

# Center for the Victims of Torture

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/president-trump%E2%80%99s-five-major-barriers-asylum-cvt-explains>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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At present, the media is consumed with the impeachment of President Trump and the prospect of war with Iran. But do not let the lack of press coverage fool you into thinking that the administration is backing off of its assault on refugees and asylum seekers. Right now, the administration is quietly rolling out policy proposals with the express purpose of deterring individuals and families from seeking refuge in the United States, including additional ways to outright deny protection. The Presidents White House is turning its back on the United States moral duty as a world leader to assist people in grievous situations, making the difficult lives of refugees seeking asylum and the torture survivors among them more challenging and discouraging.

In the current global refugee crisis, with [nearly 71 million displaced people](#), many survivors of torture and persecution are asylum seekers trying to be recognized as refugees so they can find safety.

To understand the asylum barriers being created by the U.S., heres what you need to know:

#### **Barrier 1. The Third-Country Transit Rule**

The President has imposed a strict new asylum rule in his efforts to bar migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, most of whom are from Central America, but who also include Venezuelans, Cubans and others from African countries. The rule states that asylum seekers who pass through a third country on their way to the U.S. will only be eligible for asylum in the United States if they first apply and are denied refugee status in that country, effectively negating asylum for all but Mexican refugees seeking protection in the U.S. This is an attempt to circumvent the laws protecting refugees who fear returning to countries where they were persecuted, and to force people to seek asylum and even remain in countries where they face danger.

#### **Barrier 2. The Remain in Mexico Policy**

This policy forces asylum seekers to stay in dangerous Mexican border cities as they wait for word on their asylum cases. Also known as Migration Protection Protocols (MPP), the policy has stranded tens of thousands in unsanitary conditions without access to sufficient food, water or other basic necessities. In addition, human rights [groups have reported](#) hundreds of incidents of violence against asylum seekers living in these situations since the policy went into effect.

For survivors of torture, these conditions exacerbate previous trauma. In November 2019, CVT [filed this statement for the record](#) opposing MPP and highlighting the devastating physical and psychological effects the policy has for survivors of torture.

#### **Barrier 3. Other Illegal International Agreements**

In a development that has been devastating to survivors seeking asylum, the administration has entered into new agreements to return asylum seekers to dangerous countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras countries from which most asylum seekers at the southern border originate. These countries are unsafe and do not have the capacity to host and protect asylum seekers. For example, [according to WOLA Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas](#), in 2018 El Salvador had the second highest homicide rate in Latin America and Honduras was among the top four. In Guatemala, large numbers of individuals continue to flee, 33,000 of whom sought asylum in the United States in 2018. In these three Central American states, the violence is perpetrated by state security forces, gangs and organized crime. Clearly, many of those who flee are likely to be survivors of torture.

#### **Barrier 4. Onerous Work Permit-Related Restrictions**

[New rules sought](#) by the Department of Homeland Security in November 2019 will impede, and in many cases likely eliminate entirely, refugees ability to make a living. Under the new rules, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) would have indefinite time to process work permit applications, for which they would charge a \$490 fee. This amount is exorbitant; [CVTs clinicians](#) often have to work with survivors to figure how to pay even a \$3 copay for medications.

In addition, asylum seekers would have to wait one full year before even being allowed to obtain a work permit. For people fleeing torture and persecution, who generally have no resources to sustain themselves or their families, these barriers will be insurmountable. They would, in effect, keep asylum seekers out of work for an unidentified amount of time while they await processing. This could be months, maybe even years. Many cannot afford to go without an income for any length of time and being without work puts them at risk for exploitation. USCISs justification for the rule that it would enable the agency to weed out those whose only purpose in applying for asylum is to enter and work in the United States is doubly troubling, because it might well signal that at some point work permits for asylum seekers could vanish entirely.

The limbo this creates in the lives of asylum seekers has an adverse effect on their healing journey. As Andrea Northwood, Ph.D., LP, CVT director of client services, explained in a [Public Comment Opposing the Proposed Removal of the 30-Day Processing Provision](#):

*In addition to the basic necessity of income in order to survive and support a family in danger back home, sitting around all day with nothing to do is described as a major stressor (at best) and even a cause of insanity (going crazy) by our asylum-seeking trauma survivors, as they use keeping busy and meaningful activity to distract themselves from involuntary, disturbing traumatic memories as well as profound sadness and loss.*

Stressors such as these can bring a return to thoughts of torture amongst survivors that, Dr. Northwood adds, could trigger torture-related flashbacks.

#### **Barrier 5. Refugee Cap at Historic Low**

Since taking office, President Trump has slashed the U.S. refugee admissions program by more than 80 percent. Most recently, he set the fiscal year 2020 admissions ceiling at a record-low 18,000 refugees, a fraction of the 95,000 historic average. This action will further restrict options for people fleeing persecution and conflict. Once a reliable safe haven and global leader in welcoming refugees, the U.S. is now forsaking its legacy of generosity and welcome. It is slamming the door not only in the faces of many people in need of resettlement, but also on refugee torture survivors healing opportunities. And it harms U.S. businesses, which lose labor from the immigrant work force, as well as the loss in taxes and social security revenues paid by those workers.

The administrations dismantlement of our asylum and refugee systems puts countless lives in jeopardy. The journey to safety presents asylum seekers with untold dangers, as CVTs clients are well aware. The presidents proposals are not only reprehensible but also illegal. Aiming to make seeking asylum so miserable that it deters people from applying is an obvious violation of the Refugee Act of 1980.

Please support [organizations](#) advocating for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Concerned individuals should also reach out to their [congressional offices](#) to let their representatives know they are unhappy about their tax money being spent on such inhumane policies. While Congress debates the fate of Trumps presidency, the fates of the hundreds of thousands of people seeking asylum hang in the balance.

Other countries take their cue from the actions of U.S. presidents. A world leader who doesnt shelter the worlds most at-risk populations is no leader at all. Please join us in opposing these cruel and vindictive policies.

We **heal victims** of torture through unique services and professional care worldwide.

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We **strengthen partners** who heal torture survivors and work to prevent torture.

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We **advocate** for the protection & care of torture survivors and an end to torture.

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