

Refugees, *The Land of the Invisible* Overview

This provides a brief overview of the issues of refugees and asylum seekers. To find out more, download the critical thinking activities, workshops and presentations, and look at the action guide to see what more you can do to help.

TAGS

Refugees

Introduction

A poor welcome from the world's wealthy

Did you know that the world's six wealthiest nations host less than 9% of the world's refugees, while poorer countries shoulder most of the responsibility?

The world's richest countries can and should do much more to help vulnerable people who have fled their homes because of violence and conflict.



Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam

What should we know about this issue?

The number of people forced to flee their homes due to war, violence or persecution is at its highest level since records began. The conflict in Syria has been a major factor in this increase, but people have also fled other conflicts including in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. In total, more than 65 million people have fled their homes – 40.8 million within their own country, 21.3 million as international refugees and 3.2 million awaiting asylum decisions in industrialised countries.

The responsibility for providing refugees with shelter, food and health care, as well as jobs and education, is falling disproportionately on poorer countries, which are often struggling to meet the needs of their own people or are at risk of compromising their own stability.

The world's six richest countries, which make up more than half the global economy, host just 8.88% of the world's refugees and asylum seekers. Among these countries, Germany alone hosts over 736,000 people, while the USA, the UK, France, China and Japan are hosting the remaining 1.4 million between them.

In sharp contrast, half the world's refugees and asylum seekers – almost 12 million people – are hosted by Jordan, Turkey, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pakistan, Lebanon and South Africa, whose economies collectively account for less than 2% of the world's total.

Those who are forced to flee their homes often face treacherous journeys before they reach a safe haven. Families are ripped apart and many end up living in squalid conditions with not enough

food, and without clean water or proper sanitation. Some people spend decades as refugees, with no prospect of formal work or a decent education¹.

Richest countries least welcoming

Oxfam calculations, using the latest available UN figures (mid-2016) and the World Bank's ranking of countries based on their economic wealth ([GDP](#)) highlight the stark contrast between the number of refugees and asylum seekers hosted by the world's six richest countries, and the number hosted by the six countries that host the most refugees.

Table 1: Top six wealthiest countries and the number of refugees and asylum seekers they host

Country	No. of refugees and asylum seekers hosted
USA	559,370
China	301,729
Japan	16,305
Germany	736,740
United Kingdom	168,937
France	336,183
2,119,264 refugees and asylum seekers, or 8.88% of the world's total	
56.6% of cumulative global GDP	

Table 2: Top six countries/territories hosting refugees and asylum seekers and the number hosted*

Country/Territory	No. of refugees and asylum seekers hosted
Jordan	2,806,414
Turkey	2,753,760
Occupied Palestinian Territory	2,051,096
Pakistan	1,567,604
Lebanon	1,535,662
South Africa	1, 217,708
11,932,244 refugees and asylum seekers, or 50.02% of the world's total	
1.9% of cumulative global GDP	

*Includes figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees.

This does not mean that those countries hosting the most refugees and asylum seekers are doing everything possible to uphold their rights, but overall they are taking a far higher share of the world's responsibility than those countries with the biggest economies. One way rich countries can welcome the most vulnerable refugees is through **resettlement**, a process in which refugees are provided with a new start and life in a third country; a different one from the country they have fled and in which they currently live.

¹ All statistics from Oxfam 2016: ["A poor welcome from the world's wealthy"](#).

While some richer countries have provided some refugees with a new start, the number of people they have welcomed in this way is extremely small compared to the numbers of refugees hosted by other countries.

In 2015, the six richest countries resettled just 57,167 people, less than 6% of the 960,000 men, women and children around the world in desperate need of resettlement that year.

There are other ways rich countries can welcome more refugees and ensure they do not have to embark on life-threatening journeys to seek safety. Governments can make it easier for refugee families to reunite in their country or offer humanitarian visas allowing refugees to travel safely to apply for asylum. None of these measures should ever be used as a way to undermine the right of people who have travelled outside of these routes to claim asylum in a country. The right to claim asylum – that is, to seek protection from persecution – is a core tenet of international refugee law, and must be upheld.

To learn as much as possible about the issue of refugees and the role of NGOs from your country, we recommend visiting the following Reports from Oxfam International:

- *Oxfam International Report: [A Poor Welcome from the Worlds Wealthy](#)*
- *Oxfam International Report and the rights of migrants arriving into Italy: [Hotspots, Rights Denied](#)*
- *Oxfam International Report: [Voices of Refugees and Migrants in Greece](#)*