



NASHVILLE INTERNATIONAL
Center for Empowerment

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT REFUGEES

"Refugees are vulnerable people, but due to the generosity of the American people we are able to provide refugees with help and hope as they flee devastating circumstances and prepare them for independence in a new and permanent home."

–Anne-Marie Grey. Executive Director and CEO, USA for UNHCR

It's easy to think that most refugees live in camps. Reporting about refugees frequently shows aerial photos of tent cities, makeshift settlements and overcrowded camps.

While this is the difficult reality for more than 6.2 million refugees, **approximately 75 percent of refugees live outside of camps.** Refugees living in cities, suburban and rural environments struggle to find safety and adequate shelter. Living conditions can be harsh, and lack basic services like electricity or heat.

There are many myths and misconceptions about refugees. An important fact to remember is that refugees have entered the country legally after having undergone a stringent application and screening process. Also, keep in mind the definition of a refugee is any person who is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their country of nationality or habitual residence because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Now to dispel some myths.

- **MYTH: Refugees Do Not Pay Taxes.**

FACT: Refugees are subject to the same employment, property, sales, and other taxes as any U.S. citizen. Refugees cannot vote, however.

- **MYTH:** Refugees Take Jobs From U.S. Workers.

FACT: Recent evidence by the U.S. Labor Department says "NO" to this myth. Refugees are not provided any special treatment when obtaining employment. They must apply and compete for jobs the same as any citizen. Refugees often enter economic sectors currently unable to supply adequate numbers of native workers. Refugees and immigrants also create jobs for U.S. workers because they have a high propensity to start new businesses. Refugees have been a major force in contributing to the urban renewal of several major U.S. cities.

- **MYTH: Refugees Receive Special Money From the U.S. Government to Purchase Homes, Cars, and Other Items.**

FACT: The U.S. Government does not provide refugees with money when they arrive in the U.S., however, there are minimal benefits available for emergency situations and the medically needy. The refugee must apply for these benefits and meet income and resource standards to qualify for any assistance.

- **MYTH: Refugees come to the U.S. for Economic Reasons.**

FACT: Refugees are individuals or families who have come to the U.S. because they were forced to flee their homeland, many times with little or no belongings, leaving family and friends behind and are unable to return.

- **MYTH: The United States Is The Only Country To Accept Refugees.**

FACT: There are 24 countries worldwide involved in refugee resettlement. The major resettlement countries include: Australia, **Canada, Norway**, China, France, **Germany**, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- **MYTH: Refugees Do Not Contribute or Participate In Society.**

FACT: Refugees contribute a great deal to this country through the sharing of their talents, skills, cultures and customs. History indicates that some of our most significant contributors to the U.S. have been refugees and immigrants. And, as noted previously, refugees do pay taxes.

• **MYTH: Refugees Represent a Health Hazard to the American Public.**

FACT: There are refugees who have health problems which are a result of the lack of medical care that existed in their country of origin or due to problems they encountered during their flight from persecution. Most health problems are addressed by health care services in first-asylum camps and in refugee processing centers before refugees are admitted to the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) closely monitors all admissions and prevents the admission of certain persons with health conditions identified as hazardous to the public.

Who is a Refugee?

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.

Two-thirds of all refugees worldwide come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.

Stats: 53% of refugees are school-aged children under the age of 18

Who is an Internally Displaced Person?

An internally displaced person, or IDP, is someone who has been forced to flee their home but never cross an international border. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it—in nearby towns, schools, settlements, internal camps, even forests and fields. IDPs, which include people displaced by internal strife and natural disasters, are the largest group that UNHCR assists. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid because they are legally under the protection of their own government.

Countries with some the largest internally displaced populations are Colombia, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

Stats: 40m People are internally displaced around the world.

Who is a Stateless Person?

A stateless person is someone who is not a citizen of any country. Citizenship is the legal bond between a government and an individual, and allows for certain political, economic, social and other rights of the individual, as well as the responsibilities of both government and citizen. A person can become stateless due to a variety of reasons, including sovereign, legal, technical or administrative decisions or oversights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlines that “Everyone has the right to a nationality.”

Stats: 10m People around the world are stateless or at risk of statelessness

Who is an Asylum Seeker?

When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.

Stats: 1.7m new asylum claims in 2017

ADDITIONAL FACTS

- The three-month resettlement period is a whirlwind of emotion and deadlines – from photo ID, social security number applications and ESL classes to parents applying for jobs and kids enrolling in school to health screenings and caseworkers giving lessons on public transportation options. Secondary Cases are more in need of help than those who have been allocated to a case worker.
- Most refugees don't have access to American friends. Isolation is a way of life for many. Having a friend to guide and support refugees in their new lives isn't only based on kindness—it's a smart economic decision as well. Every day, refugees wake up in America and live the immigrant experience of working tirelessly to give a better life to their families and children.

There is a big benefit to having a diverse set of friends, creating opportunities for inclusiveness and a sense of welcoming to cities and small towns throughout the U.S. The benefits stretch both from the refugees themselves to the community members around them.

The key to a refugee's success? ***Support after those initial three months.*** This is when refugees need to become integrated in their community and begin making meaningful connections.

This is what Family Mentorship is all about.