

Refugees and Asylees in the United States

In 2014, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of people displaced within their country or having fled internationally reached the highest level ever recorded - 59.5 million. By mid- 2014 there were more than 1.2 million asylum seekers worldwide. Ongoing war in Syria alone has led more than 4.1 million people to seek refuge in neighboring countries and forced displacement of more than 7.6 million Syrians.

The United States is the world's top resettlement country for refugees. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 (ending in September 30, 2015), the US resettled 69,933 refugees and in FY year 2013 granted asylum status to 25,199 people. Furthermore, the Obama administration proposed to significantly increase the number of refugees the US accepts each year—from 70,000 in FY 2015 to 85,000 in FY 2016 and 100,000 in FY 2017—and scale up the number of Syrian refugees admitted to at least 10,000 for the current fiscal year, which began October 1.

The United States offers humanitarian protection to refugees through two channels: refugee resettlement and asylum status. The major difference between refugees and asylees is the location of the person at the time of application. Refugees are usually outside of the United States when they are screened for resettlement, whereas asylum seekers submit their applications while they are physically present in the United States or at a U.S. port of entry.

The president in consultation with Congress annually establishes the number of persons, who may be admitted as a refugee. At the beginning of each fiscal year, the president sets the number of refugees to be accepted from five global regions, as well as an “unallocated reserve” if a country goes to war or more refugees need to be admitted regionally.

After the most recent peak of 142,000 in 1993 (largely as a response to the Balkan wars), the U.S. annual refugee admission ceiling steadily declined. In 2008, however, the ceiling was raised by 10,000 to accommodate an expected increase in refugee resettlement from Iraq, Iran, and Bhutan. From 2008 to 2011, the annual ceiling remained at 80,000; it was reduced to 76,000 in 2012, and further reduced to 70,000 since 2013.

In the past decade, nationals of Burma have been the largest group of refugees resettled to the United States with 148,957 (or 24 percent) of the 622,169 resettled since 2006. The next two groups are Iraqis (125,970, or 20 per cent) and Bhutanese (84,547, or 14 percent). In 2015, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia were the top three countries of origin for refugees, representing 57 percent of resettlements. Rounding out the top ten countries were: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bhutan, Iran, Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, and Cuba.

In 2015, as in the prior year, the largest shares of refugees arriving in the United States were resettled in Texas (11 per cent) and California (8 percent). Relatively large shares were also resettled in New York (6 per cent), Arizona (5 per cent), Michigan (4 percent), and Ohio (4 percent). Thirty-eight percent of all refugees were resettled in these top six states.

Paper Review is written by Dr. Leah Utyasheva, leading human rights expert of the RUSMPI / Source: Jie Zong and Jeannie Batalova, *Refugees and Asylees in the United States*. October 28, 2015. Migration Policy Institute. The full text is [here](#)

Educational Experiences of Refugee Children in Countries of First Asylum

A 2015 report by the U.S. National Centre on Immigrant Integration Policy, analyses educational experiences of refugee children prior to resettlement and in the U.S. The report emphasizes that past experiences affect how children encounter school and the relationships they form with their teachers and peers. Pre-settlement histories of refugee children have significant ramifications for their academic careers. Yet, host country authorities frequently do not have access to these histories, because of factors such as language barriers, privacy concerns, cultural misunderstanding, and stereotypes.

Currently, 230 million children live in countries affected by armed conflict, and children make up half of refugee population. Most refugee children are resettled in developing countries. Refugee children in developing countries are some of the most educationally marginalized in the world - more than half of the 57 million children who are out of school globally live in conflict-affected settings. The U.S. resettles the largest number of refugees. Between 2002 and 2014, the U.S. resettled 644,500 refugees, 24 percent of whom were school-age children. These refugees had origins in 113 countries, and before arrival to the U.S. most of them lived in developing countries of first asylum. In countries of first asylum, many refugee children experience frequent disruptions and limited access to schooling. The enrollment rates of refugee children are far below of those of other children globally, and disruptions leave many behind their age-appropriate grade level. Secondary school enrollment is very low and student-teacher ratios are high.

According to the report, four aspects of refugees' educational experiences in first-asylum countries are especially important for U.S. teachers and schools:

- First, refugee children may experience interruptions to education for multiple reasons, such as conflict, discriminatory laws and policies, and ongoing migration, which can lead to late entry into school and interrupted schooling.
- Second, prior to U.S. resettlement, refugee children spend long time learning first asylum country languages while often failing behind in age-appropriate academic studies.
- Third, education may be of low quality, including emphasis on teacher-centered practices, which are often the result of limited resources, including low funding levels, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials, poor teacher training, and curricula geared toward national exams. In the U.S. where teachers expect children participate by working in groups, asking questions and engaging in exploration, refugee children who have no experience with child-centered activities, may be following what they understand to be proper classroom conduct.
- Fourth, refugee children and their parents may be wary of U.S. school and teachers if they have had previous educational experiences of discrimination.

U.S. schools, teachers and educational authorities need to take these considerations into account while designing educational policy for refugee children.

Paper Review is written by Dr. Leah Utyasheva, leading human rights expert of the RUSMPI / Source: Sarah Dryden Peterson, *The educational experiences of Refugee children in Countries of First Asylum*, Migration Policy Institute, National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, October 2015. The full text is [here](#)

