



[The White House Pledges to Increase the Refugee Cap After Its Initial Proposal is Sharply Criticized](#)

The White House has stated that it will set an increased refugee cap by the middle of next month following pushback over its initial decision to expand the eligibility criteria for resettlements but keep the historically low mark set under the previous administration. President Biden backtracked over a proposal to limit the number of refugees who can enter the United States to 15,000, and had promised during his presidential campaign to increase the number of refugees admitted from that figure to 62,500 by the end of the fiscal year and then to 125,000 for the 2022 fiscal year. However, it was revealed late last week that the cap would remain at 15,000 due to concerns over the government's ability to process refugees. Correspondingly, Biden came under heavy criticism from Republicans and Democrats alike, and his administration reversed course, saying that a new proposal would be presented before May 15th. The original decision to keep the refugee cap at 15,000 was heavily criticized by rights organizations, in addition to lawmakers in Congress. Analysts have indicated that Biden may have felt pressure to limit the number of incoming refugees because of the ongoing migrant crisis at the southern border.

Biden administration officials defended the proposed refugee limit through a variety of means. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said keeping the refugee cap at 15,000 would allow the government to rebuild the refugee resettlement infrastructure in the short term, before dramatically increasing the cap in the long term. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the lower limit was to reduce the burden on the overworked Office of Refugee Resettlement, which is an oft-overlooked branch of HHS. However, the reasons parroted by administration officials failed to appease lawmakers or advocacy groups, of whom both have made their displeasure known.

During President Biden's first speech on foreign policy in early February, he pledged to increase the number of refugees that the United States would admit in accordance with his campaign promises. Among other reasons, grave humanitarian concerns around the world necessitated the Biden administration's drive to increase the refugee cap. Dire humanitarian situations in Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of Latin America in particular have heightened the pressure on Biden to boost the refugee cap. Additionally, one of the core elements of the Biden presidential campaign was a more welcoming tone towards asylum seekers and refugees, in stark contrast to the harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric of the previous Trump administration.

In recent weeks, President Biden has received criticism for his perceived weakness on the southern border, where a migrant crisis is ongoing. Reports have claimed that the president was unhappy with condemnation from Republicans over the situation, and he believed increasing the refugee cap at this time would drive more complaints over "open borders." To mitigate this, Biden's proposal would have seen the eligibility requirements substantially expanded for potential refugees, but the limit kept at 15,000. However, he miscalculated by underestimating the blowback from members of his own party in Congress. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a leading progressive in the House of Representatives, called on Biden to immediately reverse the decision to keep the refugee cap at 15,000. Other leading democratic voices such as Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) also condemned the proposed move, and urged the president to increase the number of refugees admitted to the country.

Pressure such as this saw the Biden administration walk back the initial proposal, with a promise to present a new plan for increasing the refugee cap by May 15th.