

Displacement 101: Background Facts and Figures



Definitions

You have probably heard terms such as asylum seeker, refugee, or internally displaced person. But what do those terms actually mean, and what is the difference between them? To help make sure everyone is on the same page, here are those definitions:

- **Refugee:** Under international law, a refugee is someone who is forced to flee their home country to escape persecution or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity, or freedom. This may be linked to their race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, or membership of a social group, but also to situations of conflict, violence, or public disorder. Refugees are protected by international law and cannot be sent back home if their life or freedom would be at risk.
- **Asylum Seeker:** An asylum seeker is a person who is applying (or preparing to apply) for asylum in another country to seek international protection. A final determination of the protection need, however, has not yet been made for such persons. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee. An asylum seeker may not be sent back to their country of origin if they have a well-founded fear that their life or fundamental rights would be threatened there.
- **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, 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.
- **Stateless:** A person is stateless when no State recognizes this person as a national according to the operation of the State's law. Stateless people often face significant challenges accessing basic rights. For example, a stateless person often isn't allowed to go to school, see a doctor, get a job, open a bank account, buy a house, or get married.

More about Refugees

Here is some basic information that may be helpful as you try to put the global refugee crisis in context:

- At the midpoint of 2024, there were **122.6 million forcibly displaced people worldwide**. 37.9 million were refugees, 8 million were asylum seekers, 68.3 million were internally displaced, and 5.8 million other people in need of international protection.
- 71% of refugees are being hosted in low and middle-income countries. This is largely due to geography; these countries are closest to the conflict zones people are fleeing. Iran and Turkey are host to the largest refugee populations in the world, hosting 3.8 and 3.1 million refugees, respectively.
- 65% of the world's refugees come from just four countries: Syria (6.3 million), Venezuela (6.2 million), Ukraine (6.1 million), and Afghanistan (6.1 million).
- Refugee advocates often refer to three durable solutions for refugees. These durable solutions are **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 third country), and **repatriation** (for refugees for whom circumstances in their homeland change significantly enough that it is safe to return).

- 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 3.6 million refugees.
- The maximum number of refugees resettled in the U.S. each year, which is referred to as the ceiling for refugee admissions, is determined by the annual Presidential Determination (PD).
 - 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.
 - For fiscal year 2024 (which began in October 2023 and ended in September 2024), the Biden administration set a refugee admissions ceiling of 125,000 and admitted 100,034 refugees. This marks the first time that the U.S. admitted more than 100,000 refugees since 1994.
- 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.
- On average, 82 percent of refugees participate in the labor force, compared to the 62 percent national average. Refugees are twice as likely as native-born individuals to hold jobs in the service industry, and many industries now rely heavily on refugee workers.
- Refugees and asylees had a positive net fiscal impact on the U.S. government and economy over a 15-year period (2005-2019), totaling nearly \$124 billion, according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report released in 2024.