

White House says Biden will increase refugee cap this year, after Dem fury over original target

The White House says a new cap will likely be coming by May 15.

The White House on Friday said that President Biden is expected to increase the refugee cap for this fiscal year, just hours after he signed an order that kept it at Trump-era levels and sparked fury from congressional Democrats.

“The President’s directive today has been the subject of some confusion,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in an afternoon statement.

BIDEN TO KEEP REFUGEE ADMISSIONS AT TRUMP-ERA LEVELS, DESPITE EARLIER MOVES TO INCREASE IT

Former President Donald Trump lowered the refugee cap for FY 2021 to 15,000 — something the Biden had pledged both during the campaign and his first days in office to raise.

Biden had promised to increase the cap to 125,000 for the next fiscal year, which begins in October. He also said he would work with Congress to make a “down payment” on that number. In the meantime, Secretary of State Antony Blinken proposed to Congress lifting the cap to 62,000 for this fiscal year.

However, the administration announced Friday that Biden was signing an emergency presidential determination to keep the number at 15,000 while changing the regional allocation of who is brought in — allowing more slots from Africa, the Middle East and Central America, while ending restrictions on Somalia, Yemen and Syria.

It brought immediate and widespread criticism from left-wing Democrats and immigrant activist groups.

AOC RIPS INTO BIDEN FOR KEEPING ‘RACIST’ TRUMP-ERA REFUGEE CAP

“This Biden Administration refugee admissions target is unacceptable,” Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said. “These refugees can wait years for their chance and go through extensive vetting. Thirty-five thousand are ready. Facing the greatest refugee crisis in our time there is no reason to limit the number to 15,000. Say it ain’t so, President Joe.”

“Completely and utterly unacceptable. Biden promised to welcome immigrants, and people voted for him based on that promise,” Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-NY, said. “Upholding the xenophobic and racist policies of the Trump admin, incl the historically low + plummeted refugee cap, is flat out wrong.”

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez@AOC

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Breaking News: The Biden administration will keep its cap on refugee admissions at the low level set by the Trump White House, walking back an earlier pledge. <https://nyti.ms/3eadvjw>

In the later statement indicating the number could go higher than 15,000, Psaki said that Biden had been consulting with advisors to “determine what number of refugees could realistically be admitted to the United States between now and October 1.”

“Given the decimated refugee admissions program we inherited, and burdens on the Office of Refugee Resettlement, his initial goal of 62,500 seems unlikely,” she said, a reference to the ongoing crisis at the southern border, of which the ORR is a key agency in dealing with migrant children.

DEMS URGE BIDEN TO INCLUDE AMNESTY FOR SOME ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN SECOND SPENDING BILL

Psaki then said that with the reforms to the refugee admissions in place, a new updated cap will be announced before the middle of May.

“While finalizing that determination, the President was urged to take immediate action to reverse the Trump policy that banned refugees from many key regions, to enable flights from those regions to begin within days; today’s order did that,” she said. “With that done, we expect the President to set a final, increased refugee cap for the remainder of this fiscal year by May 15.”

The controversy represents the latest political difficulty for the Biden administration, which has been facing intense pushback over its handling of the continued crisis at the southern border.

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The administration has overseen a dramatic surge in migration — including unaccompanied children — which has led to shocking images of packed migrant facilities and children being dumped by smugglers at the border.

The administration has been scrambling to cope with the influx, building new facilities and trying to get other countries to increase troop presences at their borders. But critics have accused the administration of fueling the crisis by rolling back Trump-era border protections and policies.

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