Refugees: Systemic Challenges and Personal Stories

Praveena Kandasmi
Kenna Tyrrell
Kellie Cahalane
DEFINITIONS

Refugees are people fleeing armed conflict or persecution. Their situation is often so perilous and desperate that they cross national borders to seek safety in nearby countries. This became internationally recognized as "refugees" with access to assistance from States, UNHCR, and other organizations. They are no longer recognized presently because it is dangerous for them to return home, and they need sanctuary elsewhere. These are people for whom denial of asylum has potentially deadly consequences.

Myth: Refugees come to America to seek a better life, but really to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants face no such impediment to return if they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their government.

An immigrant is someone from a foreign country who relocates to live in another country. They may or may not be citizens. Immigrants are subject to the laws of their adopted country. They may come here if they fear death or a worse life. Immigrants are usually driven by economic factors, as they want to be closer to family.

Where the world's displaced people are being hosted

53% of refugees worldwide came from three countries

The UNHCR estimates that there are 65.3 million people worldwide who have been forced to flee. This includes 21.3 million people who have sought refuge abroad, 10 million internally displaced within their country, and 107,100 asylum seekers awaiting determination of their status in the country of refuge.

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The refugee vettng process

Average wait time: 18-24 months

Process:
1. Initial referral
2. Interview
3. Medical examination
4. Security screening
5. Background checks
6. Final interview
7. Approval

Myths vs. Facts

Myth: Refugees are all Muslim.
Fact: Refugees come from diverse backgrounds. A recent report by the U.S. Office of Admissions Refugee Processing Center shows that only 24,768 refugees who arrived between January 2016 and August 2016 were Muslim, while more than 30,000 were of Christian and other faiths.

Myth: Refugees are choosing to leave their country.
Fact: Refugees are forced to flee because of war and persecution.

Myth: Refugees are a drain on society.
Fact: Refugees start business, pay taxes, and contribute to their communities. The vast majority of newly resettled refugees quickly find jobs, they spend money that helps local economies and send their children to schools with the intent that they become productive members of their new communities.

Myth: Refugees are all from the Middle East.
Fact: For the past decade, 27% of all refugees have been from Myanmar (also known as Burma), where conflict between several ethnic groups and the government continues to rage, making it the world's longest-running civil war. Other countries, such as Sudan, are also among the top sources of refugees.

Myth: Refugees are not fleeing violence.
Fact: Refugees are fleeing violence, persecution, or war. They are people who have been forced to leave their homes due to circumstances beyond their control. They are not choosing to leave.

Myth: Refugees are choosing to return to their home countries.
Fact: Refugees are forced to leave their homes and do not choose to return.

Myth: Refugees are all men.
Fact: Over half of refugees worldwide are children.

Myth: Refugees are all Muslim.
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