Reagan sets the refugee admissions ceiling at 140,000 refugees and allocates **96,000 resettlement slots** within that ceiling for Indochinese refugees fleeing violence in Southeast Asia.⁶

1988

The Reagan administration raises the regional allocation for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 15,000 to **30,000 refugees** to respond to an unexpected increase in refugees from Armenia.⁷

George H. W. Bush (1989 – 1993)

Highest admissions ceiling: **142,000**

1989

President Bush **raises the FY 1989 refugee admissions ceiling to 116,500** due to increased need for admissions from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.⁸ **Nearly 40,000 refugees** from the region will arrive that fiscal year.⁹

1990

In FY 1990, the Bush administration increases the admissions ceiling to 125,000 refugees



