

Who Are Refugees

Refugee

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) itself, in addition to the 1951 definition, recognizes the following persons as refugees: who are outside their country

A refugee, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), is a person "forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country. They are unable to return to their own country because of feared persecution as a result of who they are, what they believe in or say, or because of armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder." Such a person may be called an asylum seeker until granted refugee status by a contracting state or by the UNHCR if they formally make a claim for asylum.

Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are often called refugees, but they are distinguished from refugees because they have not crossed an international border, although their reasons for leaving their home may be the same as those of refugees.

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

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The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention or the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 is a United Nations multilateral treaty that defines who a refugee is and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. The convention also sets out which people do not qualify as refugees, such as war criminals. The convention also provides for some visa-free travel for holders of refugee travel documents issued under the convention.

This convention was mentioned in Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The Refugee Convention builds on Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries. A refugee may enjoy rights and benefits in a state in addition to those provided for in the convention.

The rights created by the Convention generally still stand today. Some have argued that the complex nature of 21st century refugee relationships calls for a new treaty that recognizes the evolving nature of the nation-state, economic migrants, population displacement, environmental migrants, and modern warfare. Nevertheless, ideas like the principle of non-refoulement (non-returning of refugees to dangerous countries) (Article 33) are still applied today, with the 1951 Convention being the source of such rights.

Palestinian refugees

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Palestinian refugees are citizens of Mandatory Palestine, and their descendants, who fled or were expelled from their country, village or house over the course of the 1948 Palestine war and during the 1967 Six-Day War. Most Palestinian refugees live in or near 68 Palestinian refugee camps across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 2019 more than 5.6 million Palestinian refugees were registered with the United Nations.

In 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) defined Palestinian refugees to refer to the original "Palestine refugees" as well as their patrilineal descendants. However, UNRWA's assistance is limited to Palestine refugees residing in UNRWA's areas of operation in the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

As of 2019, more than 5.6 million Palestinians were registered with UNRWA as refugees, of which more than 1.5 million live in UNRWA-run camps. The term "Palestine refugee" does not include internally displaced Palestinians, who became Israeli citizens, or displaced Palestinian Jews. According to some estimates, as many as 1,050,000–1,380,000 people, who descend from displaced people of Mandatory Palestine are not registered under UNRWA or UNHCR mandates.

During the 1948 Palestine War, around 85% of the population or 700,000 Palestinian Arabs, living in the area that became Israel fled or were expelled from their homes, to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and to the countries of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. They, and their descendants who are also entitled to registration, are assisted by UNWRA in 59 registered camps, ten of which were established in the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967 to cope with the new wave of displaced Palestinians. They are also the world's oldest unsettled refugee population, having been under the ongoing governance of Arab states following the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, the refugee populations of the West Bank under Israeli governance since the Six-Day War and Palestinian administration since 1994, and the Gaza Strip administered by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) since 2007.

Today, the largest number of refugees, over 2,000,000, live in Jordan, where by 2009 over 90% of UNWRA-registered Palestinian refugees had acquired full citizenship rights. This figure consists almost exclusively of West Bank–descended Palestinians; however, as of December 2021, Palestinians with roots in the Gaza Strip are also still kept in legal limbo. In 2021, Jordanian politician Jawad Anani estimated that roughly 50% of Jordan's population had West Bank–Palestinian roots. Another approximately 2,000,000 refugees live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, under Israeli occupation and blockade. Approximately 500,000 refugees live in each of Syria and Lebanon respectively, albeit under very different circumstances. While Palestinian refugees in Syria maintained their stateless status, the Syrian government during Assad's rule afforded them the same economic and social rights enjoyed by Syrian citizens; they were also drafted into the Armed Forces despite not being citizens. Citizenship or legal residency in some host countries is denied, most notably for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where the absorption of Palestinians would upset a delicate confessional balance. For the refugees themselves, these situations mean they have reduced rights: no right to vote, limited property rights and access to social services, among other things.

On 11 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) adopted Resolution 194 which affirmed the Palestinians right to return to their homes.

