

TORN FROM HOME.

My Life as a Refugee

Refugees and Immigrants in Greater Boston



For the last three centuries, Boston has served as a major port of entry for newcomers to the United States, a trend that continues today. According to the Mayor's Office of New Bostonians, immigrants account for more than 1 in 8 residents (12.5%), the highest percentage since 1930 (12%) and over 140 languages are spoken within city limits alone.

Refugees comprise a large part of this population. Between 2006 and 2010, 1837 refugees arrived to the Boston area, and over 70,000 currently live in Massachusetts. They come from originating countries around the globe, including Eritrea, Iraq, Burma, Somalia, Bhutan and many others.

Building upon Massachusetts's rich legacy of diversity and inclusion, in 2009, the Governor's Advisory Council on Immigrants and Refugees released the New Americans Agenda, to help government, service providers, and residents "to better understand the benefits and needs of immigrants and their communities."

What is the difference between an immigrant and a refugee?



Refugee

Under the UN Convention 1951, a refugee is a person who, owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality or being outside the country of his/ her former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

An **immigrant** is a foreign national who has been granted permission to remain permanently in the United States. However, the term is often used more broadly to mean any person who was born in another country and came to live in the United States.

Where do they come from?

Boston is home for refugees from many places and cultures, and in the last five years has resettled individuals and families from over 80 countries! Below are brief profiles of three of the largest senders:

Iraq

The U.S. led invasion of Iraq in early 2003 began the surge of the Iraqi refugee population. Violence between different sects also increased culminating in an unstable, hostile, and dangerous environment with UNHCR estimating 4.7 million Iraqis have fled their homes: 2.7 million as internally displaced persons and 2 million having fled Iraq. Many Iraqis settled here today have provided critical services to the U.S., including translation and intelligence.



Somalia

Nearly two decades after the collapse of its central government, Somalia continues to be considered one of the world's foremost humanitarian crises. To this day, its citizens are confronted with the turmoil of war, and lack of infrastructure and resources. Somalis in the US have found safe refuge from the violence in their homeland, and now contribute greatly to industrial and agricultural workforces around the country.

Burma

Over the last few decades, an oppressive military regime in Burma has caused the displacement of millions of people. At the end of 2002, an estimated 600,000 to 1 million Burmese were forced to flee their homes and seek safety in other parts of the world, including Thailand and India, and, most recently, the United States. In 2009 alone, the United States admitted 10,513 refugees from Burma.

How you can help

These communities are assisted largely by not-for-profit organizations that depend on the support of both the government and public contributions. Here are some ways you can support their work:

Learn: Torn From Home is a great place to start. Make sure to look at the resource guides at the end of the exhibit for additional places to find information, such as books, websites, discussion groups and other organizations.

Welcome: If you know of any newcomers who have recently settled in your community, invite them to your social networks to speak, or simply to come and meet others. Offer to help them with basic tasks, such as grocery shopping; sometimes the smallest gestures of kindness are the biggest help.

Donate: Nonprofit organizations rely on donated money and goods to do their work. Learn more about local organizations to see how your donations can support their important work.

Volunteer: Organizations often need individuals to assist with various activities or clerical work, and are especially in need of those with special skills such as legal, language, computer or medical expertise. Take the flyer at the end of the exhibit to find a group near you.

