



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

REFUGEE RIGHTS

This document, designed for Amnesty Speakers, provides an introduction to the rights of refugees and other people on the move.

AMNESTY'S POSITION

Amnesty has been working for decades to protect the rights of refugees. With the world facing a refugee crisis of historic levels, Amnesty is campaigning for refugees to be protected, welcomed and enjoy their human rights, including through strengthened global responsibility-sharing and international cooperation. Instead of co-operating to support those in need of protection, governments across the world have been shifting responsibility and putting up ever more physical and legal barriers.

Amnesty International is calling for:

Refugees must

- Not be forced to return to a country where they are at risk of persecution
- Not be discriminated against
- Have access to work, housing and education

Asylum-seekers must

- Not be returned to a country where they would be at risk of persecution
- Have access to fair and effective asylum procedures, and if they are returned to a country it must be done safely and with dignity



Amnesty International UK take part in a Refugees Welcome demonstration in London 2015 ©Amnesty International

DEFINITIONS

A Refugee

- Is outside their country
- Is unable or unwilling to safely return to their country due to well-founded fear of persecution

A refugee, as defined in 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (and its 1967 Protocol), is somebody who cannot return to their country of nationality because they fear being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.¹ They are outside their country of nationality and are unable to safely return because their government cannot or will not protect them.

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DEFINITIONS (Cont.)

An Asylum Seeker

- Claims the protection to which refugees are entitled
- Is outside their country and in another country
- Has asked the Government of that country to recognise their refugee status and allow them to live there

An asylum seeker is somebody who has arrived in another country and has asked the Government to formally recognise them as a refugee. If their asylum-application is accepted this would allow them to live in that country under certain terms and conditions.

An internally displaced person

- Fears persecution or other serious harm
- Has left their home but remains within their country

An internally displaced person is someone who is seeking safety in a different part of their own country than where they normally live. This could be due to fear of persecution or because they are at risk of suffering other serious harm (e.g. forced to move by reason of flood or drought). As the person who is displaced is still within their own country, the government of the country is still ultimately responsible for their protection and safety. However, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) recognises that in some cases it is the government that is causing an individual's displacement, and this makes internally displaced people especially vulnerable. As such the UNHCR also provides assistance to internally displaced people.

A Migrant

- Has moved from their home
- The move could have been voluntary or forced
- Has migrated 'regularly' (with legal permission) or 'irregularly' (without legal permission)

A migrant moves around within their own country, or from one country to another. Some move voluntarily, while others are forced to leave because of economic hardship or other problems. People can migrate 'regularly', with legal permission to work and live in a country, or 'irregularly', without permission from the country they wish to live and work in.

For a glossary of terms and definitions relating to asylum seekers and refugees in the UK see:

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary>



Refugees trapped at the Hungarian and Serbian border. 2015.
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CURRENT SITUATION

The number of people who are forcibly displaced worldwide is higher than the entire population of the UK.

The UNHCR reports² that by the end of 2016 there were:

- 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Of which,
 - **25.4 million are refugees**
 - 19.9 million under the UNHCR mandate
 - 5.4 million Palestinian refugees registered separately by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)
 - **3.1 million are asylum-seekers**
 - **40 million are internally displaced people**
 - **667,400 refugees returned to their countries of origin**

Currently, record numbers of people are forcibly displaced, within and across borders.

- Those displaced within borders do not seek international protection.
- Excluding Palestinians, more than two-thirds (68%) of all refugees worldwide came from just five countries:
 - **Syrian Arab Republic (5.5 million)**
 - **Afghanistan (2.5 million)**
 - **South Sudan (1.4 million)**
 - **Myanmar (1.2 million)**
 - **Somalia (986,400)**
- The countries hosting the most refugees (excluding Palestinians) were:
 - **Turkey (3.5 million)**

- **Pakistan (1.4 million)**
- **Uganda (1.4 million)**
- Lebanon (998,900)
- Islamic Rep. of Iran (979,400)
- Germany (970,400)
- Bangladesh (932,200)
- Sudan (906,600)

UK CONTEXT

UNHCR figures show that by mid-2018, in the UK, there were:

- **124,018 refugees**
- **33,035 pending asylum seeker cases³**

Britain offers no asylum visa. In fact, there are very few, legal ways for refugees to safely escape their country and claim asylum in another country.

In 2018, the UK offered 'grants of asylum, alternative forms of protection and resettlement' to 15,891 people. 42% were children³.

The number of Syrian refugees resettled in Britain was 15,977 by March 2019. The Government has promised to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020.⁴

HISTORY OF REFUGEE RIGHTS

Throughout history, migration has been a fact of life. The reasons people migrate are varied and often complex. Some people move to new countries to improve their economic situation or to pursue their education. Others leave their countries to escape human rights abuses such as torture, persecution, armed conflict, extreme poverty and even death.

The practice of granting asylum to people fleeing persecution is one of the earliest hallmarks of civilization. References to it have

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been found in texts written 3,500 years ago, during the great early empires in the Middle East such as the Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and ancient Egyptians.⁵

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created. Article 14 (1) states that 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution'. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights paved the way for subsequent international conventions (legally-binding agreements between states) and national laws.

In 1951, the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees became the cornerstone document for the international protection of refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention, as a post-Second World War instrument, was originally limited in scope to persons fleeing events within Europe occurring before 1 January 1951.

In 1967 an amendment was made to the 1951 Refugee Convention in the form of a 1967 Protocol. This removed the latter limitations and thus gave the Convention universal coverage.¹

Separately, following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was established to carry out direct relief and works programmes specifically for Palestine refugees. The Agency began operations in 1950, to respond to the needs of around 750,000 Palestinian refugees. To this day the UNRWA supports and assists Palestine refugees – there are 5.3 million who are eligible for UNRWA services. They are a distinct group of refugees, defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” The descendants of Palestinian refugee males, including legally adopted children, are also eligible for registration.⁶

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