



Top Line Figures

- 32.9 million are 'people of concern' to UNHCR
- 80% are women, children and the elderly
- 33 refugee situations exist where the number of refugees has been 25,000 or more for at least 5 consecutive years
- 324 refugee camps currently exist worldwide

Breakdown of People of Concern (see definitions on second page)

- Of the 32.9 million people:
- 9.9 million are **refugees**
- 12.8 million are **internally displaced persons (IDPs)**
- 5.8 million are **stateless people**
- 2.6 million **returnees**
- 740,000 are **asylum seekers**
- 1,000,000 are others of concern

What is the 1951 Convention?

The 1951 Geneva Convention is the main international instrument of refugee law. The Convention clearly spells out who a refugee is and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights he or she should receive from the countries who have signed the document. The Convention also defines a refugee's obligations to host governments and certain categories or people, such as war criminals, who do not qualify for refugee status. The Convention was limited to protecting mainly European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, but another document, the 1967 Protocol, expanded the scope of the Convention as the problem of displacement spread around the world.

What is UNHCR?

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1951, initially helping more than one million European refugees after World War II. Today UNHCR has more than 6,200 staff in 111 countries helping nearly 32.9 million refugees and other displaced persons. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.

What is UNHCR's mandate?

Governments normally guarantee the basic human rights of their citizens. But when civilians become refugees this safety net disappears. UNHCR is the UN agency responsible for the safety and well-being of refugees and others of concern worldwide. UNHCR's most important responsibility is to ensure respect for the basic human rights of refugees, ensuring that no one is returned involuntarily to a country where he or she has reason to fear persecution. UNHCR provides lifesaving assistance to those forced to flee their homes, such as shelter, medical care, food, clean water and education. UNHCR also helps refugees find lasting solutions. Voluntary repatriation, or return to their original homes, is what most refugees hope for. But this is not always possible, and in those cases UNHCR helps people rebuild their lives elsewhere—either in the countries where they first sought asylum or in a third country willing to accept them for resettlement.

Where does UNHCR work?

In 2006, Chad, Sudan, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Sri Lanka and Somalia are among the many refugee situations worldwide.

Who does UNHCR help?

Today UNHCR cares for a record 32.9 million people, most of whom are women and children. People of concern to UNHCR include not only refugees, but also other groups such as asylum seekers, refugees returning home, stateless people and some, but not all, of the estimated 24.5 million people who are displaced within their own countries, often known as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The figures here illustrate the size of the problem (see Top Line Figures).



Get Involved

How can students help?

You can call 1-800-770-1100 or visit www.UNrefugees.org for fundraising ideas to help the 32.9 million refugees and displaced around the globe. Your help will provide the basic assistance that the world's refugees need most – shelter, medical care, food, clean water and an education.

What can teachers do?

Educators across the United States can help students learn about the plight of refugees and understand the importance of treating refugees with tolerance and respect. UNHCR offers free educational materials for teachers of grades 4-12, including lesson plans, magazines, videos, posters and games.

Please visit Teachers' Corner at www.UNrefugees.org for more information and to order materials. Sign up today for UNHCR's e-newsletter for teachers.

Definitions

Who is a refugee?

The 1951 Refugee Convention describes a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group; a refugee either cannot return home or is afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.

Who is an IDP?

An internally displaced person (IDP) is a person who has been forced to flee his or her home for the same reason as a refugee, but remains in his or her own country and has not crossed an international border. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid. As the nature of war has changed in the last few decades, with more and more internal conflicts replacing wars among countries, the number of IDPs has increased significantly.

Who is a returnee?

A returnee is a refugee who has returned to his or her home country. The majority of refugees prefer to return home as soon as it is safe to do so, after a conflict and the country is being rebuilt. UNHCR encourages voluntary repatriation, or return, as the best solution for displaced people. The agency often provides transportation and other assistance, such as money, tools and seeds. Occasionally, UNHCR helps rebuild homes, schools and roads. Since 2002, UNHCR has assisted more than four million Afghans to return home.

Who is a stateless person?

A stateless person is someone who is not a citizen of any country. Citizenship is the legal bond between a government and an individual, and allows for certain political, economic, social and other rights of the individual, as well as the responsibilities of both government and citizen. A person can become stateless due to a variety of reasons, including sovereign, legal, technical or administrative decisions or oversights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlines that "Everyone has the right to a nationality."

Who is an asylum seeker?

When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.

What is the difference between a refugee and an economic migrant?

An economic migrant normally leaves a country voluntarily to seek a better life. Should he or she decide to return home, they would continue to receive the protection of his or her government. Refugees flee because of the threat of persecution and cannot return safely to their homes.

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