

The Refugee Crisis

The little girl twirled her tattered, brown teddy bear by its arms. Hanging on her shoulders was a small bright blue backpack nearly half her size. She and her mother, grandmother, and brother followed a translator wearing a bright orange vest through the Berlin train station. The translator dropped them off at track one, and they were on their way. This story is all too familiar for individuals as conflict erupts in nations such as Ukraine.¹ As of March 29, 2022, nearly 4 million people have left Ukraine and fled to neighboring European countries, eventually making their way to the United Kingdom and the United States.²

More than 4m people have fled Ukraine

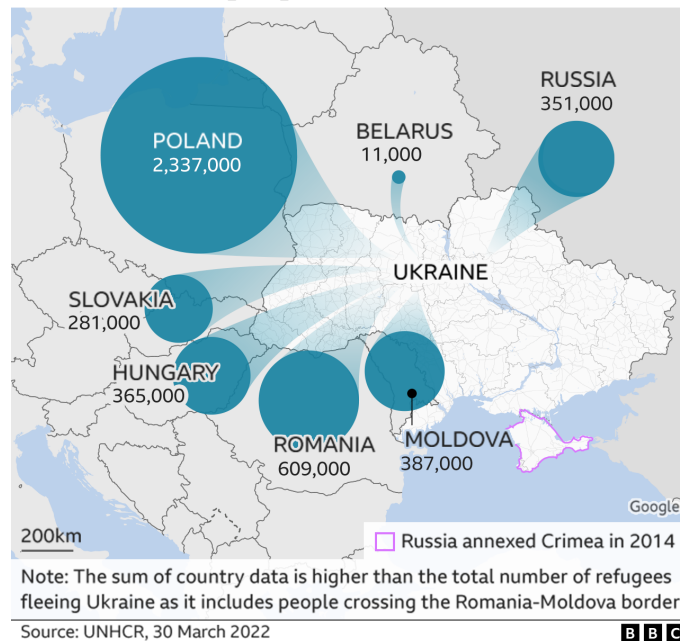


Figure 1: Locations Ukrainian Refugees Have Fled To³

Beyond the Ukraine crisis, over 82 million refugees are around the globe who have been forcibly displaced from their homes to escape violence.⁴ The total number of refugees is the equivalent of the entire population of Germany.⁵ When people are displaced, they lose their assets and livelihoods. They are unable to plan for their futures, and they do not know what to expect.⁶ Refugees can be from any nation, but 68% of them come from 5 countries: the Syrian

Arab Republic, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar.⁷ For many of the people who flee their homes, they seek asylum in other nations. Turkey, Colombia, Uganda, Pakistan, and Germany are the countries that host the most refugees.⁸ The United States must adapt its policy to accept more refugees not only to enrich the economy but also to promote their long-term health and safety. A lack of government support and openness for refugees has resulted in low admission numbers, leaving refugees in unsustainable situations in nations ravaged by war.

How US Refugee Admissions Numbers Are Determined

In the United States, the President can determine the refugee limits with Congress' agreement.⁹ For the year 2022, the limit was set to 125,000 refugees, but on March 24, 2022, President Biden announced that it would allow up to 100,000 Ukrainians into the nation.¹⁰ Although the ceiling is high, historically, the number admitted typically falls below the limit.

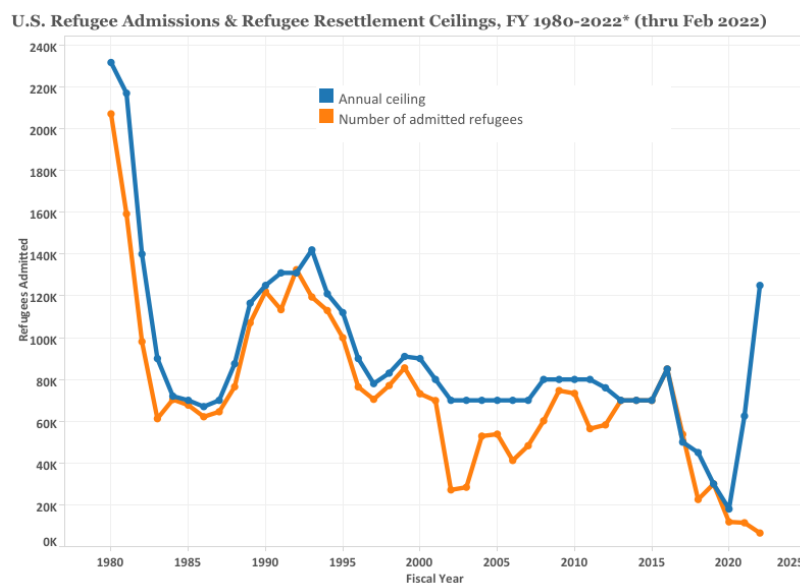


Figure 2: Difference Between the Number of Admitted Refugees and the Refugee Ceiling¹¹

