

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## IN VETTING REFUGEES, U.S. PLANS TO ASSESS ABILITY TO ASSIMILATE

*Officials say government would still consider need for protection; policy change driven by White House adviser Stephen Miller*

By Felicia Schwartz  
September 27, 2017

WASHINGTON – The Trump administration is planning to assess the ability of refugees to assimilate – in addition to their need for protection – when deciding whether to admit them, according to an annual report to Congress on refugees.

The report, which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal and has yet to be made public, says the U.S. may consider “certain criteria that enhance a refugee’s likelihood of successful assimilation and contribution in the United States,” in addition to “compelling protection needs.”

Historically, the U.S. has considered whether refugees demonstrate that he they have experienced persecution or fear persecution.

The change in policy drew impetus from the White House, and in particular, Stephen Miller, a senior adviser to the president who has been instrumental in crafting the administration’s policies on refugees and immigration.

The policy also reflects President Donald Trump’s view that immigrants should embrace American values. In a videotaped message last week to new U.S. citizens, Mr. Trump urged them to help others to assimilate.

“You now share the obligation to teach our values to others, to help newcomers assimilate to our way of life and uplift America by living according to its highest ideals of self-governance and its highest standards,” he said. “Our history is now your history. And our traditions are now your traditions.”

A State Department official said that it wouldn’t be mandatory for refugees to meet an assimilation standard, but that officials are exploring factors to help meet administration priorities.

“One of the discussions that the current administration has been having is how to ensure that refugees successfully assimilate,” a State Department official said. “We’ve started to have discussions – to see within that cadre of very vulnerable people if . . .they might have additional factors that we can use to help them assimilate.”

A second State Department official said a refugee’s ability to assimilate and contribute to U.S. society is “not an additional requirement.”

The Trump administration will admit at most 45,000 refugees in fiscal year 2018, [The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday](#), the lowest cap since at least 1980. Secretary of State Rex

Tillerson and acting Homeland Security Secretary Elaine Duke briefed lawmakers about the annual refugee cap on Wednesday.

A White House official said Mr. Trump would consult with Mr. Tillerson and Ms. Duke about the final refugee cap of 45,000 and will soon order a presidential determination to announce the final ceiling.

In reaching the cap, the Trump administration said Wednesday, the government would take no more than 19,000 refugees from Africa, 5,000 from East Asia, 2,000 from Europe and Central Asia, 1,500 from Latin America and the Caribbean and 17,500 from the Middle East and South Asia.

The State Department and the Department of Homeland Security are undertaking several initiatives to bolster assimilation and integration by refugees in fiscal 2018, the report says. Such steps will "better secure our communities by fostering a cohesive society based upon shared civic ideals, an appreciation of our history and an understanding of the English language."

The report didn't offer further details on how the administration would assess a refugee's likelihood of successful assimilation.

The first State Department official said the U.S. is considering whether to provide English language training before refugees come to the U.S. The various types of additional criteria "are in the early days of discussion," the official said.

The official added that the U.S. would "continue to focus on vulnerability and protection."

Advocates and refugee organizations said they are concerned about the planned assimilation factors, which they described as contrary to the historic goals of the refugee program.

"It's adding a criteria to be resettled in the United States and we think that is absolutely wrong," said Hans Van de Weerd, vice president of U.S. programs at the International Rescue Committee.

"Resettlement is for people who have no other choice, who need protection, who need urgent medical care," he said. "To add a criteria about whether they have the potential to contribute to this nation flies in the face of what the resettlement program is about, and it also seems to imply that refugees are not assimilating currently."

*– Shane Harris contributed to this article.*