



10 things to know about the Global Refugee Crisis and America's lack of leadership

An IRC analysis of the latest annual reports from the UN Refugee Agency.¹

July 2019 (Updated April 2020²)

There is a dire need for global leadership in refugee protection...

#1 More people are forcibly displaced today than ever before.

- As of 2018, a record 70.8 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations.
- 25.9 million of those forcibly displaced are refugees, people who were forced to cross international borders in search of safety.
- The refugee population under the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) mandate doubled from 2012 to 2018.³

#2 The majority of the refugee population has been displaced for five years or more.

- As of 2018, 15.9 million or 78 percent of refugees are in situations of “protracted displacement,”⁴ having been displaced for five or more consecutive years in a row in a hosting country. This represents an increase from 66 percent in 2017.
- Of those refugees in protracted situations, more than one third are in a situation lasting 20 years or more.
- Nine additional refugee situations became protracted in 2018 and no protracted situation was resolved.⁵

#3 The poorest countries shoulder the greatest responsibility.

- Just 16 percent of the world's refugee population is hosted in developed countries, like the U.S.
- Out of the top 10 refugee-hosting countries, nine are in developing regions.
- 33 percent of the global refugee population is hosted in low-income countries that the UN classifies as “Least Developed Countries.”⁶ These countries, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, account for just 1.25 percent of the global GDP and 13 percent of the world's population.

#4 The number of refugees who need resettlement is rising.

- Resettlement is a last resort for less than one percent of the world's refugees. Only those who are at risk in their host country and unable to return home are considered for resettlement.
- Refugees selected for resettlement to the U.S. include those who have supported U.S. missions abroad, survivors of torture, persons with acute medical needs, and the most at-risk women and children.

Projected refugee resettlement needs



... at a time when pathways to safety are woefully insufficient...

#5 Options for a safe, voluntary, and dignified return home remain limited.

- Less than three percent of refugees (593,800 people) returned home in 2018.
- Syrians made up the largest population to return (210,900 people), followed by South Sudanese (136,200 people) despite the fact that UNHCR identified these countries as unfit for safe large-scale returns.
- Fewer refugees returned home in 2018 than in 2017 when 667,400 refugees returned.

#6 Few refugees can rebuild their lives and achieve self-sufficiency in host countries.

- Many barriers remain to integration in major refugee-hosting countries, leaving millions in uncertain limbo. Naturalization rates indicate that few refugees are able to obtain citizenship in their host communities.⁷
- In 2018, a total of 62,600 refugee naturalizations were reported to UNHCR, down from 73,400 refugees the previous year.
- Access to the formal labor market is another barrier to self-sufficiency in host communities. More than half of countries worldwide impose restrictions on refugees' right to work.⁸

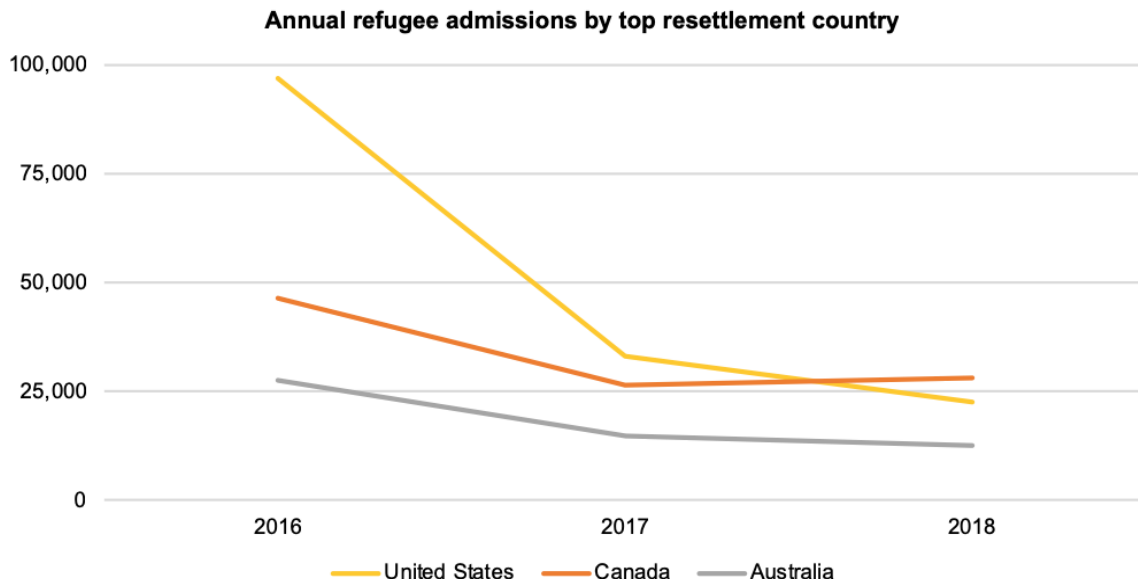
#7 Global resettlement of refugees has dropped more than 50 percent in just two years.

