



Background on the Global Refugee Crisis

October 15, 2015

Who is a refugee?

“Refugee” is a legal term used to define an individual who:

“...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”^[1]

Refugee status is conferred on those whose refugee claim has been definitively evaluated by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). During situations that cause mass flight of people from conflict or violence, where it is generally evident why they fled, refugee status is conferred *prima facie*.

An asylum-seeker is an individual who has fled their home and has crossed a border seeking safety and protection. Asylum-seekers enter the Refugee Status Determination process and may be conferred refugee status once their asylum claim has been adjudicated by the UNHCR.

Refugees and asylum-seekers have fled their countries on account of persecution and because their home governments are unable or unwilling to protect them.

Refugees and asylum-seekers are distinct from other vulnerable migrant populations in that they have *crossed an international border* seeking protection. When individuals are displaced by conflict and violence within the boundaries of their home country, they are known as *internally displaced persons (IDPs)*.

The term ‘migrant’ encompasses all individuals who travel across borders, for any reason. But, importantly, migrants who do not fall into the categories of refugee or asylum-seeker are still able to seek the protections of their home governments. Refugees and asylum-seekers flee because their governments are unwilling or unable to protect them, and are, oftentimes, the source of a refugee or asylum-seeker’s persecution.

Current Refugee Crisis

In June 2015, the UNHCR reported that there are more than 60 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people worldwide – the highest level ever recorded. Of the 60 million displaced, half are children.

The United Nations has deemed this the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. While the crisis in Syria has dominated the media, it is important to remember, hold in prayer, advocate for, and support refugees from conflict zones across the globe - as well as the countries that host them.

The largest refugee populations are from Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan and South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The largest internally displaced populations are found in Colombia, the DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Syria. The top refugee-hosting countries include Chad,



Djibouti, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan, Turkey, and Uganda (unhcr.org/54abe0e66.html). As the list demonstrates, developing countries bear the greatest burden in international humanitarian response to refugee crises. Western, developed nations host a minuscule percentage of the world's refugees. Many remain in refugee camps for decades before they are able to repatriate, integrate locally, or be resettled to a third country.

Durable solutions

After a refugee has fled persecution in his or her native country, there are three durable solutions that will allow the refugee to rebuild his or her life in peace and dignity:

- Voluntary repatriation to his/her home country;
- Local integration into the country of first asylum;
- Resettlement to a third country.

Resettlement is the third and last option for any refugee, when it is not possible for the refugee to return home or to integrate into the country which first offered asylum. Resettlement is a long and arduous process, an opportunity available to only a tiny fraction of refugees. In fact, less than one half of 1% of refugees will ever be resettled.

Resettlement countries

The United States is the international leader in refugee resettlement, resettling more than all other countries combined. The number of refugees that will be resettled to the United States is determined annually through what is called the “presidential determination,” a determination released by the president after conferencing with Congress, administration officials, and refugee/migration experts about admissions levels.^[2] In October 2015, the Obama administration announced an increase in the presidential determination for the next two years: 85,000 refugee arrivals for fiscal year 2016, and 100,000 refugee arrivals for fiscal year 2017.

With the United States, the following nations are also considered traditional resettlement states:

- Australia
- Sweden
- Norway
- New Zealand
- Canada
- Finland
- Denmark
- The Netherlands

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom established resettlement programs in the last decade, and more recently, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Paraguay, Portugal, Spain, Romania and Uruguay have formally announced the establishment of resettlement programs.

The United States Resettlement Program

The U.S. resettlement program, known as the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), is an interagency effort involving many departments of the federal government, as well as domestic and international NGO's, including faith-based organizations. It is based in a strong model of public-private partnership.

The primary populations being resettled to the United States through the USRAP include Afghanis, Bhutanese, Burmese, Congolese (Democratic Republic of Congo), Cubans, Eritreans, and Ethiopians, Iranians, Iraqis, Somalis, and Sudanese. As of October 2015, fewer than 1,700 Syrians have been resettled to the United States.

Political pushback, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations of the program and of refugees continue to be an issue. Advocacy and support for refugee resettlement and for refugees has never been more important than it is now. To learn more about the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society's ministry of advocacy, visit www.advocacy.episcopalchurch.org.

Domestically, nine resettlement or "voluntary" agencies work in this partnership with the federal government.^[3] The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society,^[4] working through Episcopal Migration Ministries, is one of these agencies.

Episcopal Migration Ministries

Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the refugee resettlement service of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, is a living example of the Church's commitment to be a presence of hope, comfort, and welcome to refugees.

Each year, Episcopal Migration Ministries, through a network of 30 local organizations, provides a wide spectrum of services, including resettlement, employment, and intensive medical and mental health services, to more than 5,000 refugees, asylees, special immigrant visa holders, and Cuban/Haitian entrants.

These new Americans rely upon this assistance and support as they rebuild their lives in security and peace in communities across the United States. In addition to Episcopal Migration Ministries' collaboration with local partner organizations, EMM staff members equip, support, and empower dioceses, congregations, and individuals to learn about and find their own place in the welcoming ministry of refugee resettlement.

If you, your congregation, or diocese would like more information about Episcopal Migration Ministries' work and ways you can be involved, please contact Allison Duvall, manager for church relations and engagement, ataduvall@episcopalchurch.org or (212) 716-6027.

Additional information, videos, and resources about the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society's refugee resettlement work through Episcopal Migration Ministries may be found at www.episcopalchurch.org/emm. A list of our resettlement partners may be found at <http://bit.ly/EMMpartners>.

[1] 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

[2] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/30/presidential-memorandum-fy-2015-refugee-admissions>

[3] These nine agencies are: Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR).

[4] The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society is the legal and canonical name under which The Episcopal Church is incorporated, conducts business, and carries out mission.