

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Some basic facts and figures



What's the difference between the terms refugee, asylum seeker and migrant?

Refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution.¹ The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who “owing to a 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 to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country....”²

An asylum seeker is someone who has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the UN Refugee Convention or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.³

An asylum seeker has the right to stay in the country while his or her application is dealt with. If the application is accepted, i.e. the authorities believe that the person would be at risk if returned to their home country, he or she is given refugee status. Refugees are allowed to stay long-term or indefinitely. Those whose asylum applications are refused are required to leave the country, unless they wish to appeal the decision or there are legitimate reasons why they cannot yet return home.⁴

A migrant is simply any person who has moved to another country. Migrants have different reasons for migrating, including, in addition to persecution or conflict, reasons such as family ties, historic links or economics. They may or may not have a legal right to reside in the new country.

How many refugees are there worldwide?⁵

- There are over 65 million people worldwide who are forcibly displaced. Most of these stay within the borders of their country of origin and are known as 'internally displaced people'.
- The current worldwide total number of refugees who have fled into another country is over 22 million.
- The majority of refugees do not go further than their neighbouring country. Over 80% of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries. The 5 countries which are hosting the most refugees are: Turkey (2.9 million), Pakistan (1.4million), Lebanon (1.0 million), Iran (979,000), Uganda (941,000) and Ethiopia (792,000).
- The three countries from which most refugees currently come (55% of the worldwide total) are: Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan.

How many refugees are there in the UK?

The latest UN statistics, for the end of 2015, record that in the UK there are a total of 123,000 refugees and 46,000 asylum seekers (whose cases are still pending).⁶

What about Syrian refugees?

In September 2015 the UK government made a commitment to take 20,000 Syrian refugees over 5 years and established the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme, through which refugees would be brought directly out of UNHCR camps near Syria. So far 7,307 people have come to the UK through this scheme (figures up to March 2017).⁷

1 <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/refugees.html>

2 <http://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>

3 http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

4 See also: “Refugees and Asylum Seekers – Getting the story straight in 2016” by the British Red Cross:

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Refugee%20support/Mythbuster%20booklet%202016.pdf>

“Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Migrants – Welcoming the Stranger” by Churches Together in the Merseyside Region:

<http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/userfiles/files/News/2015/2016/aguide-welcomethestranger.pdf>

and The Refugee Council: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary>

5 All figures from: <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>

6 <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/country/59b294387/unhcr-statistical-yearbook-2015-15th-edition.html>

7 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-07-03/HCW523/>