



**The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee advances human rights through grassroots collaborations.**

← **News & Stories**

## **An Introduction To Asylum-Seekers, Refugees, and Global Migration**

Compassionate understanding of those fleeing danger is key to advancing justice for this vulnerable population.



By UUSC Staff on May 28, 2025

June 20 is World Refugee Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness about the realities of refugees around the world. This global observance shines a spotlight on the courage, resilience, and strength of millions forced to flee their homes under threat of persecution, conflict, and violence. It's important to delve into understanding the distinctions between

asylum-seekers and refugees, the primary causes prompting these migration patterns, and some enlightening facts about global migration.

## The Distinction Between Asylum-Seeker and Refugee Status

In international law, the terms “asylum-seeker” and “refugee” bear distinct definitions.

An “asylum-seeker” is an individual who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee. They apply for “asylum” — the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance in the country they moved to. The procedures involved are often complex, lengthy, and differ from country to country.

A “refugee,” on the other hand, is a person who has fled their country and has been recognized under the 1951 Refugee Convention, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Unlike asylum-seekers, refugees possess certain rights in their host countries and are eligible for certain types of assistance.

## Causes of Migration

The factors leading to migration, particularly *forced migration*, are multifold.

Political instability and conflict remain key reasons, where individuals and families are coerced to flee to ensure their safety and survival. Economic factors also play a crucial role. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities force many to seek better prospects abroad.

Social factors encompass various forms of discrimination and persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion.

The escalating crisis of climate change and extreme weather events is increasingly becoming a formidable driver of global migration. Unpredictable weather patterns, recurrent heatwaves, prolonged droughts, rising sea levels, and intensified hurricanes are rendering certain regions of the world uninhabitable, forcing inhabitants to migrate in search of safer environments. Tens of millions of people have been displaced because of climate-related disasters. The most vulnerable to these changes are often those with the least resources to adapt or relocate, thereby amplifying the social inequalities that already

exist. Therefore, climate change-induced migration isn't just an environmental issue but also a profound humanitarian concern that demands urgent attention and action.

## Facts About Global Migration

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2022, nearly 82.4 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. This staggering figure includes 26.4 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18.

Certain countries like Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (Burma) account for the majority of refugees, while countries like Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan, Uganda, and Germany host the most refugees. It's important to remember that behind every statistic, there's a personal story of resilience and a longing for safety and a new beginning.

One path to a meaningful life includes a deeper understanding and accompaniment of the stories of asylum-seekers and refugees.

Embracing these stories and the struggles they encapsulate is vital for our global society. Empathy fosters understanding, which in turn shapes policy, mobilizes support, and nurtures a more inclusive, compassionate world. You can contribute to making a difference in several ways. This can include donating to organizations working towards refugee aid, volunteering your time and skills, or even helping to raise awareness within your own circles. UUSC provides its Congregational Accompaniment Program for Asylum-Seekers (CAPAS) program to help congregations host those seeking asylum. [Learn more about the program](#) and its impacts.

*Image Credit: Adobe*

## READ THIS NEXT



## End of Title 42 Signals Continued Work for Fair Immigration in the US



# Providing People in Migration More Pain Than Promise

