

Understanding Forced Displacement

A forcibly displaced person is someone who has been pushed to abandon their usual dwelling or place of residence, whether within their own country or across a foreign border.

"No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land." Warsan Shire



Why do people flee?



Conflict and Violence: Ongoing wars and conflicts in countries and regions such as Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar and Gaza are major drivers of forced displacement. Sometimes economic collapse acts as a thread multiplier for some of these conflicts, like in Venezuela.



Persecution and Human Rights Violations: Targeted persecution based on ethnicity, religion, or political beliefs is a critical factor for religious minorities in some countries, like Afghanistan. Gang violence is common and targeted in Central America's Northern Triangle. Gender-based violence is another major driver of forced displacement, and survivors (most often women) frequently face unjust asylum systems that fail to recognize their experiences and lingering fears. LGBTQI+ individuals, too, flee life-threatening persecution and often continue to face danger and legal barriers in host countries.



Environmental Factors: Climate change and natural disasters are increasingly contributing to forced displacement, compounding existing vulnerabilities. The recent floods in Chad or droughts elsewhere in Africa are just two examples of climatic phenomena that are forcing people from their lands. However, those displaced due to climate change are not protected by international law the way people suffering persecution are.

Who are those on the move?

Refugees

A refugee is a person who has fled his or her home country to escape violence, persecution, or war. Refugees leave with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Many cannot return home or express fear about doing so. Refugees are protected by international law as a result of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Learn more at www.unhcr.org.



Refugee status is determined by the country receiving an applicant or the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

Asylum Seekers



An asylum seeker has fled their home country, crossed into another, and is now seeking protection in that country by formally applying for asylum. Like a refugee, an asylum applicant must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country to be granted asylum.

Internally Displaced Persons

An internally displaced person (IDP) has been forced to flee their home but remains within the borders of their home country. They are not protected by international law as they have not crossed an international border, meaning they remain under the protection of the local government even though it may be the cause of their displacement.

'There are no such things as migrants and refugees, only people'
Fr. Adolfo Nicolás S.J.



"Home is where it all begins and what we want all people to find."
Fr. Leo O'Donovan.

How does life in displacement look?

While many forcibly displaced people live in camps, a growing number are in urban areas, especially in middle-income countries.

Life in a refugee camp can vary widely. The average time refugees spend in camps is 10 to 15 years.

Cities allow refugees to live autonomously, make money, and build a future. But they also present dangers. Refugees may be vulnerable to exploitation, arrest, or detention.

Interconnected challenges and complex barriers

Violence, conflict, persecution, and life-threatening conditions increase someone's risk of developing mental health conditions.

Structural barriers that impede their access to meaningful employment lead to economic hardship and social isolation.

Many experience limited access to education and encounter racism and other forms of discrimination



All await one of three possible "durable" solutions: repatriation to their country of origin, integration into their host country, or resettlement in a third country.

Refugee Resettlement

occurs when individuals or families are transferred from one country of asylum to another that has agreed to admit them and provide permanent settlement. The U.S. has resettled over 3.6 million refugees since 1980. In early 2025, new executive actions suspended refugee admissions and terminated partnerships with resettlement agencies.

State of Global Displacement in 2024

Visit <https://www.unhcr.org/us/global-trends> to access the numbers and learn more.



2024 saw

123.2 MILLION

people displaced worldwide.

36.8 million are refugees and 8.4 million are asylum-seekers.

Internally displaced people (IDPs) make up 60% of those forced to flee.

70% of all refugees and others in need of protection come from just five countries:

Venezuela, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and South Sudan

49 MILLION are children



Key displacement situations

Forced displacement is often caused by conflict within a nation. These areas have been the backdrop to noteworthy cases of displacement:

Gang violence spread in **Haiti**, tripling the number of displaced people.

Conflict in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** saw 7.4 million people forcibly displaced.

The war in **Gaza** has uprooted 90% of the civilian population.

6 million **Ukrainian** refugees were reported throughout Europe.



In 2024, **73% OF REFUGEES** were hosted in low and middle income countries.

67% are hosted in neighboring countries.



The world's least developed countries provide asylum to 23% of forcibly displaced people

The Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye, Colombia, Germany and Uganda **hosted more than one-third of the world's refugees** and other people in need of international protection.

There is one other category of displaced person we have not yet discussed: those who are *stateless*. Someone who is stateless is not recognized as a citizen by any country. This can be due to discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or gender; gaps in nationality laws; state succession (when countries break apart); and bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining documents. There were at least 4.4 million stateless people in 101 countries as of the end-of 2024.

3.1 MILLION

new individual asylum claims were made in 2024, the largest recipient nations being. **the U.S., Egypt, Germany, Canada, and Spain.**



At the same time, refugee returns were at a 20 year high, with **9.8 million** people returned to their areas or countries of origin.

Of the **1.6 million refugees** returned to their homes in 2024, four nations received 92% of the returns: **Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, & Ukraine.**