



## FORUM

### **Explainer: Operation PARRIS and Refugee Arrests and Re-Vetting**

#### **Introduction**

This explainer provides background on the recent efforts of the Trump administration to reopen the cases of certain resettled and vetted refugees, in some instances arresting and detaining them during the re-vetting process.

Since the beginning of the second Trump administration, the federal government has taken aggressive steps to [restrict the refugee resettlement program](#), immediately halting refugee admissions, cutting funding to the resettlement agencies, reducing Department of State (DOS) staffing and international assistance capacity, and [lowering the refugee ceiling](#) to lowest levels in the modern era.

Beyond these steps to reduce the flow of new refugees, the administration has taken additional steps to re-examine potentially thousands of already resettled refugees during the Biden administration who have yet to obtain a green card. As detailed in this explainer, these previously vetted and admitted refugees face new uncertainty, including the reopening of their refugee cases, additional rounds of re-vetting, and – in some cases – arrest and indefinite detention.

#### **Refugee background**

[Refugees](#) are [lawfully admitted](#) into the U.S. under a formal process involving extensive screening and vetting. The process of [obtaining refugee status](#) is [thorough and extensive](#), involves multiple U.S. and international agencies, and often takes years.

Refugee status is an indefinite status, and it leads to permanent status. Once an individual obtains refugee status, he or she [is required](#) to wait for one year but is then obligated to apply for Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR or “[green card](#)”) status. Refugee status is an indefinite status, so it does not terminate if a refugee does not apply for LPR status.

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), [8 U.S.C. § 1159\(a\)\(1\)](#), refugees who have not obtained a green card within one year are to “return or be returned to the custody of the Department of Homeland Security for inspection and examination for admission to the United States.” In part because the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) also requires refugees to be present in the U.S. “[for at least 1 year](#)” before obtaining a green card, that provision has been

understood to refer to the ability of DHS to follow up on cases after one year and was not, by itself, a sufficient basis for detaining a refugee, as indicated in this [2010 agency guidance](#).

Historically, the one-year timeframe to apply and receive a green card has not been interpreted as a deadline carrying punitive immigration consequences. Logically, that interpretation was consistent with the circumstances of resettlement, including the required one-year wait time before applying for green cards, as well as the fact that refugees at the one-year mark are still very much in the midst of the integration process.

Traditionally, refugee status has only been revoked [in rare cases of fraud or material misrepresentation](#) during the application process, and requires the government to bring a [formal proceeding that affords due process](#) to the refugee. Delays in applying for or receiving a green card, by themselves, have never triggered the revocation of immigration status or other significant immigration consequences. In recent months, the administration has sought to change that.

In reopening refugee cases and creating this extensive [review process](#) for certain refugees, including dozens of [arrests and detentions](#) for those who had not secured a green card within the one-year period (some who delayed in filing for a green card, along with others who timely filed, but had not yet had their applications adjudicated), the administration's actions raise questions about the fairness of targeting this much-vetted and protected group, as well as the sufficiency of due process afforded them.

### **Trump administration actions**

Beginning in late 2025, the Trump administration began taking steps to re-open cases and halt green card processing for large numbers of refugees resettled under the prior administration.

On November 21, 2025, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced it would re-open the cases of tens of thousands of already resettled refugees and begin re-vetting them. Issuing an [internal memo](#) that directed staff to review more than 200,000 lawfully admitted and resettled refugees who entered the U.S. between January 20, 2021, and February 20, 2025, roughly corresponding to the Biden presidency. USCIS said it wanted to ensure that these individuals “met the refugee definition ... at the time of admission and to explore admissibility.” The process could potentially terminate the refugee status of already-admitted refugees who USCIS subsequently determines have not met refugee criteria. The guidance also halted all processing of green card applications for refugees who entered during the time period in question.

The refugee review process entails an [internal and administrative process](#) of reexamining original documentation submitted by refugees to ensure they meet the relevant legal criteria for admission and resettlement, including potentially re-interviewing cases. This review process could also apply, when appropriate, to refugees outside of the specifically enumerated timeframe. Upon issuance of the November memo, [critics warned](#) that reopening cases was an unnecessary waste of resources and threatened to [sow fear](#) in impacted communities. Subsequent actions only further heightened such concerns.

## Operation PARRIS

On January 9, 2026, USCIS [announced](#) Operation Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening (Operation PARRIS) in Minnesota. Launched several weeks into [Operation Metro Surge](#), the wide-ranging immigration enforcement operation already under way in Minnesota. Operation PARRIS specifically targeted resettled refugees in the state who had not yet adjusted to or officially received their LPR status. USCIS framed the operation as part of a “war on fraud,” and indicated that the review process would involve background checks, reinterviews, and merit reviews.

Soon thereafter, [reports circulated](#) of door-to-door [arrests and detentions](#) of resettled refugees, including numerous instances of Minnesota-based refugees being transferred out-of-state, in particular to Texas where re-interviews were conducted. After going through this re-vetting, a number of refugees were simply released on the streets in Texas outside the detention facilities, [with no means to return to Minnesota](#) and in some instances [without their documentation](#). It is estimated that [150 refugees](#) or more were arrested and detained in this process. Of those arrested and detained there has been no public information about any of them losing their refugees status as a result of the re-interview process.

The two common denominators in all these arrests were 1) the refugees had entered the U.S. between January 2021-February 2025, and 2) they had not yet received their green cards. Notably, some of these individuals had already applied for green cards but simply had not received them and/or the cards had not yet been issued. A contributing factor in a number of these instances was that refugee green card processing had been halted under the November [USCIS memo](#), which made it impossible for them to obtain their green cards in a timely manner.

