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**Migration and
Refugee Services**
Renewing Hope. Seeking Justice.
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

About World Refugee Day

World Refugee Day, celebrated annually on June 20th, draws global attention to the plight of millions of refugees— individuals forcibly displaced from their homes due to various forms of conflict, violence, or persecution. As per [UNHCR data](#), the refugee population surged to an alarming 32.5 million by mid-2022, making their struggle an urgent humanitarian concern. Refugees face immense risks, including physical danger, emotional trauma, and socio-economic instability. In response, the Catholic Church champions a clear message of compassion and solidarity, which is rooted in its call to “welcome the stranger.” Through this conviction, the Church urges the faithful to actively participate in refugee resettlement initiatives, to better educate themselves on the causes, consequences, and effective solutions to refugee crises, and to support refugees

living in their communities.

Too often we ignore the needs of refugees and other forced migrants seeking a place of safety. During a [2021 address in Nicosia, Cyprus](#), Pope Francis lamented this tendency, stating that “barbed wires are put in place so as not to let the refugee enter, the one who comes to ask for freedom, bread, help, brotherhood, joy, who is fleeing from hatred and is faced with a hatred that is called barbed wire. May the Lord awaken the conscience of all of us in the face of these things,” Catholic communities must become more engaged, working tirelessly to transform these teachings into concrete actions. This document highlights some of the ways in which Catholics can reach a deeper understanding of and commitment to the integration and support of refugees in their local communities.

Prayer for Refugees

God of our Wandering Ancestors,
Long have we known
That your heart is with the refugee:
That you were born into time In a family of refugees
Fleeing violence in their homeland,
Who then gathered up their hungry child
And fled into alien country.
Their cry, your cry, resounds through the ages:
“Will you let me in?”
Give us hearts that break open
When our brothers and sisters turn to us
with that same cry.
Then surely all these things will follow:
Ears will no longer turn deaf to their voices.
Eyes will see a moment for grace instead of a threat. Tongues
will not be silenced
but will instead advocate.
And hands will reach out—
working for peace in their homeland,
working for justice in the lands where they seek safe haven.
Lord, protect all refugees in their travels.
May they find a friend in me
And so make me worthy
Of the refuge I have found in you.

AMEN

Thanks to CRS

Sample Prayer Intentions

- For all refugees who are forced to flee from their homes, that God might bring them to a place of peace and safety, we pray to the Lord.
- For refugee children, who have been separated from their families due to difficult circumstances or death, that God will provide his protection, we pray to the Lord.
- For our bishops, that they will continue in their commitment to lead Catholic social service agencies and encourage parishes in their dioceses to both support lifesaving assistance for refugees around the world and to be active partners in refugee resettlement and provide in their communities a place of welcome, we pray to the Lord.
- For Christian faithful and all people of good will, that they might find the compassion to walk in solidarity with refugees and the courage to advocate on their behalf, we pray to the Lord.
- For U.S. and world leaders and elected officials, that they might work together to end the strife and persecution that gives rise to refugee crises, provide care and protection for refugees forced to flee, and share responsibility in helping them build new lives, we pray to the Lord.



Frequently Asked Questions about Refugees

Who is a refugee?

Under U.S. law, a refugee is a person who is forced to flee his or her home country due to persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted on account of his or her nationality, race, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees do not voluntarily choose to migrate but instead do so out of immediate necessity – often in the context of civil unrest, armed conflict, or other violence motivated by one of the five factors listed above and carried out by a state actor, an individual colluding with the state, or an individual whom the state cannot control.

What is the current status of refugees around the world?

Current levels of displacement are some of the [highest ever recorded](#), and every year the numbers only seem to grow. As of mid-2022, there were 103 million people displaced worldwide, including 53.2 million internally displaced and 32.5 million refugees. About 41% (36.5 million) of refugees are under the age of 18. Only 204,500 refugees returned to their country of origin or were resettled in the first 6 months of 2022.

The United States has traditionally been at the cornerstone of the international humanitarian system that protects refugees who so desperately need help, although the number helped has significantly decreased in recent years. More than 74% of the world’s refugees live in low- and middle-income countries and 36% of all refugees are hosted in five countries: Turkey, Colombia, Germany, Pakistan, and Uganda.

