

Upcoming Meetings & Events

U.S. IMMIGRATION: PAST POLICY AND NEW DIRECTIONS – MAR 31

On Wednesday, March 31 at 6:00 PM EDT, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library will host a panel to discuss the history of and contemporary issues in U.S. immigration policy. Panelists include Theresa Cardinal Brown of the Bipartisan Policy Center and Roberto Gonzales of the Immigration Initiative at Harvard University, among others. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

EMERGING EXPERTS: PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES – APR 4

On Sunday, April 4 at 7:00 PM EDT, Leading in Colour will host a discussion with Abdullah Sarwari regarding upholding refugee rights, the process for private sponsorship of refugees in what is currently Canada, and how this has impacted refugees and claimants throughout the pandemic. For more information and to register, click [here](#).



Unaccompanied Children's Arrivals are a Humanitarian Challenge – But a Solvable One

By Mario Bruzzone

For much of 2020, U.S. authorities turned away all asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border, including both families arriving together and unaccompanied children. The prior Administration attempted to justify the restrictions by a novel invocation of Title 42 of the United States Code, which grants a weak form of quarantine power to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—but no enforcement authority. The CDC's own public-health experts [opposed](#) the border closure, but were overruled by then-Vice President Mike Pence. For unaccompanied children in particular, the border closure was in contravention of the [protections spelled out in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act \(TVPRA\)](#) of 2008.

In November, a judge in the Second Circuit [restricted](#) the U.S. government's ability to summarily expel unaccompanied children.

At that time, the shelters overseen by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) could operate at only about 60% of their pre-COVID capacity. The capacity limitations came about by both ORR policies on social distancing and safety within individual shelters, as well as systematic decisions that took beds offline across the network, such as a “border staging posture” that meant that unaccompanied children would quarantine in one facility at the border, then be transferred to a second facility elsewhere—only to be quarantined again. A USCRI brief in December noted that ORR had yet to treat COVID-19 as a population-health problem.

The current arrivals of unaccompanied children into the U.S. present a humanitarian challenge. Fundamentally the challenge is one of capacity—the system that cares for unaccompanied children and reunites them with family in the U.S. had neither the bed space available nor the flexibility to easily add space in licensed facilities.

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Upcoming Meetings & Events (cont'd)

A NEW ERA IN IMMIGRATION? PART 3 – APR 14

On Wednesday, April 14 at 1:00 PM EDT, the St. Edward's University Social Work Program and the University of Texas Law School will host part 3 of its 3-part webinar series on immigration law and policy changes of the new Administration. This installment will focus on the rebuilding of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program. Panelists will address the current legal, social, and emotional needs, challenges, and opportunities facing refugee families, the organizations that serve them, and the broader community. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

United States Issue Updates

• House Passes Dream and Promise Act, Farmworker Modernization Act

On Thursday, March 18, the House of Representatives passed the Dream and Promise Act (H.R. 6) and the Farmworker Modernization Act (H.R. 1603). The Dream and Promise Act provides protection from deportation and a pathway to residency and citizenship to DREAMers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and individuals with Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). The Farmworker Modernization Act allows agricultural workers to earn permanent residency and streamlines the H-2A process. For more on the Dream and Promise Act, click [here](#). For more on the Farmworker Modernization Act, click [here](#).

• ORR Announces Use of Pecos Facility for Unaccompanied Children

On Saturday, March 20, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) announced that it would open a new temporary influx facility for unaccompanied children. The Target Lodge Pecos North will be used to house 500 children in rooms, and potentially another 1500 children in tented “soft-sided” facilities if needed. The Pecos facility joins other similar facilities in Carrizo Springs, Texas; Midland, Texas; and the Kay Bailey Hutchinson Convention Center in Dallas. On Monday, March 22, officials in San Diego announced that its convention center would also be used for intake for unaccompanied children, although ORR has not yet confirmed the San Diego site.

• USCIS Extends Temporary Final Rule on Interpreters

On Monday, March 21, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) extended a Temporary Final Rule on the use of approved telephonic interpreters for asylum applicants who are unable to participate in an interview in English. The rule results from COVID-19 mitigation efforts and was originally issued on September 23, 2020. The updated rule can be read [here](#).

• United States Steps up Pressure on Myanmar Amid Violence

Shortly after the administration granted TPS for Myanmar (also known as Burma), U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai announced Monday that the United States will suspend all trade with Myanmar “until the return of a democratically elected government.” Tai says the move is a condemnation of the violence by Myanmar’s security forces, which has “shocked the conscience of the international community.” The announcement was made after Myanmar saw its bloodiest weekend since the coup, as thousands have been displaced and have fled over the border into Thailand. Although the US hopes the trade sanctions will put some pressure on security forces to end the violence, observers on the ground fear the violence will continue to escalate. The announcement can be read [here](#).