While federal statutes do require resettled refugees to obtain a green card after one year, the arrest and detention of those who failed to apply or failed to receive a green card within the one-year period, represented a dramatic departure from how such individuals were previously treated. Historically there were no arrests, detentions, or even penalties for not obtaining a green card after one year of residence. In fact, the one-year timeframe was not seen so much as a deadline but as a marker for beginning the process of pursuing a green card. DHS did not historically even send a notice or formal reminder to refugees to apply for a green card at the one-year mark.

## DHS policy changes

In late 2025, the Trump administration began taking steps to reinterpret 8 U.S.C. § 1159(a)(1) to mandate detention of refugees who did not receive green cards within a one-year period. On December 18, 2025, it [rescinded](#) the 2010 agency guidance. One month later, on January 21, 2026 then-DHS Secretary Kristi Noem [sent a letter](#) to Attorney General Pam Bondi requesting that she vacate a 2012 Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) decision (*Matter of D-K*), that held that already admitted refugees, may not be taken into DHS custody under INA § 209(a)(1), charged inadmissible in removal proceedings, and instead DHS would need to establish another ground of deportability. DOJ has [yet to act](#) on the request (at the time of this explainer’s publication), but a reversal would create additional avenues to deport resettled refugees.

Subsequently, on February 18, 2026, [DHS issued another memo](#) purporting to reinterpret 8 U.S.C. § 1159(a)(1), reiterating its rescission of the 2010 agency guidance, and outlined new guidance permitting it to arrest and detain refugees who had not adjusted to a green card at the one-year deadline. According to the February memo, § 1159(a)(1) requires DHS to arrest and detain refugees without green cards after one year. The memo explained that refugees were obligated to “return or be returned to the custody of the Department of Homeland Security for inspection and examination,” providing no maximum time limits on their detention. In arriving at this [new interpretation](#), DHS indicated it would continue to re-interview and re-vet refugees as it carried out this new policy.

## **Litigation**

### ***U.H.A v Bondi***

The first lawsuit regarding refugee arrests and detentions, [U.H.A v Bondi](#), was filed on January 24, 2026, prior to the issuance of the February 18 memo, on behalf of refugees by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) and others. U.S. District Judge John Tunheim issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) on January 28 halting any further arrests and detention of refugees and ordering the release of all the refugees who had already been arrested, including providing them with a way to return to Minnesota. The TRO, which only applied to refugees arrested in Minnesota (and not to any other states), halted Operation PARRIS’s house-to-house arrests and detentions of Minnesota refugees, leading the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to change tactics and instead issue call-in letters (DHS Form G-58) to potential refugee targets for re-vetting. These letters requiring follow-up provided refugees with anywhere from one day to one week or more to prepare their cases and potentially obtain counsel.

On February 9, Judge Tunheim [denied](#) the federal government’s motion to vacate the TRO [characterizing](#) Operation PARRIS as a “solution in search of a problem.” Tunheim interpreted the relevant statute’s use of the term “custody” to refer to a narrow and limited inquiry into the individual’s potential pathway to LPR status – not a requirement to detain them. Subsequently, on February 27, 2026, upon the expiration of the TRO, Judge Tunheim issued a preliminary injunction further halting Operation PARRIS’s refugee arrests and detentions in Minnesota. In his ruling, Judge Tunheim highlighted the Catch-22 faced by refugees facing arrest and detention for failing to obtain a green card, while also being forbidden to obtain a green card until one year had passed. He stated, “The Court will not allow federal authorities to use “a new and erroneous statutory interpretation to terrorize refugees who immigrated to this country under the promise that they would be welcomed and allowed to live in peace, far from the persecution they fled.” His preliminary injunction only applies to refugees in Minnesota. It has yet to be seen if DHS will appeal this preliminary injunction.

### ***Jean A. v Noem***

Because *U.H.A v Bondi*’s injunctive relief only applies to refugees arrested in Minnesota, subsequent litigation has sought to extend relief nationwide. On February 27, 2026, IRAP and others [brought a new lawsuit](#) in the U.S. District Court of Massachusetts, entitled [Jean A v Noem](#). This suit challenges the legality of the policy that justifies the arrest and detention of refugees on a nationwide basis. On March 23, 2026 the [district court](#) granted an unopposed

motion that would pause the arrest and detention of refugees nationwide until the case had been decided. The court's order does not prevent refugees from receiving call-in letters and having to go through review and reinterview regarding their original refugee claim.

### **Current practices**

Since the issuance of injunctive relief in *U.H.A v Bondi* and the recent ruling in *Jean A. v Noem*, DHS appears to have modified the implementation of Operation PARRIS, including halting door-to-door arrests and detentions of resettled refugees. These particular actions have stopped in Minnesota and do not seem to be happening elsewhere in the U.S. What has continued in Minnesota, [and now elsewhere](#), is that refugees are [receiving call-in letters for interviews](#). While less alarming than arrests and detentions, refugees are [reportedly](#) being asked not only about their green card applications, but also about their initial application for refugee status, indicating that DHS is still attempting to find grounds to revoke refugee status for these individuals. This represented a notable departure from how prior administrations (including the first Trump administration) treated refugees in the U.S. The questioning – which was not triggered by any indication of irregularity or wrongdoing – creates uncertainty for a population that previously was seen as being securely resettled into a [durable solution](#).

It is still unclear how widespread these investigations are and whether they are uncovering anything beyond minor discrepancies. There is no indication that any refugee has had his or her refugee status revoked as an outcome of this review process. However, the specter of reopening tens of thousands of cases of resettled refugees threatens to take a toll on all U.S. refugees, their families, employers, and communities, while creating [unnecessary](#) uncertainty.