On average, it takes about two years to vet a refugee since they must go through several background checks, screenings, and interviews through the United States Refugee Admissions

Program (USRAP).¹² The USRAP categorizes individuals on levels of priority based on their relationship with people already settled in the states or current needs.¹³ However, before the process can even begin, the applicants must be selected and referred to the United States by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹⁴ In 2020, the UNHCR submitted the files of over 39,500 refugees for consideration by various resettlement countries.¹⁵ The application is then presented to the Department of Homeland Security, Citizen and Immigration Services (UCSIS).¹⁶ Finally, they must also attend a cultural orientation course before arrival and establish where they will live in the United States.¹⁷

The Land of The Free

A surge in conflict across the globe since 2010 has led to historically high levels of forced displacement.¹⁸ Refugees have witnessed war firsthand while suffering from a lack of food, water, and basic human needs.¹⁹ The destruction of their homes and fleeing to another place can detrimentally impact their mental health and make them vulnerable.²⁰ While there are challenges for all displaced persons, an uprooted life has severe consequences for children. Refugee children have limited access to education because they are less likely to attend school due to financial issues, language barriers, and personal safety.²¹ Isolation in the community could also be a problem due to xenophobia and discrimination.²²

Unfortunately, isolation is a common problem faced by refugees that enter the United States. For example, a young girl, Dana was one year old when her family fled Iraq and resettled in Jacksonville, Florida. She found herself isolated from her classmates, who did not understand her story, culture, or traditions, and students bullied her when she brought her favorite traditional meals to Florida.²³ However, Dana was able to turn this experience into a positive outcome and

became the youngest refugee advocate in Florida, sharing her story with state legislators.²⁴ Not all children may be able to handle bullying in the same way and the outcome could be negative.

Children, about 30% of all refugees, are in developmental phases, where trauma can be detrimental because they have fewer coping mechanisms than adults to process and navigate the issues.²⁵ Exposure to violence has a catastrophic impact on a child's development and leads to self-harm, aggressive behavior, depression, substance abuse, or—at worst—suicide, according to UNICEF.²⁶ Unaccompanied refugee children, especially girls, are at more than double the risk for violence, exploitation, and abuse.²⁷ While it is important to help these people retake control of their lives, displaced persons often live in poor areas in developing countries, that are struggling to meet their own developmental goals.²⁸

Additionally, the United States submits to its fears of asylum seekers threatening the country and restricts entry to the nation while simultaneously pulling back from international collaboration to aid refugees.²⁹ There has been a history of the United States refusing to accept refugees. Most notably, during World War II, the U.S. Government turned away thousands of Jewish refugees out of the fear that they were Nazi spies.³⁰ The fate of the Jews was well-recognized and ultimately very tragic, but the United States failed to aid the Jews when it had an opportunity. In 1939, the *St. Louis* was sailing off the coast of North America with mostly Jews was denied the ability to dock and was forced to return to Europe, where many of its passengers perished in the Holocaust.³¹ Three years later, the *SS Drottningholm*, set sail carrying hundreds of desperate Jewish refugees from Sweden towards New York, but the United States government had pegged one of the passengers, Friedrich Bahr, as a Nazi spy.³² The government used his story as an excuse to deny refuge to Jews fleeing the Nazi Regime.