Refugee crisis

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A refugee crisis can refer to difficulties and/or dangerous situations in the reception of large groups of refugees. These could be forcibly displaced persons, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers or any other huge groups of migrants.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), due to conflicts, human rights violations, and other disturbing events, 108.4 million individuals experienced forced displacement globally by the end of 2022. 35.3 million of 108.4 were refugees. UNHCR oversees 29.4 million refugees, whereas 5.9 million fall under the mandate of UNRWA as Palestine refugees. Furthermore, internal displacement affects 62.5 million individuals, 5.4 million are asylum-seekers, and an additional 5.2 million are other people in need of international protection. More vital information from UNHCR highlights that 76% of

refugees and those in need of international protection worldwide are hosted in low to middle-income countries, with a significant portion being countries neighboring their nations of origin. Türkiye hosted the largest refugee population globally, accommodating nearly 3.6 million refugees. The Islamic Republic of Iran followed closely with 3.4 million, trailed by Colombia with 2.5 million, Germany with 2.1 million, and Pakistan with 1.7 million. In relation to their national populations, Aruba (1 in 6) and Lebanon (1 in 7) hosted the highest number of refugees and individuals requiring international protection, followed by Curaçao (1 in 14), Jordan (1 in 16), and Montenegro (1 in 19). In 2022, the majority of refugees and individuals in need of international protection, accounting for 52%, originated from the top three countries that migrated to host nations. The first country was the Syrian Arab Republic with 6.5 million refugees, followed by Ukraine with 5.7 million, and Afghanistan, ranking third with 5.7 million refugees. In 2022, the government reported approximately 113,300 refugees who resettled, while UNHCR documented 116,500 refugees relocated to states for resettlement.

Refugee camp

A refugee camp is a temporary settlement built to receive refugees and people in refugee-like situations. Refugee camps usually accommodate displaced

A refugee camp is a temporary settlement built to receive refugees and people in refugee-like situations. Refugee camps usually accommodate displaced people who have fled their home country, but camps are also made for internally displaced people. Usually, refugees seek asylum after they have escaped war in their home countries, but some camps also house environmental and economic migrants. Camps with over a hundred thousand people are common, but as of 2012, the average-sized camp housed around 11,400. They are usually built and run by a government, the United Nations, international organizations (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross), or non-governmental organization. Unofficial refugee camps, such as Idomeni in Greece or the Calais jungle in France, are where refugees are largely left without the support of governments or international organizations.

Refugee camps generally develop in an impromptu fashion with the aim of meeting basic human needs for only a short time. Facilities that make a camp look or feel more permanent are often prohibited by host country governments. If the return of refugees is prevented (often by civil war), a humanitarian crisis can result or continue.

According to UNHCR, most refugees worldwide do not live in refugee camps. At the end of 2015, some 67% of refugees around the world lived in individual, private accommodations. This can be partly explained by the high number of Syrian refugees renting apartments in urban agglomerations across the Middle East. Worldwide, slightly over a quarter (25.4%) of refugees were reported to be living in managed camps. At the end of 2015, about 56% of the total refugee population in rural locations resided in a managed camp, compared to the 2% who resided in individual accommodation. In urban locations, the overwhelming majority (99%) of refugees lived in individual accommodations, compared with less than 1% who lived in a managed camp. A small percentage of refugees also live in collective centres, transit camps, and self-settled camps.

Despite 74% of refugees being in urban areas, the service delivery model of international humanitarian aid agencies remains focused on the establishment and operation of refugee camps.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a United Nations agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country. It is headquartered in Geneva,

Switzerland, and has 20,305 staff working in 136 countries as of December 2023.

Ukrainian refugee crisis

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An ongoing refugee crisis began in Europe in late February 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Over 5 million refugees fleeing Ukraine are recorded across Europe (as of May 2025), while an estimated 8 million others had been displaced within the country by late May 2022. Approximately one-quarter of the country's total population had left their homes in Ukraine by 20 March. 90% of Ukrainian refugees are women and children, while most Ukrainian men between the ages of 18 and 60 are banned from leaving the country. By 24 March, more than half of all children in Ukraine had left their homes, of whom a quarter had left the country. The invasion caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II and its aftermath, is the first of its kind in Europe since the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, as well as the fourth largest refugee crisis in history, and is the largest refugee crisis of the 21st century, with the highest refugee flight rate globally.

The vast majority of refugees initially entered neighbouring countries to the west of Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova). Around 3 million people then moved further west to other European countries. As of May 2025, according to UNHCR data, the countries in which the largest numbers of Ukrainians had applied for asylum, or other temporary protection, were Germany (1.2 million), Poland (1 million), and the Czech Republic (0.4 million). As of September 2022, Human Rights Watch documented that Ukrainian civilians were being forcibly transferred to Russia. The UN Human Rights Office stated "There have been credible allegations of forced transfers of unaccompanied children to Russian occupied territory, or to the Russian Federation itself." The United States Department of State estimated that at least 900,000 Ukrainian citizens have been forcibly relocated to Russia. More than 4.5 million Ukrainians have returned to Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion.

