Refugees: Ppl outside of their home countries who’re unable to return owing to fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or adherence to a political opinion

If you are a refugee, you have the right under the agreement of 145 countries to not be returned to your home country against your will (nonrefoulement)

Note: US is only signatory to the 1967 Protocol (not the 1951 Convention)

Who Decides:

National Governments

Often follows a nation’s foreign policy (e.g. Refugees from communist countries more commonly resettled during the Cold War than other refugee groups)

Until a gov’t decides to recognize you as a refugee, you are classified as an asylum-seeker

Many countries are selective about what refugee claims they accept. Often, groups with political connections (e.g. Cubans in the 1980s) get accepted, but climate/environmental/economic refugees are not accepted.

Economic Refugees: Ppl fleeing a lack of economic opportunities in their home countries

Countries (most in Global North, who fear Global South refugees) may oppose economic refugees for fear that it opens the doors for all immigration.

It can be an economic drain for the receiving country

Climate/Environmental Refugees: Ppl fleeing loss of land and/or livelihood as a result of climate change

Ppl in Global South most affected by climate change

Rising sea levels, drought/desertification

Globally, up to 100s of millions are expected to be displaced by climate change by 2080

What happens when ppl file for an asylum claim?

1. Voluntary Repatriation (return to home country once safe)

Simultaneously the easiest and hardest of the three options. Easiest b/c no one will dispute it if possible, but hardest b/c in order to make it possible requires a change in the home country. Often dependent on outside political pressure, foreign policy, and $ (gov’t aid, donations, Red Cross, etc.)

E.g., recently the resettlement of Afghanis in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era

1. Settlement in Country of First Asylum (usually a neighboring country)

Often the most practical solution, but generally puts a lot of pressure on the nation’s neighboring countries in conflict (above already high pressures from the conflict itself). Tends to concentrate large numbers of refugees in small areas (small countries / small number of countries) and puts large economic strain on the host nation. This generally relocates ppl from on Global South country to another Global South country.

E.g., Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, & Syria. About a third of Jordan’s pop is Palestinian refugees and their children. Also, Rwandan refugees in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) following the Rwandan genocide in 1994

1. Settlement in a Third Country (usually in the Global North)

Generally a movement of the Global South Refugees to Global North countries. The countries who take in the most refugees are the U.S., Canada, Australia, Sweden, and Norway. This solution often requires the political will of the host country (something that fluctuates tremendously)

E.g., Hmong refugees resettling to the U.S. after the Vietnam War

Immigration Gap: The difference b/w immigration policy and outcome

Arises from:

Shifts in economic pressures

Shifts in gov’t policies (in the U.S., swings left and right of center)

“State policies that encourage immigration have worked to undermine state attempts to control it, provoking public opposition and calls for even tighter immigration policies”

This contingent political will that is required for third country refugee resettlement is also required in overall immigration policy and fluctuates tremendously producing mismatches b/w policies and outcomes (or policies and enforcement)

Where do refugees come from?

Primarily the Global South

European refugees all but gone

Latin American refugees consistently low

African refugees growing in number

Peaked in 1980 (following Vietnam war, lots of refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia) at over 200,000 refugees

Note, the drop in refugees accepted after 9/11 by 60%, due to political climate and increased scrutiny in refugee screenings after 9/11

Before 1970, U.S. didn’t regulate immigration. It was a 1875 supreme court case that gave the U.S. that right. From 1875-1921 we were figuring it out and settled on the quota system (quotas by national ensured most immigration was white immigration) which in 1965 changed to by hemisphere (eastern and western), focused on reuniting families (75% of immigrants), and considered the skills of immigrants. This meant that immigration shifted from primarily European to predominantly Latin American and Asian

Similarities and Differences b/w Immigrants and Refugees:

Refugees have less networks in the host country

Refugees are less based on self-selection, so tend to be poorer (haven’t been saving up to immigrate)

Refugees tend to have less work skills (often coming from war zones)

Refugees tend to be less successful and assimilate slower than other types of immigrants

Immigrants move for economic reasons, generally

Refugees move for political climate reasons

Internally Displaced Persons: Ppl who have been forced out of their homes due to the fear of persecution or violence, but have not left their home countries

E.g., Sudan, there is fighting in some areas, displacing some people

In 2014: 26 million (11 million new that year)

There is often less political will, resources, and money for these types of migrants. They’re often from areas w/ protracted conflicts that’re underrepresented in Western media and typically fall through the cracks in humanitarian law b/c of the importance of national sovereignty

Where are refugees moving to?

In 2010, 108,000 refugees were resettled by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

71,400 to the U.S.

12,100 to Canada

8,500 to Australia

1,800 to Sweden

In 2015, 107,100 refugees resettled (66,500 to the U.S.)

Represents the third option, resettlement to a third country

On avg, the U.S. takes in the most refugees (even post 9/11), though Canada takes in a much higher % of its pop in refugees

In 2015, 200,000 refugees returned home

Mostly to Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Central African Republic

For every refugee that moves on to a third country, two are returned home

Currently, not by the country’s choice (once refugees set foot in their country, they can’t be forced to leave):

Turkey hosts 2.5 million externally displaced ppl

Pakistan hosts 1.6 million

Lebanon hosts 1.1 million

Iran hosts 979,000

Ethiopia hosts 736,000

Millions more are in limbo/in the original country of asylum

Refugees in the first country of asylum is almost always in the highest level (though many are never fully processed as refugees and remain asylum-seekers, but it has spiked tremendously in the last year

Why are countries resistant to accepting Syrian refugees?

Paris

Further context:

The refugee crisis is small compared to overall global immigration

In 2010, 214 million ppl migrated internationally (3.1% of the global pop)

Over 120 million of that was to developed countries

Most migration is

Global North to Global North (highly skilled workers)

Global South to Global South (mostly unskilled / lightly skilled workers)

And Global South to Global North (over half of immigration)

Refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced persons likely to increase due to increasing global population and increasing conflict over resources