Compounding on the perceived threats, many refugees are from conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan: areas viewed to cultivate terrorists.³³ These individuals are not terrorists; they are people fleeing from a devastated homeland. These people have faced unfortunate situations, which could happen in any nation at any point, and are seeking refuge to protect their lives. The fallacies and exaggeration of American politics influence the security threats perceived by citizens. Refugees are vetted vigorously through a handful of government programs and security teams through a series of applications and interviews.³⁴



Figure 3: A Young Girl Demonstrating That She is Human and Not a Terrorist³⁵

Benefits of an Accepting Society

While America was not officially founded until 1776, the initial migration to the original English colonies was primarily for refugees fleeing oppression and persecution so that they could freely practice their religion; this freedom is the foundation of the American identity. Oppression and flight was the core experience of past arrivals, who were classified as immigrants instead of refugees. For instance, after the failed German Revolution of 1848, thousands of German

revolutionaries moved to the United States to escape the power of the Austrian Empire and their views.³⁶ They were scientists, journalists, teachers, and lawyers who fled and became active in the anti-slavery movement, which would grant rights to about 4 million slaves.³⁷ In this case, the United State's acceptance of people was valuable to the country's forward progress.

The integration of refugees into American society is valuable for the economy and industrial advancement. Refugees bring new ideas and work to increase the nation's productivity. Madeleine Albright, whose family fled Czechoslovakia in 1939, was the first female U.S. Secretary of State and former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.³⁸ Albright advocated for democracy and human rights and worked to bolster U.S. leadership in world politics.³⁹

Refugees have diverse perspectives that assist their development in the nation. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “[p]eople who have been uprooted from one culture and exposed to another tend to be more creative, while studies show that diverse groups outperform like-minded experts at problem-solving.”⁴⁰ Refugees use these skills to become business people, where “entrepreneurship among refugees is nearly 50 percent higher than among people born in the U.S.”⁴¹ They run America while supplying the nation a return on its initial investment in their lives through the payment of taxes.



Figure 4: Positions Refugees Take in Society⁴²

Given the benefits of refugees to the economy, some individuals may be worried that they could lose their job to them. However, it is agreed upon by most migration economists that the presence of more foreigners in the labor force does not hurt natives, mainly because there is a different skill set between the two, and they compete for different jobs.⁴³ Additionally, the birth rate in the United States has fallen to record lows, and as a result, the working-age population of the United States is also falling.⁴⁴ American society will benefit from the arrival of younger refugees who can support the population numbers and maintain the current output.⁴⁵

Furthermore, accepting refugees reflects the American values of equal treatment and non-discrimination. Allowing more displaced persons to enter the nation can right the wrongs of the nation's past in rejecting displaced persons in situations where it was crucial, such as World War II. It is a moral choice to provide a home for refugees and uphold American values. When America accepts fleeing victims, they take a stronger stance on the global stage, establishing that they reject ideologies that oppose American values.⁴⁶ For instance, by accepting Ukrainian refugees, America takes a position against the Russian Government's autocracy.

Admitting refugees can advance American interests abroad by acting as a role model for other nations. By accepting more fleeing individuals and opening the borders, the United States encourages other countries to follow their lead and do more. If the United States continues its closed ideals or promotes a more rigid refugee policy, then there is a risk that other countries will also shut their borders and decrease their refugee intake. As a result, there would be instability and security for U.S. interests in those nations.⁴⁷

While there are numerous benefits for American society, there are clear social benefits for the refugees who have just fled a terror situation. The sooner the country commits to protecting

displaced persons, the sooner the refugees can move forward with their lives.⁴⁸ Most importantly, by accepting refugees, America protects the most necessary right: the right to live. It is clear, from previous experience, that turning our backs on refugees can be fatal for those people. The decision to accept them is life-saving. During displacement, refugees acquire a lot of physical and emotional stress that can have an impact on their future health. Resettlement of these people in America can help ease the stress and provide the resources for dealing with these issues.

Finally, refugees enrich cultural diversity by bringing new traditions to the community where they move.⁴⁹ According to the International Institute in St. Louis, “cross-cultural understanding is vital for immigration,” and the institute also hosts the annual Festival of Nations that exposes residents to global cultures and aids immigrants in feeling safe and at home.⁵⁰

A Realistic Approach

Since the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, “the USRAP has successfully protected more than three million refugees.”⁵¹ This is a tremendous start to assisting resettlement efforts. However, the crisis requires increased aid by the United States to ease the global situation. First, the United States should increase its quota to resettle 300,000 people per year, a small amount compared to the total number of displaced people. Through this mode of action, America will be viewed as a nation with morals and show international leadership. When a powerful country such as the United States adopts this program, it could influence other nations to expand their refugee programs, especially since the United States has failed to take in nearly as many refugees as other countries.⁵² Without increasing its refugee allowance, there will continue to be displaced persons who are fighting for their right to life. Millions of people will proceed to suffer in the awful conditions they find themselves in as they wait for acceptance into the nation.

