

Key Terms

Refugee—A person who leaves their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, political views, or membership in a particular social group. People fleeing conflicts are also generally considered to be refugees since they are seeking refuge (safety). Refugees have specific rights and protections under international law. For example, refugees have the right to not be forced to return to the unsafe situation that they fled. Refugees have the rights of security and freedom of movement. They have the right to keep their family together. Similarly, countries that have refugees seeking asylum in their territory have specific responsibilities under international law for the treatment of those refugees.

Migrant—A person who moves to a foreign country for various reasons—for example, for employment, education, or to reunite with family—usually for a year or more. Unlike refugees, migrants do not face a direct threat of persecution or death in their home country.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)—A person who is forcibly uprooted within their country but who has not crossed an international border. IDPs may be forced from their home as a result of armed conflict, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, yet remain in their country.

Host Country—The country to which a refugee relocates.

Asylum—Shelter or protection from danger granted by a country to someone forced to leave their home country.

Asylum Seeker—A person who has moved across international borders in search of protection and filed a claim for asylum with the host country's government. While the government reviews the claim, the person remains an asylum seeker. If the claim is accepted, the person becomes a "refugee" in the eyes of the government. For example, someone from Syria who is living in Germany and waiting to hear the outcome of their asylum application would be considered an asylum seeker.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)—Established by the United Nations, the UNHCR is an international organization responsible for the protection of refugees worldwide.



In April 2015, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) opened the Mahama refugee camp in Rwanda to assist refugees fleeing the neighboring country of Burundi. The camp began providing services for 22,000 refugees in its first month, and as of April 2021, the number of residents was roughly 48,000. The UN provides refugees with food, water, shelter, education, medical attention, and other services. The UNHCR is funded by voluntary donations from governments and private donors. It is facing a severe funding shortage as it struggles to respond to the worsening global refugee crisis, and has appealed to countries worldwide for assistance.