Supporting refugees around the world by ensuring protection of funding for international humanitarian and development assistance expresses our solidarity with them and with the generous nations that welcome them. When we educate refugee children, we give them a chance to contribute to their communities and reduce their vulnerability to human trafficking. When we help parents provide for their families, we reduce the likelihood that they will turn to child labor or early child marriage. Supporting refugees also helps diminish the strain on host communities. It’s vitally important that we protect funding that supports refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers overseas, and funding that addresses the root causes of migration.

Only those individuals who are considered to be the most vulnerable are referred for resettlement in a third country.

Despite the extent of global displacement, less than 1% of refugees are submitted for resettlement worldwide. In [Fiscal Year 2022](#), the United States resettled only 25,465 refugees, far short of the presidential determination 125,00 for that year. Although the US did admit close to 80,000 Afghans and 100,000 Ukrainians during this period, they were admitted under humanitarian parole and not through the resettlement program.

How does the processing system work?

The international community has traditionally promoted three durable solutions to displacement situations: (1) voluntary repatriation, (2) integration into the country of first asylum, or (3) resettlement into a third country. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works to find the best solution for each displaced person on an individual basis.

UNHCR is generally responsible for identifying and designating individuals as refugees. UNHCR assists in ensuring the safety and well-being of refugees as they await a placement determination. However, temporary protection for refugees remains a challenge for the international community. Not only do refugees often have to endure life-threatening conditions in order to arrive at their first host country, but, once there, they usually live in confined refugee camp sites or in urban settings, sometimes for as long as a decade.

How Does Refugee Resettlement Work in the United States?

Each year, the President of the United States authorizes the admission of a certain number of refugees into the country. This number, described as the “Presidential Determination” is based on a consultative process between Congress, the President, and various federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS). A refugee is typically referred to the United States by UNHCR, an embassy, or an authorized non-governmental organization (NGO). A government-funded Resettlement Support Center (RNC) then facilitates the application process by completing application paperwork and gathering biometric and biographical information needed for the determination and vetting process. During this application process, which typically takes 18 to 24 months to complete, the prospective refugee remains outside of the United States.

Prospective refugees to the United States undergo a rigorous and thorough screening process that includes vetting through databases held by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, DOS, and DHS. In addition, the refugee is interviewed by a highly-trained U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer to determine eligibility to the U.S. resettlement program and admissibility to the country. Further review is conducted if an individual’s application raises safety or national security concerns and, ultimately, he or she will not be resettled in the United States if such concerns are not resolved. Once USCIS conditionally approves the applicant, he or she must complete a medical examination. Those individuals who receive approval for resettlement undergo a final screening by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection prior to entry into the country.

Admitted refugees are assigned to an experienced resettlement agency in the U.S. prior to arrival in order to help ensure their welcome and successful integration into our country. Once in the United States, refugees engage in cultural orientation, English lessons, medical evaluations, and other forms of social support through the resettlement community and other organizations.

What is the Catholic Church's teaching on refugees?

It is a core Catholic teaching that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore entitled to dignity and respect. The Catholic Church views assisting those in need as a fundamental Christian duty that is derived directly from the life of mercy of Christ, who himself was a migrant and a child of refugees. We, as Christians, are called to welcome our new neighbors with the same love and compassion we would want ourselves to be shown in a time of persecution. We are also called to provide support and care for refugees overseas who remain in tenuous situations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IDEAS



Join

[Join the Justice for Immigrants Campaign](#) and keep abreast of all the migration related issues

Foster

Become a foster parent for an unaccompanied child! [Email us](#) today and provide a child a safe place to live.



Correspond

Send a message of hope and solidarity by [writing a postcard](#) to a refugee child.

Volunteer

Become involved in your local [Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees](#) or your [local Catholic Charities](#).





[Listen to the Oral History Archive!](#)

In coordination with Princeton University, USCCB/MRS helped to create an oral history archive that features the stories of more than 165 migrants who were forced to flee from their homes and whom eventually found their way to the United States. These stories provide insights into the challenges that these migrants face every day, the fortitude they demonstrate over-coming these obstacles, and their experiences starting a new life. Take an opportunity to listen to these oral histories, share them with your friends, and learn about the lives of migrants who now live and work in your communities.

Contact Us!

Be sure to let us know how you celebrated World Refugee Day 2023.

Let us know by email at JFI@usccb.org

If you have any questions or feedback, please email Todd Scribner at TScribner@usccb.org

JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS

Photo Credit: Winner, 2010 World Refugee Day Art Contest, Mina: "Liberated Dreams"

