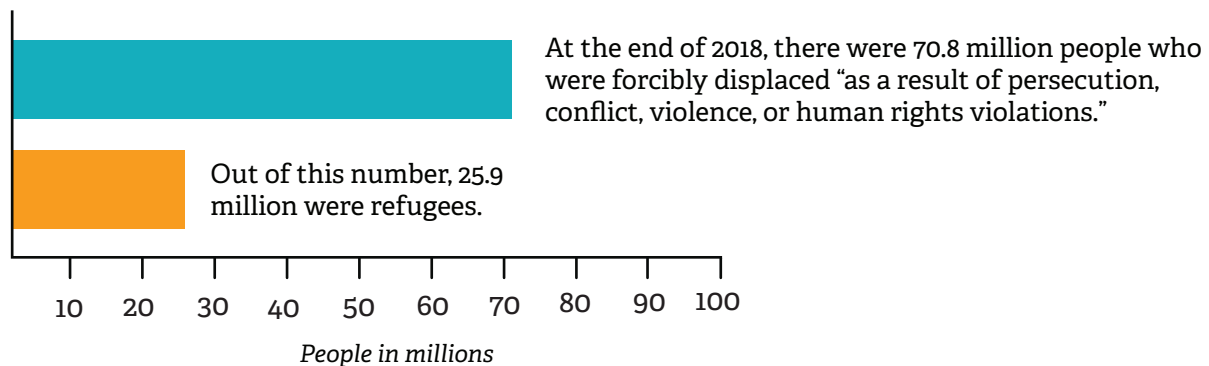


EXPLAINER

Migration

In 2018, 1 out of every 108 people around the world were displaced from their homes because of violence or fear of persecution.¹ The forced migration of people is increasing, growing from 43.3 million people in 2009 to 70.8 million in 2018.² People leave in search of better lives: to find work, to pursue their education, to find safety from violence, or to find acceptance of who they are. As immigration increases, it is becoming an ever more important political issue in many countries. Stories of migrants—documenting the conditions they flee or the policies that regulate their movement—often dominate the news.

How many migrants are there around the world?



In 2018

37,000

New displacements everyday

138,600

Unaccompanied and separated children were displaced



4 in 5 displaced people were in neighboring countries

Top 5 Sending Countries:



Top 5 Receiving Countries:





LEBANON

had the highest per capita number of refugees (1 in 6)

Estimated
740 million
internal migrants
in 2009.

Internal migration (migration within a country) is more difficult to measure than international migration



VENEZUELA

had a fast-growing number of refugees and asylum-seekers leaving the country in 2018

Source: 2018 IOM report⁴

Estimated
244 million
international migrants
in 2015

Who is a migrant?

A migrant is any person who moves away from their home residence, either inside a country or between countries. It is a broad term that encompasses both people who choose to leave and people, like refugees, who are forced to leave.

Who is a refugee?

In everyday language, the term *refugee* refers to “a person fleeing life-threatening conditions.”⁵ Journalists often use *refugee* in this sense to refer to people fleeing from violence, economic devastation, or climate catastrophes, for example. However, the legal definition of *refugee* is more specific than the popular definition. According to the United Nations, a refugee is a person who is outside of their own country and will not or cannot return because of a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”⁶ The definition also includes stateless people, who are not recognized as citizens of any country.

1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees

The United Nations (UN) defined the term *refugee*, and agreed on what rights refugees have, in this convention, which was passed in the aftermath of World War II. The original UN definition of refugee only included Europeans.

1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees

In this protocol, the UN expanded the definition of the term *refugee* to include people fleeing from any country around the world.

Who is considered to be a refugee under this definition?

A Syrian person who flees to Turkey because they fear they will be killed due to their political beliefs.

Why?

Because this person left Syria, crossing an international border, and has a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” in Syria due to their political beliefs.

Who is not considered to be a refugee under this definition?

A Syrian who flees from Damascus (the capital of Syria) to the Homs region of Syria because they fear they will be killed due to their political beliefs.

Why?

Because even though they are forced to flee because of a “well-founded fear of being persecuted,” they did not leave Syria. A person must be outside of their country of origin to be considered a refugee.

A Rohingya person from Myanmar, who is not able to get a Myanmar passport because only members of certain ethnic groups are able to gain citizenship.

Why?

Because under international law everyone is entitled to a nationality and protections from a government. International law thus recognizes people without any citizenship as refugees.

A Bangladeshi person who is displaced because rising sea levels flood their home.

Why?

Because international refugee law does not include people who are displaced due to natural disasters or climate change.

An intersex person from Zimbabwe who flees the country after experiencing threats and violence because of their identity.

Why?

Because the person was forced to flee their country, and the UN generally considers persecuted LBGTQI people “as members in a particular social group.”

A Ghanain who cannot find any work to support their family and leaves Ghana to try to find work in another country

Why?

Because international refugee law does not include people who are forced to migrate for economic reasons.

What is the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker?

An asylum seeker is a person who is asking for protection under international law. All refugees begin as asylum seekers, but not all asylum seekers become refugees. Usually, an asylum seeker arrives in a foreign country and applies for protection under that country’s asylum laws. Each country has a different process for granting asylum. People applying for asylum are usually asked to supply evidence proving they have been persecuted, along with their application. Under international law, people have the right to seek asylum in a different county if their own government fails in its obligations to them. Thus, asylum seekers migrate legally.⁷

- ¹ “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>.
- ² “Global Trends,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- ³ “Global Trends,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- ⁴ “World Migration Report 2018,” International Organization for Migration (2017), https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/china/r5_world_migration_report_2018_en.pdf.
- ⁵ AE Shacknove, “Who Is a Refugee?,” *Ethics* 95 (1985): 274-284. [country/docs/china/r5_world_migration_report_2018_en.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/china/r5_world_migration_report_2018_en.pdf).
- ⁶ “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10>.
- ⁷ “Key Migration Terms,” IOM website, <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.