

SELECT REFUGEE FACTS 2021

DEFINITIONS

Refugee: A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (e.g., members of the LGBTQ community). The persecution a refugee experiences may include harassment, threats, abduction or torture. A refugee is often afforded some sort of legal protection, either by their host country's government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or both. In the United States, refugees are hand-selected by the U.S. government and are screened in advance. They are subject to background checks and security screenings by multiple U.S. agencies. Only after everything is approved are they brought to the U.S. to reside permanently.

Asylum Seeker: An asylum seeker is a person who has fled persecution in their home country and is seeking safe haven in a different country, but has not yet received any legal recognition or status. In several countries, including the U.S., asylum seekers are sometimes detained while waiting for their case to be heard.

Internally displaced person: An internally displaced person, or IDP, is a person who fled their home but has not crossed an international border to find sanctuary. Even if they fled for reasons similar to those driving refugees (armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight.

Migrant: A migrant is a person who chooses to move from their home for any variety of reasons, but not necessarily because of a direct threat of persecution or death. Migrant is an umbrella category that can include refugees but can also include people moving to improve their lives by finding work or education, those seeking family reunion and others.

Some Basic Information to put the Global Refugee Crisis in Context:

- There are now estimated to be more than 80 million who have been forcibly displaced due to persecution and violence. 26.4 million of these people are refugees. Most of the remainder are internally displaced within the borders of their own countries (i.e., they have fled their homes but have not crossed an international border).
- 85% of refugees are being hosted in developing countries. This is largely due to geography; these countries are closest to the conflict zones people are fleeing. Turkey is the country that hosts the most refugees (3.6 million).
- 68% of the world's refugees come from just five countries: Syria (6.6 million), Venezuela (3.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.2 million), and Myanmar (1.1 million).

- 40% of refugees are under the age of 18. Of the more than 80 million people estimated to be forcibly displaced from their homes, 30 – 34 million are estimated to be children below 18 years of age.

- Refugee advocates often refer to three durable solutions for refugees. These durable solutions include local integration (for refugees who can safely rebuild their lives in the country to which they fled), resettlement (for the most vulnerable refugees for whom life is not safe in the country to which they fled and so require permanent resettlement in a 3rd country), and repatriation (for refugees for whom circumstances in their homeland change significantly enough that it is safe to return).

- In 2019 (the last year for which concrete data is available), UNHCR pursued formal resettlement for just 81,600 refugees, although there are tens of millions of refugees worldwide. According to government statistics, 26 countries admitted 107,800 refugees for resettlement during 2019, with or without UNHCR's assistance. The U.S. used to lead the world in terms of resettlement; however, because we have cut the number of refugees, we resettle by more than 80%, we have contributed to significantly lowering the number of refugees resettled worldwide over the last 3 years.

- The U.S. has been resettling refugees for decades. In the aftermath of World War II, Congress enacted the first refugee legislation, providing refuge to over 650,000 displaced Europeans. Since the U.S. resettlement program was formalized through the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. has resettled over 3 million refugees.

- The Refugee Act created the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to ensure access to a uniform and effective resettlement of refugees to the United States.

- The USRAP is a public-private partnership between non-profit organizations and the U.S. Department of State. It includes nine national resettlement agencies, including HIAS, and a network of hundreds of local partner organizations that resettle refugees in communities around the country.

- The maximum number of refugees resettled in the U.S. in a given year, which is referred to as the ceiling for refugee admissions, is determined by the annual Presidential Determination (PD).

- o Since the USRAP's inception, the United States has set an average refugee admissions goal of 96,229 refugees and, on average, has resettled 85,000 refugees annually. Prior to 2018, the PD only dipped below 70,000 once, in 1986 when it was set at 67,000. In some years, the U.S. resettled up to 200,000 refugees.

- o For fiscal year 2021 (which began in October 2020 and will end in September 2021), the Trump administration set a refugee admissions ceiling of 15,000, the lowest in the history of the U.S. refugee resettlement program. As of December 31, 2020, the United

States was not on track to meet the goal of 15,000 refugees because the administration used COVID as a reason to essentially ground the program to a halt.

- The new Biden Administration has promised to increase the FY2021 numbers and to raise the PD to 125,000 for FY2022.
- Refugees are the most vetted individuals entering the United States and undergo complex security checks run by the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department, the Department of Defense, the National Counterterrorism Center, and other U.S. intelligence agencies. It can take between 18-24 months, and sometimes longer, from the time a refugee is referred to the USRAP to the time of arrival.
- Once resettled, refugees not only contribute to their new communities economically, but also play an active role in civic engagement, participate in the labor force, maintain a strong devotion to education, purchase homes, and become U.S. citizens.
- It is legal to seek asylum. Under both U.S. and international law, the U.S. must hear the claims of asylum seekers, regardless of where or how they entered the country (e.g., at an official point of entry, between ports of entry, etc.).

(Source: HIAS.org and current news reports)