

Upcoming Meetings & Events

USCRI POLICY BRIEFING: REFUGEES IN EAST AFRICA – FEB 18

On Thursday, February 18, USCRI will host its second quarterly policy briefing. The briefing will cover the current refugee and internally displaced person crises in Sudan and South Sudan. It will feature speakers who have witnessed the situation on the ground in both countries and can provide recommendations for U.S. foreign policy for responding to the crises. More details forthcoming.

UNSAFE: THE JOURNEY OF UNACCOMPANIED YOUNG PEOPLE – FEB 18

On Thursday, February 18 at 2:30 PM EST, Bristol Student Action for Refugees (STAR) will host a panel of experts to discuss the experience of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. Panelists include Gulwali Passarlay, Faiq Tukmachi, and Mia Barlow. For more information and to register, click [here](#).



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United States Issue Updates

• New Way Forward Act Reintroduced

On January 27, Representative Jesús “Chuy” Garcia (D-IL-4) reintroduced the New Way Forward Act (originally [H.R. 5383](#)). If passed, the Act would undo the harshest effects of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Changes would include decriminalizing undocumented border crossing and ending private immigration detention centers. In addition, the Act would limit the categories of “serious crimes” under which an immigrant is currently barred from qualifying for asylum, changing the banned category to only felonies with a jail sentence of at least five years.

• Senate Democrats Introduce TPS Legislation for Venezuelans

On January 25, Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), incoming Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, joined by Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), and Cory Booker (D-NJ) [introduced](#) the Venezuela Temporary Protected Status Act of 2021, legislation to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for eligible Venezuelans fleeing “the dire conditions in their home country and to strengthen migration systems in countries surrounding Venezuela.” The Senators’ legislation follows a last-minute memorandum by the former Administration to defer deportations of Venezuelans through Deferred Enforced Departure (DED).

Upcoming Meetings & Events (cont'd)

QUEER REFUGEES, WESTERN STEREOTYPES AND DENIAL – FEB 23

On Tuesday, February 23 at 1:00 PM EST, University College London (UCL) will host Barrister Allan Briddock who will examine how multi-layers of marginalization often result in LGBTQIA+ refugees being denied refugee status as they do not conform to Western stereotypes. The discussion will examine further how the judiciary has imposed a narrow view of what it is to be “open” about one’s sexual orientation and has used a stereotyped view of non-Western cultures to find that people are not at risk due to their sexual orientation in their home countries. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

United States Issue Updates (cont'd)

• Administration Rescinds “Zero Tolerance” Separation Policy

On January 26, in a letter to all U.S. attorneys, the Administration’s acting attorney general Monty Wilkerson officially rescinded the former Administration’s “zero tolerance” [program](#), which led to the separation of over 3,000 migrant families. Although it is largely symbolic, the move officially removes the policy from the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) guidance to federal prosecutors and instructs prosecutors to use discretion when prosecuting misdemeanor border offenses. Before zero tolerance, more serious border offenses, including violent offenses or illegal re-entry at the border, were more commonly charged in federal court. Rather than tell prosecutors never to prosecute misdemeanors, Wilkinson's letter advises them to use discretion rather than a zero-tolerance approach.

• Federal Judge Temporarily Blocks 100-Day Deportation Moratorium After Texas Sues Administration

On January 26, a federal judge in Texas issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) after Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sued the Administration late last week alleging the moratorium is [unconstitutional](#) and violates an agreement between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Texas. The restraining order is effective for 14 days as the state's case against the moratorium continues. Paxton argued the state would face financial harm if undocumented immigrants were released into the state because of costs associated with health care and education, and said the moratorium would also lure others to come to Texas.

Around the World in International Migration

• Worldwide Refugee Resettlement Hits Record Low

Despite an estimated 1.44 million refugees in urgent need of resettlement globally, only 22,770 were resettled through [UNHCR](#), the UN Refugee Agency, last year. The drop originates from low quotas put forward by countries, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which delayed departures and programs. The largest numbers of resettled refugees in 2020 originated from Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Myanmar.

• Spain Opens New Migrant Camps in the Canary Islands

In response to a spike in arrivals last year, Spain is launching a new migration policy in the Canary Islands with a plan for opening camps for undocumented migrants. The government expects a significant influx of new arrivals, but largely refuses to transfer them to the mainland. After a huge jump in arrivals from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa last year sparked tensions in the archipelago, authorities have started to move some migrants to tents in two camps on Gran Canaria. Four more camps will be opened in mid-February on other islands. The government has defended the new policy and denied that the camps will be like those on the Greek island of Lesbos, which have been criticized for their deplorable conditions.

