

October 21, 2010

REFUGEES: A FACTSHEET

What is a refugee?

A refugee, as defined by Section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) (based on the United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols relating to the Status of Refugees) is a *person who is unable or unwilling to return to the home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution” due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin.*

How many refugees are there?

The [World Refugee Survey 2009](#) reports that there are more than 13 million refugees worldwide.

- The largest number of refugees is found in the Middle East and North Africa. There are approximately 6.3 million refugees in the region. In Syria, for example, there are approximately 1.7 million refugees from Iraq, Former Palestine, Somalia, and other countries.
- In Africa there are approximately 2.7 million refugees. Kenya has more than 350,000 refugees from at least 9 countries.
- In South and Central Asia there are 2.5 million refugees; in East Asia and the Pacific there are 909,000;
- in the Americas and the Caribbean there are 649,500; and
- in Europe there are approximately 493,000 refugees.

What are the long-term possibilities for refugees?

The preferred long-term solution for most refugees is voluntary repatriation. That is, returning to the home country. However, some refugees cannot repatriate. Some languish indefinitely in refugee camps. In some cases, third-country resettlement may be the only option.

Which countries accept refugees for resettlement?

International law does not require any country to accept refugees. Traditionally, wealthy countries with strong immigration histories have accepted the largest number of refugees for resettlement. Recently, some developing countries have begun to take refugees as well. The [following chart](#) provides data on the ten countries receiving the largest numbers of refugees per capita:

Host country	Refugees resettled in 2009	Host country population	Ratio of resettled refugees to host population
Australia	8,742	21,300,000	1:2,400
Canada	10,804	33,300,000	1:3,100
United States	60,191	304,500,000	1:5,100
Norway	910	4,800,000	1:5,300
New Zealand	750	4,300,000	1:5,700
Finland	749	5,300,000	1:7,100
Iceland	29	300,000	1:10,300
Denmark	373	5,500,000	1:14,700
Netherlands	544	16,400,000	1:39,500
Ireland	101	4,500,000	1:44,600

How many refugees does the U.S. admit?

Each year the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the numerical ceiling for refugee admissions. The total limit is broken down into limits for each region of the world. After September 11th 2001, the number of refugees admitted into the United States fell drastically, but the numerical limits have been increased in the past several years.

Year	Number of refugees admitted
2000	72,143
2001	68,925
2002	26,765
2003	28,305
2004	52,840
2005	53,738
2006	41,094
2007	48,218
2008	60,107
2009	74,602

For [Fiscal Year 2011](#) the President announced that up to 80,000 refugees could be admitted to the U.S., under the following regional allocations:

Africa	15,000
East Asia	19,000
Europe and Central Asia	2,000
Latin America/Caribbean	5,500
Near East/South Asia	35,500
Unallocated Reserve	3,000
TOTAL	80,000

How does the U.S. refugee resettlement process work?

The Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is responsible for administering the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within the Department of Homeland Security conducts refugee interviews and determines individual eligibility for refugee status in the United States.

There are three principle categories for classifying refugees under the U.S. refugee program:

- **Priority One.** Individuals with compelling persecution needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists. These individuals are referred to the U.S. by the UNHCR, or they are identified by a U.S. embassy or an NGO.
- **Priority Two.** Groups of “special concern” to the U.S. who are selected by the Department of State with input from USCIS, UNHCR, and designated NGOs. Currently, the groups include certain persons from the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, and Eritreans.
- **Priority Three.** The refugee relatives (parents, spouses, and unmarried children under 21) of refugees who are already settled in the U.S. may be admitted as refugees. The “anchor” in the U.S. must file an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) and must be processed by DHS. As of March 2008, the P-3 program is suspended for persons of certain nationalities due to indications of fraud.

Generally, to qualify, individuals must have access to a U.S. refugee processing post¹ and must not be firmly resettled in any other country. Not everyone who falls into these categories is admitted to the U.S.

- Before admission to the U.S., each refugee must undergo an extensive interviewing, screening, and security clearance process by Regional Refugee Coordinators.
- Refugees are subject to the grounds of exclusion listed in Section 212(a) of the INA, including health-related grounds, moral/criminal grounds, and security grounds. They may also be excluded for polygamy, misrepresentation of facts on visa applications, smuggling, and previous deportations. Waivers exist for certain grounds of exclusion.
- If a person is accepted as a refugee, it is conditioned upon the individual passing a medical examination and all security checks.

After a refugee has been conditionally accepted for resettlement in the U.S.,

- The Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) sends a request for sponsorship to the U.S., and the Refugee Processing Center works with private voluntary agencies to determine where the refugee will live in the U.S.
- The private voluntary agency is responsible for assuring that most services are provided during the refugee’s first 90 days in the U.S. They arrange for food, housing, clothing, employment counseling, medical care, and other necessities.
- One year after admission, a refugee may apply for Lawful Permanent Resident Status.

¹ U.S. processing posts are located in Accra, Cairo, and Nairobi in Africa; Havana and Mexico City in Latin America; Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City in East Asia; Moscow, Rome and Vienna in Europe, and Ankara in the Near East/South Asia.