In times of crisis, the United States should adopt a new family visa scheme to support the large influx of refugees and allow them to live with relatives who are citizens. During the Ukrainian crisis, the United States only issued immigrant visas to refugees of Ukraine.⁵³ However, the process is long because it follows the standard process with interviews, background checks, and medical exams.⁵⁴ In times of crises such as Ukraine, the United States must adopt an expedited immigrant visa policy to meet the global need. With a family visa scheme, applications can be quickly filtered, and applicants can be relocated since they have family within the country. This plan has worked for the United Kingdom, which adopted this family visa strategy for the Ukrainian Refugee crisis. As of March 29, 2022, over 22 thousand Ukraine family visas had been issued out of 31,200 applications received.⁵⁵ The United Kingdom has both an efficient and large-scale response to help aid the situation.⁵⁶

Once refugees have arrived, the priority should be to quickly adapt them to their new environment and provide language training skills so that they can easily blend into society. Also, learning the language and swiftly integrating means that they are employable and will have a better opportunity to recreate the life that they left. Job training and skill development can enable refugees to obtain higher-skilled and better-paid positions for the long term once they have adjusted to the new nation.⁵⁷ The language barrier presents a problem, especially in the United States, where the primary second language of English learners in schools is Spanish.⁵⁸ The crisis is located in nations whose languages are not commonly spoken in the United States. To better accommodate these individuals and ease their transition, the United States should take a multi-tier approach. First, the government should place these people in communities where there are individuals that speak the applicants' native language. The government should also create a long-term plan to support American learners of the languages of refugees, such as Arabic,

Napali, and Somali.⁵⁹ Creating scholarships and programs for students can ensure that there will be educated individuals that can assist refugees' integration into life during the next crisis. To create these programs, a solution is to increase taxes until there has been sufficient revenue to support the inflow of people. When we support refugees, there will be more tax-paying individuals, and in the long run, the United States should make a return on this initial investment and tax increase.

Washington should increase its funding for refugees in its budget instead of relying on Congress's spending surges during immediate crises. The most attention to spending often occurs after the initial outbreak of an emergency, where humanitarian responses are focused on providing life-sustaining materials such as food, water, medicine, and shelter.⁶⁰ Money should be set aside and invested for the long-term development of refugees in the United States for an easier transition into American life. In this instance, a rise in taxes would also be necessary to acquire the funds. Ultimately tax raises will not be agreeable to all citizens but is a critical action to maintain the safety of displaced people.

For the enrichment of culture, the United States Congress should undertake World Refugee Day, June 20, as a federal holiday. This act would demonstrate that America stands with refugees and is willing to support them. Having the holiday also promotes cultural openness and acknowledges the role of refugees in the United States. In various cities across the UK, Australia, and Germany, Refugee Week is held the week of June 20 to educate the host community on refugees through art, music, and food.⁶¹

America as a Home for All

With the number of refugees growing due to increased violence in nations across the globe, it is time for the United States government to take expanded action and accept more

refugees into the nation. The forced displacement of individuals results in clear mental, physical, and emotional trauma which can be mitigated through the swift integration of these people into America. The lives and rights of these individuals are at risk every day. The United States lacks action in ensuring the placement of these people. It is time for America to step up to meet the standards other nations have set and promote the safety of refugees. America needs to stand behind the freedoms that were foundational to the nation and further aid refugees entering the country to have the rights that America protects. Congress should pass laws to expedite the acceptance process of refugees during times of crisis and promote the integration of refugees through increased programming and support.

As supported by numerous reports by various organizations, America requires several improvements to its current refugee acceptance process to ensure that these refugees are not spending more time in war-torn nations than necessary. Acquiring funding is a vital component for the many proposed programs, through which an increase in taxes is imperative. A small investment now will lead to a stronger future due to the numerous economic benefits refugees have on the economy. No more refugees need to suffer as they wait for acceptance to the nation. No more refugees need to fight for their lives. The United States Congress has the power to support the refugee crisis, reduce the anxiety faced as refugees await their fate, and expedite their integration into American culture.

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