Around the World in International Migration (cont'd)

• **Post-Brexit United Kingdom Begins to Close Doors to Unaccompanied Children Without Relatives in the Country**

For unaccompanied children in European Union (EU) member states, who have no relatives in the United Kingdom (UK), the passage to the country has just become more difficult. UK Home Office and Justice Minister Chris Philp has stated that, "Responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees in EU Member States lies with the authorities of the safe EU country in which they are present, in accordance with their international obligations." Since Brexit, the UK is no longer bound by the Dublin Regulation, which means that asylum seekers are asked to apply for asylum in the first EU country in which they arrive. For unaccompanied children seeking asylum with relatives in the UK, passage may be easier. However, Minister Philp also stated that the UK will concentrate on "resettling vulnerable refugees direct from dangerous conflict zones rather than those who have often paid people smugglers to reach other safe European countries."

• **Number of Asylum Applications in Germany Decreases Sharply**

According to the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, there were over 30% fewer applications in 2020 than in 2019. In 2020, 76,061 people who had newly arrived in Germany formally applied for asylum. This number represents a drop of 31.5% compared to 2019 (35,033 fewer formal applications). Most of those applying for asylum were nationals of Syria, Afghanistan, or Iraq. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer stated that, "Humanity and order are the cornerstones of our successful migration policy. The number of asylum applicants dropped significantly again in 2020. At the same time, we helped many people in need and let them come to Germany. The decrease in asylum applications last year was not due to the COVID-19 pandemic alone, because the numbers have fallen for four years in a row. This shows that our measures to manage migration are working. We are on the right track." Frontex, the European Union border and coast guard agency, also largely attributed the lowest number of irregular migrant crossings since 2013 to restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19.

• **Central African Republic Displacement Tops 200,000**

Insecurity in the Central African Republic (CAR) has caused over 200,000 people to become displaced within the country and in neighboring states in less than two months. Refugee arrivals into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have reached 92,000 according to local authorities and 13,240 people have crossed into Cameroon, Chad, and the Republic of Congo, since violence erupted in December 2020 ahead of CAR's general elections. Refugees continue to arrive daily and the United Nations warns that tens of thousands are facing dire conditions.

• **United Nations Human Rights Committee Finds that Italy Failed to Rescue Over 200 Migrants in 2013 Mediterranean Disaster**

On January 27, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) published its decision finding that Italy failed to protect the right to life of more than 200 migrants who were on board a vessel that sank in the Mediterranean Sea in 2013. The boat departed from Libya on October 10, 2013 carrying some 400 people, mostly Syrians. In the decision, the committee said that Italy "failed to respond promptly" to distress calls after the vessel was shot "by a boat flying a Berber flag in international waters" some 113 kilometers south of the Italian island of Lampedusa. The committee of 18 experts says distress calls to Italian authorities were redirected to Malta, which was some 218 kilometers away. By the time a Maltese patrol boat arrived the boat had capsized. More than 200 people, including 60 children, drowned. Hélène Tigroudja, a member of the HRC stated that, "The accident happened in the international waters within the Maltese search and rescue zone but the location was indeed closest to Italy and to one of its naval ships. Had the Italian authorities immediately directed its naval ship and coast guard boats after the distress calls, the rescue would have reached the vessel, at the latest, two hours before it sank."

Whispers from Washington

Current Capitol Hill Considerations

Some Executive Orders Delayed

The immigration executive orders (EOs) were expected to be released on Friday, January 29 but now have been delayed to the week of February 1 or later. These EOs include those regarding regional migration and border processing, refugee policy, family reunification, and legal immigration. While delayed, these are still expected, but Administration officials cite the need for more time. However, the Administration officials promise that these EOs will definitively be released, and their delay does not mean a cancellation.

The EOs are expected to include ending the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy as well as call to end asylum agreements established by the previous Administration with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Moreover, the Administration will establish a unique taskforce to reunite families separated at the United States’ border with Mexico. In addition, while part of a larger process, the EOs will also include addressing the immigration system.

The Administration has pledged to raise the refugee ceiling from 15,000 to 125,000 for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, which began on October 1, 2020. However, the Administration is not expected to immediately raise the ceiling, but instead will follow the formal consultation process with Congress.

Global Gigabyte

Amaan Iqbal Ibrahim, originally from India, won the Princess Diana Legacy [Award](#) in 2017 for his work in supporting over 1000 laborers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where tens of thousands of workers hailing from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh travel to the area to work and support their families back home.

Now, during the pandemic, Amaan has raised a task force of students to regularly visit the laborers, serving food during their religious festivals whether they are Muslim, Hindu, or Christian. These times are when workers can feel particularly isolated and lonely, as they are away from their families and otherwise unable to celebrate their festivals and ceremonies.

Of the project, Amaan said that, “Whenever I volunteered or served food, initially I thought of the migrant workers as people in need of our help. But it was only after hearing the story of a laborer who wrote a letter to his son, likening him to the train that went by their home, and the laborer himself as the fuel, burning himself in the heat so the son could go places, I realized that I should have been looking at the laborers as real people, with individual identities and loving families.”

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

If you have any questions
or comments, please
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