- In 2018, 92,400 refugees were resettled worldwide, down from 102,800 in 2017 and 189,300 in 2016.
- In 2018, there was a more than 99 percent gap between global resettlement slots and the number of refugees worldwide.
- Without global leadership, the gap between resettlement needs and spaces will only continue to widen.

... and the U.S. is leading a global race to the bottom.

#8 In the absence of U.S. leadership, resettlement commitments are falling through.

- While 37 countries made commitments⁹ to resettle refugees in 2016, just two years later only 25 countries are resettling refugees.
- From 2016 to 2018, the top three refugee resettlement countries have taken a step back. Refugee admissions dropped by 76 percent to the U.S., 40 percent to Canada, and 54 percent to Australia.



#9 Once the global leader in refugee resettlement, the U.S. has abdicated responsibility.

- In a break with longstanding tradition, the U.S. failed to welcome the most refugees in 2018.
- Each day in 2018 an average of 37,000 people were forced to flee their homes. The U.S. welcomed fewer refugees over the course of the year, resettling an average of 63 refugees per day.

#10 The U.S. has turned its back on the most vulnerable refugees worldwide.

- Sixty percent of refugees identified as in need of resettlement came from the top five refugee-producing countries in 2018. Yet, that year, refugees from these countries accounted for just 21 percent of U.S. resettlement.
- At a time when the number of people impacted by religious persecution worldwide is rising, the number of religious minorities resettled by the U.S. has fallen sharply.¹⁰

Top five refugee producing countries in 2018 ¹¹	Number of refugees	Number of refugees identified as needing resettlement in 2018	Number of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2018
1. Syria	6.7 million	478,170	41
2. Afghanistan	2.7 million	86,940	839 ¹²
3. South Sudan	2.3 million	92,537	2
4. Myanmar	1.1 million	9,090	3,771
5. Somalia	0.9 million	55,158	139
Total	13.7 million	721,895	4,792

Sources and Notes

¹ Data for this document was drawn from UNHCR's [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018](#) and [Projected 2020 Global Resettlement Needs](#) reports.

² Correction (April 2020): An earlier version of this report misstated that in 2018 there was a more than 99 percent gap between global resettlement slots and projected needs. This version correctly states that there was a more than 99 percent gap between global resettlement slots and the number of refugees worldwide.

³ The population increased from 10.5 million in 2012 to 20.4 million in 2018. Note: these figures do not include Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

⁴ A situation of protracted displacement is defined by UNHCR as one in which "25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given host country." UNHCR 2018 Global Trends.

⁵ South Sudanese refugees in Kenya, Sudan and Uganda; Nigerians in Cameroon and Niger; Somali and Congolese refugees in South Africa; Pakistani refugees in Afghanistan; and Ukrainian refugees in Russia.

⁶ The UN defines Least Developed Countries as "low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets." For more on this definition and the current list of countries, see: unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/.

⁷ For a more complete analysis of the difficulty of measuring integration, see page 33 of UNHCR 2018 Global Trends.

⁸ Roger Zetter and Héloïse Ruadel, "Refugees' Right to Work and Access to Labor Markets – An Assessment." September 2016. KNOMAD Working Paper and Study Series. https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2017-03/KNOMAD%20Study%201%20Part%201-%20Assessing%20Refugees%27%20Rights%20to%20Work_final.pdf

⁹ Note that formal commitments to resettle refugees do not necessarily indicate a country resettled refugees in that year or followed through on those commitments.

¹⁰ The International Rescue Committee, "Trump Administration slashes resettlement of religious minorities." July 15, 2019. Press release. <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-analysis-trump-administration-slashes-resettlement-religious-minorities>

¹¹ As of 2018, there are approximately 3.4 million Venezuelans who have fled the country, yet UNHCR does not currently classify the entirety of this population as a refugee flow. It is therefore not reflected in the top 5 refugee-producing countries above.

¹² Figure does not include Afghan Special Immigrant Visa recipients.