

Frequently Asked Questions about Refugees and Immigrants

1. What is a refugee?

Generally, a refugee is a person who has fled his/her country because of fear of persecution.

U.S. law incorporated the refugee definition contained in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Adopted in Geneva in 1951, which defines a refugee as a person who "owing to a well-rounded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

2. What is the difference between refugees and immigrants?

Refugees have fled because of persecution while immigrants have left their home countries for other reasons.

3. Why does the United States receive refugees?

The United States has signed the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which means that it is obliged not to return refugees to their native countries.

The United States has humanitarian and democratic traditions for receiving refugees and participating in international work for refugees. U.S. citizens have long supported these traditions. The United States is obliged to carry out part of its global responsibility for refugees because of its affiliation with international conventions and agreements.

4. How much does the United States spend on helping refugees?

In 1999, the United States was the top contributor to programs that assist refugees overseas, giving \$444.9 million. The U.S. Government's Migration and Refugee Assistance budget is \$625 million for fiscal year 2000. However, in terms of their contribution per capita, the United States came eighth in the list of top donor countries in 1999. The U.S. per capita rate is \$1.63 compared to \$15.62 for Norway, \$3.86 for the Netherlands, and \$1.27 for Canada.