



July 18, 2025

## Trajectories

***The Refugees Who Are Arriving and Those Who Are Not.*** Last week, KRM received two refugee cases from the Democratic Republic of Congo: a single woman who had fled to Kenya reunited with her sister in the Lexington area; and a family of three—a 57-year-old widow, her 20-year-old son and 19-year-old daughter, who had been living as refugees in Zimbabwe—was welcomed at the Louisville airport by our staff and a local church group. This family had no relatives in the United States. They were elated to be here, with the son expressing his eagerness to work and the mother indicating that her daughter wished to complete high school.

On his inauguration day, President Trump suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which was established by Congress with the Refugee Act of 1980. In a legal challenge to the USRAP suspension, *Pacito v. Trump*, a federal district judge stayed the suspension, calling it a “nullification of congressional will.” But an appeals court affirmed the USRAP suspension, although ruling that the initial injunction did protect the approximately 12,000 refugees who were scheduled for travel to the U.S. at the time of the suspension and who had a “strong reliance interest” in being resettled.

The administration has resisted compliance with the court order to resettle these refugees, filing appeals and devising barriers to delay their departure. The four refugees KRM received are among only 37 refugees protected by the *Pacito v. Trump* injunction the State Department has permitted to travel to the U.S.

Meanwhile, last week the State Department fired most all staff associated with administration of U.S. refugee program, many with veteran service. This week, the Senate voted to approve the administration’s rescissions bill, cancelling current congressional appropriations for foreign humanitarian assistance, including refugee processing and resettlement. Finally, the administration is attempting to block the admission of refugees through the application of nationality-specific travel bans, with justifications often targeting the repressive governments that persecuted the refugees in the USRAP pipeline, forcing them to flee their home country.

The intent to dismantle the 55-year-old U.S. refugee program—under which admission to the U.S. was determined strictly on the urgency of the protection needs of persecuted people, without regard to race, religion or nationality—is clear.

In its place, the Trump administration continues to fast-track the processing and resettlement of white South Africans to the United States, designating them as refugees and promoting unsubstantiated claims that these Afrikaners are victims of genocide. In fact, the persecution claims of these Afrikaners—who reside in South Africa, many in affluent circumstances and with sizable land holdings accumulated due to the racially discriminatory policies during the apartheid era—do not appear to meet the legal standards that apply to refugee and asylum determinations.

So, it was the new life trajectories of these four refugees who arrived at KRM last week that brought to mind the worsened circumstances and narrowed hope of refugees overseas, who will languish with reduced humanitarian assistance and opportunity for resettlement.

***Immigrants Seeking Humanitarian Protection.*** Refugees are a small segment of immigrants in the United States overall. In recent years, KRM and Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services provided assistance to thousands of Cubans who came to join Louisville's large Cuban American community. Recent Cuban arrivals were fleeing intensifying political control in Cuba, which has been accompanied by economic collapse. Also, under the Biden administration, Haitians fleeing political instability and gang violence were offered temporary humanitarian protection in the United States, with hundreds being resettled through the three KRM offices, in Louisville, Lexington and Covington.

The Trump administration has, over the last three months, abruptly revoked the humanitarian parole and employment authorization of thousands of the most recent Cuban and Haitian arrivals, prior to expiration, giving them terse orders to voluntarily depart the United States or face possible detention and deportation. These Cubans and Haitians who suddenly lost their legal status, along with undocumented immigrants from Central America and other countries fear detention and deportation (possibly to an unknown third country), but feel they have nowhere to go; that return to their home country will subject them to the same risks and threats that forced them to migrate to the United States.

***Emerging Foundations of a Police State for Immigrants.*** Immigration-related detentions and deportations have increased under the Trump administration, though not substantially in Kentucky. But the colossal funding increases in the Big Beautiful

Bill passed by Congress for the construction of immigration detention centers (\$45 billion) and expanded personnel for enforcement and removal (\$29.9 billion) herald a dramatic escalation in immigration-related arrests, detention and deportation, with an intensification of aggressive tactics. ICE has recently announced that undocumented immigrants are ineligible for bond hearings and will be detained for the duration of their immigration proceedings, which could be months or years.

Just as aggressive has been the Trump administration's violation of legal protections for immigrants. The Refugee Act of 1980 established the right of individuals to apply for asylum upon entry to the U.S. The Trump administration effectively sealed the border, making it impossible for individuals to articulate a persecution claim. On July 2, a federal judge ruled that President Trump could not ignore the law and ban asylum at the border. For those who have filed asylum applications, the Department of Justice has issued guidance asserting, in disregard of legal precedent, that "legally insufficient" asylum cases can be dismissed without a hearing. At the same time, the Trump administration has been firing immigration judges. From early on, the Trump administration has asserted their right to exercise "expedited removal," that is, to deport immigrants who cannot prove they have been in the United States for at least two years, without a hearing before a judge. Immigration applications for green cards and other protections are being arbitrarily paused without explanation.

The foundations are being laid to create a police state for mass arrests, detention, and deportation of immigrants, with minimal legal protections from abuse.

***Public Unease About Anti-Immigrant Policies and Actions.*** Someone sent me a social media post that said, "I don't care if immigrants are hard-working, I care that they are human beings." In a Gallup poll conducted in June, it seems that a majority of Americans are having second thoughts about the Trump administration's handling of immigration and demonizing of immigrants. A record-high 79% of those polled said that immigration was more helpful than harmful to our country, with a record-low 17% viewing immigration as a bad thing. Seventy-eight percent of respondents supported allowing undocumented immigrants a pathway to becoming U.S. citizens if they met certain requirements over time, while only 38% of those polled supported deporting all immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally back to their home country.

The question now is, public sentiment aside, what can be done to moderate or stop what has been set in motion?

What is special about so many KRM community supporters is that they are informed about what is going on this world and often do know something of the

backstory to the immigrant and refugee journey—that deprivation, targeted violence, dehumanization and denial of basic human rights—that forced these courageous, resilient individuals to leave their homes. A broader number of Americans may not be familiar with the losses and struggles that refugees and immigrants suffered before coming to the United States, but they do recognize the hard work, educational attainment, and character of immigrants; that over generations, immigrants have been integral to the dynamism and success of our country and have become part of our communities, and of our country. The support for immigration in the Gallup polling represents a realization, however belated, that mass arrests, detention and deportation of hard-working people who have committed no crimes, other than seeking safety and opportunity for their families, is a new, fateful direction for the United States. It's a trajectory that is causing unease, with respect to how it will affect our economy, the fabric of our communities, legal safeguards, and our basic decency. Likewise, there are many Americans for whom the ideals of democracy, human rights, rule of law and equality under the law, are cherished ideals that the United States should continue to stand for, at home and abroad; and that abandoning those ideals sets us on perilous new path that is cuts against the grain of our history.

***A Counter Trajectory.*** With each passing month, a course reversal on immigration policy seems more difficult. But KRM has worked to welcome refugees and immigrants to Kentucky for 35 years, with an extraordinary number of community volunteers, service providers and donors actively participating in these efforts of welcome and community-building. Our own shared trajectory of compassion, care and celebration of the achievements and resilience of immigrants has its own momentum that cannot be abruptly stilled.

Now, more than ever, we at KRM appreciate your partnership and support, as do all the refugees and immigrants we've welcomed to Kentucky. They, especially, need your support at this moment.

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