



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a refugee?

When people are forced to flee their home to escape fighting or human rights violations and cross into another country, they are classified as *refugees*, and are protected by international law. This protection extends **ONLY** to those people considered non-combatants—they have not participated in fighting or acts of violence. As refugees, they are given food, shelter, and protection in the host country.

At the beginning of 2007, there were an estimated 24.5 million refugees in at least 52 countries.

What is an IDP?

Internally displaced persons or IDPs are displaced people – mostly women and children – who have been forced to abandon their homes because of conflict or persecution but still remain within their country. They often have very limited legal or physical protection and often face an uncertain future. Legally, they remain under the ‘protection’ of their own government—even though that same government may be the cause of their flight, or else has shown it is incapable of protecting its citizens from rebel groups or generalized violence.

How do refugees differ from IDPs?

Often, both groups leave their homes for similar reasons. Civilians are recognized as ‘refugees’ when they seek sanctuary in another country. Internally displaced persons remain within their own country.

How do refugees differ from those displaced by natural disasters?

People who are forced from their homes by floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters are also displaced persons—known as ‘evacuees.’ But, they are not in the same position as those fleeing war and violence. Their government is often more sympathetic towards them and domestic or international aid is often more easily available. Though commonly referred to as ‘refugees’ these people do not have the same legal guarantees of protection and support.

How do people become refugees?

People become refugees because they no longer feel safe in their own country. They are forced to flee their homes to escape armed conflict, violence, and human rights abuses.

Are many refugees children?

There are more than nine million refugee children around the globe.

What is the purpose of a refugee camp?

Most refugee camps are intended to provide temporary housing and basic safety for displaced populations. A collection of tents, shelters, and aid stations, some of the larger camps are home to thousands of people with rows of tents stretching for miles. In the cases of persistent violence, the camps can take the form of more established or permanent communities.



How do refugees know where to find a camp?

Most refugee camps develop spontaneously when the people fleeing violence reach an area that appears to be safe. At the onset of an emergency situation, UNHCR and other aid agencies seek permission from government officials of affected countries to work within their borders and approval to serve as a host country for refugees. Only then can aid workers assess the needs and safety of the camp(s), begin to register refugees, and manage distribution of emergency assistance. Once refugee camps have been established, aid workers may receive displaced people at the border and transport them directly to camp. The scenario varies from situation to situation, and country to country.

How do refugees support themselves?

Refugees are largely dependent on aid organizations for all of their basic needs, including food, water, sanitation and medical care. Because of their refugee status, refugees cannot legally work. However, some refugees are entrepreneurial and able to engage in the informal work sector or start small income-generating projects.

How long do people remain refugees?

The average length of stay in a refugee camp is seven years.

What are the three lasting solutions to the plight of refugees?

There are three lasting options for refugees:

Voluntary repatriation (*voluntarily returning home*)

When conditions in the home country have improved and refugee families no longer fear for their safety, they may decide to return home voluntarily.

Local integration (*remaining in the host country*)

When refugee families are not able to return home safely, sometimes a host government allows refugees to live and work locally.

Resettlement (*settling in a third country*)

Some refugee families are not able to return to their home country and not allowed to remain in their host country. In these cases, a third country must be found to accept the refugees. Only about 1% of refugees are able to resettle in other countries.

How does conflict affect education?

Education was only recently recognized as an essential right for refugees and displaced people. While education is critical to helping refugee children adjust to a sense of “normalcy,” and is important for rebuilding communities and countries after refugees return home, war and conflict-situations create a volatile and dangerous situation for educating refugee children. Conflicts destroy schools and disrupt schedules. Few teachers are available, as many were forced to flee their homes. Once the conflict settles, schools are set up to begin educating refugee children.

What is the role of UNHCR and other aid organizations?

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, is responsible for getting permission from a host government to enter and work within the country. They also coordinate and manage the emergency response of the many different aid organizations, including delivery and distribution of aid to individual camps or camp systems. Individual camps may be run by other NGOs (non-governmental organizations) like the Red Cross/Red Crescent, UNICEF, Save The Children, or others. These charities help supply the refugees with tents, food, basic supplies, medical care, and water/sanitation systems.

How do refugee crises affect me?

We live in a global community, interconnected to people from other countries in many ways. As global citizens, it is important to think about how we, as Americans, can help others in a crisis situation until they are able to become self-sufficient and help themselves.