European Union (EU) countries bordering Ukraine have allowed entry to all Ukrainian refugees, and the EU has invoked the Temporary Protection Directive which grants Ukrainians the right to stay, work, and study in any European Union member state for an initial period of one year. Some non-European and Romani people have reported ethnic discrimination at the border.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

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Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals from Rakhine State who are living in Bangladesh. The Rohingya people have experienced ethnic and religious persecution in Myanmar for decades. Hundreds of thousands have fled to other countries in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines. The majority have sought refuge in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there are two officially registered refugee camps located in Ukhiya (sub-district) and Teknaf (sub-district) in Cox's Bazar district. Violence in Myanmar has escalated in recent years, so the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has increased rapidly. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), more than 723,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017.

On 28 September 2018, at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said there were 1.1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh by that time. Overcrowding from the recent population boom at Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps has placed a strain on their infrastructure. The refugees lack access to services, education, food, clean water, and proper sanitation; they are also vulnerable to natural disasters and infectious disease transmission. As of June 2018, World Bank announced nearly half a billion dollars in monetary support to help Bangladesh address Rohingya refugees' needs in areas including health, education, water and sanitation, disaster risk

management, and social protection. An August 2018 study estimated that more than 24,000 Rohingya had been killed by the Myanmar military and local Buddhists militia since the "clearance operations" started on 25 August 2017. It also estimated that at least 18,000 Rohingya Muslim women and girls were raped, 116,000 Rohingya were beaten, and 36,000 Rohingya were thrown into fires set alight in an act of deliberate arson.

Refugee law

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Refugee law is the branch of international law which deals with the rights and duties states have vis-a-vis refugees. There are differences of opinion among international law scholars as to the relationship between refugee law and international human rights law or humanitarian law.

The discussion forms part of a larger debate on the fragmentation of international law. While some scholars conceive each branch as a self-contained regime distinct from other branches, others regard the three branches as forming a larger normative system that seeks to protect the rights of all human beings at all time. The proponents of the latter conception view this holistic regime as including norms only applicable to certain situations such as armed conflict and military occupation (IHL) or to certain groups of people including refugees (refugee law), children (the Convention on the Rights of the Child), and prisoners of war (the Geneva Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War).

Afghan refugees

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Afghan refugees are citizens of Afghanistan who were forced to flee from their country as a result the continuous wars that the country has suffered since the Afghan-Soviet war, the Afghan civil war, the Afghanistan war (2001–2021) or either political or religious persecution. As of 2023, there were 3.2 million internally displaced Afghans, and 6.4 million Afghan refugees living in other countries which is one of largest refugee populations in the world.

The 1978 Saur Revolution, followed by the 1979 Soviet invasion, marked the first major wave of internal displacement and international migration to neighboring Iran and Pakistan; smaller numbers also went to India or to countries of the former Soviet Union. Nearly 90% of the world's 6.1 million Afghan refugees reside in neighboring Iran and Pakistan, with Iran hosting the largest share as of 2024. Between 1979 and 1992, more than 20% of Afghanistan's population fled the country as refugees. Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, many returned to Afghanistan, however many Afghans were again forced to flee during the civil war in the 90s. A total of 6.3 million Afghan refugees were living in Pakistan and Iran in 1990.

There were over 6 million Afghan refugees by 2000. Most refugees returned to Afghanistan following the 2001 United States invasion and overthrow of the Taliban regime. Between 2002 and 2012, 5.7 million refugees returned to Afghanistan, increasing the country's population by 25%. Between 2012 and 2019, 2.4 million Afghans fled the country as refugees. At the time of Taliban's return to power in 2021, 2.6 million Afghans remained refugees.

Some countries that were part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) established special programs to allow thousands of Afghans to resettle in the Western world. As stateless refugees or asylum seekers, they are protected by the well-established non-refoulement principle and the U.N. Convention Against Torture. They receive the maximum government benefits and protections in countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. For example, those that receive green cards under 8 U.S.C. § 1159 can immediately become "non-citizen nationals of the United States"

pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1452(b), without needing to meet the requirements of 8 U.S.C. § 1427(a). This allows them to travel with distinct United States passports. Australia provides a similar benefit to admitted refugees. Following the Iran-Israel War, Iran began the 2025 Afghan deportation from Iran which according to sources will add up to 4M afghans.

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