• FAIR Proceedings Act Introduced in Senate

Last Tuesday, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand introduced the Funding Attorneys for Indigent Removal (FAIR) Proceedings Act. The purpose of the Act is to give the most vulnerable migrants better access to legal representation and resources in their immigration cases. The Act would guarantee access to counsel in removal proceedings for children, torture survivors, those with disabilities, and anyone below 200% of the poverty line, essentially setting up a public defender system for immigration. The Act would also require Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) facilities to allow counsel into their facilities, create a legal orientation program for all detainees, and give them the right to review the government’s evidence against them. USCRI has endorsed the Act, as we believe it presents a promising step forward for immigrants’ rights. The text of the Act can be read [here](#).

Around the World in International Migration

• Refugees Flee from Myanmar to India and Thailand Amid Military Attacks

Amid an ongoing military seizure of power in Myanmar, thousands of civilians have fled into neighboring India and Thailand. About 3,000 people have fled Myanmar's eastern Karen state into Thailand to escape military air strikes, marking the biggest movement of refugees since the February 1 coup that overthrew the government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Meanwhile, many others have attempted to flee to India, which shares a 1,021-mile border with Myanmar. In response, the government of Manipur state, which borders Myanmar, has instructed its border districts to neither open any relief camps nor provide food and shelter to refugees. According to a confidential letter to the commissioners of the districts, the government issued instructions regarding refugees attempting to enter, stating, "People trying to enter/seek refuge should be politely turned away."

• Serbia Becomes First European Country to Vaccinate People Living in Refugee Camps and Asylum Centers Against COVID-19

On March 26, Serbia became the first European country to vaccinate its migrant population living in refugee camps and asylum centers. Currently around 6,000 migrants, mainly from the Middle East and Central Asia, are in Serbia, mostly in 16 government-operated facilities. Over the past year, cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in these refugee camps and asylum centers. Thus far, 570 migrants have been given their first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The Serbian government has secured a steady inflow of vaccines through deals with suppliers. According to official data, more than 2.1 million people in a country of 7 million have had at least one shot so far, with the rollout to migrants now also beginning.

• European Commission to Continue Financing for Syrian Refugees in Turkey

At a virtual summit held on March 25, the European Commission offered more refugee aid and customs incentives to Turkey to continue its migration agreement with the European Union. Since 2016, the European Union has engaged in a series of agreements aimed at stopping the flow of irregular migration via Turkey to Europe. Under the agreement, Turkey increased border security and Greece was promised the ability to return all irregular migrants to Turkey. In exchange, Turkey would receive billions of euros in grants to support refugees among other provisions. Following slow disbursement of the funding and the European Union's failure to liberalize visas for Turkish nationals and re-start Turkey's accession process, the Turkish government reneged on the agreement, sending millions of refugees to Greece. Greece, in response, suspended asylum procedures and forcefully prevented migrants from crossing. The COVID-19 pandemic forced Turkey to close its borders once more soon after.

Whispers from Washington

Current Capitol Hill Considerations

Over 200 Organizations Call for the Biden Administration to Sign the Presidential Determination

The Biden administration claimed well over a month ago that it would raise the Fiscal Year 2021 refugee admissions goal, also known as the Presidential Determination (PD), to 62,500. This was welcome news to the refugee advocacy community, as the previous administration had set this year's PD at a record low of 15,000. However, since making that promise, the new administration has not actually signed the PD, leaving thousands of refugees in limbo. To date, over 700 refugees' flights have been cancelled and others have been postponed indefinitely. Refugees who were ready to travel are now stuck for an unknown period of time, leaving resettlement agencies and the refugees themselves powerless to move forward. Last week, over 200 local, state, and national organizations sent a letter to the administration asking President Biden to sign the new PD. Although a higher PD is important, equally important are the allocations within the PD. The US has not yet reached 15,000 refugee admissions for FY2021, but refugees are still being denied entry due to the category restrictions in the old PD. These categories are narrowly defined, and most refugees do not fit into any category, meaning that they cannot be resettled even though the US has not yet resettled 15,000 refugees for this year.

Global Gigabyte

A South Sudanese man in Egypt recently opened an academy to teach and train African refugees passionate about soccer.

Francis Dennik Kwal, who originally went to Cairo to study, recently established the South Sudan Academy. The Academy currently has three teams with about 200 players: one for boys, one for girls and young women, and one for adult men. All teams are comprised of African refugees from various countries, including South Sudan, Sudan, Nigeria, and Mali.

"The main purpose of the academy is to develop the abilities of players and amateurs and prepare them to play on Egyptian and European [official] teams. The academy also helps train children while focusing on the ethical and disciplinary aspect. We are raising a generation that is scientifically, athletically and culturally competent," Kwal says.

Read more about the story [here](#).

If you have any questions or comments, please contact the Policy and Advocacy Division at policy@uscrimail.org.

