



**8 THINGS
YOU SHOULD
KNOW ABOUT
REFUGEES**

world relief 

Introduction

Have you seen the stories of refugees in the news?

Have you felt overwhelmed by how complex the problem is?

Have you wanted to help refugees feel loved and supported, but haven't known where to start?

This ebook is for you.

While a short ebook can't cover every aspect of the current refugee crisis, we at World Relief are hoping it can do one thing—help you get to know refugees who have resettled in the U.S.

Not every one of the eight things you should know applies to every single refugee. Why? Well, that's the first thing you should know ...



one.

Refugees come from all over the world.

If you've learned about refugees from the news, it's likely you've heard a lot about refugees fleeing from war and violence in Syria. And for good reason. Over the past eight years, nearly 5.6 million Syrian men, women and children have fled from Syria as refugees.

But refugees come from all over the world—from countries in Africa, Asia, Central and South America and elsewhere. All across the world, millions of people are currently living as refugees. But they aren't doing so by choice.

two.

Refugees don't choose to be refugees.

If you've ever assumed that refugees come to the U.S. by choice, you're not alone. People commonly assume that refugees choose to leave their home countries and come to the U.S. to seek a better life. But that's not the case.

By definition, refugees have been forced to leave their home country because their lives or safety have been threatened. International law defines a refugee as someone who leaves their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for one of these five reasons:¹

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Political opinion
- Membership in a particular social group

¹ <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>





three.

Refugees are a growing population.

There are more refugees today than at any time since World War II. The total number of refugees worldwide has more than doubled in the past 20 years. Today an alarming 22.5 million people are living outside of their home country because they were forcibly displaced. If all the refugees in the world formed their own country or state, its population would be larger than the state of Florida.²

It's easy to assume refugees are different—somehow unlike most of us in the U.S.—because of the drastically different experiences they've had. However, if you get to know a refugee family, you'll discover exactly the opposite.

² http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview#_ga=1.1490737.1410439585.1452783218

four.

Refugees are like you and me.

The vast majority of refugees in the U.S. want some of the same things we all do: safety for their families, a promising future for their children, the freedom to exercise their basic human rights and the chance to make happy memories with their loved ones. They dream of a bright future, just like you and me.

Refugees also experience grief, fear and frustration—much of it stemming directly from their experiences. Imagine being forced to flee your home country, landing in an entirely new country, needing to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture and make new friends, all while trying to provide for your family. The challenge would feel overwhelming. And yet, refugees all across the U.S. demonstrate resilience and courage every day in the face of that challenge.



five.

Refugees are seeking safety and peace.

Imagine you fled the U.S. and tried to find safety in another country because your life was in danger. Now imagine that some people believed that you were a threat simply because you had come from the U.S. “I’m not the threat,” you’d likely say. “I’m the one being threatened!”

By definition, refugees are those fleeing war, violence and terrorism; not the ones creating it. Make no mistake—we need to ensure those wishing to do us harm do not enter the U.S. But compassion and security do not have to be mutually exclusive.

In fact, refugees arriving in the U.S. undergo a thorough vetting process that can take over three years to complete. Only one tenth of one percent of the world’s refugees in 2018 were ever even considered for resettlement in the U.S. This chart explains how that process works.

U.S. REFUGEE SCREENING PROCESS



WHO IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee is someone who has fled one’s home country and cannot return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.





The Plight of a Religious Minority

Deborah was born in Myanmar's Chin State. The Chin are one of many ethnic minorities within Burma. Most Chin are Baptist Christians living in a mostly Buddhist country. Their commitment to following Jesus has led to harsh mistreatment by those in Myanmar's government.

Threatened with arrest and imprisonment, Deborah fled for safety with her nine-year-old son and six-year-old daughter. Traveling by foot and hitching a ride in a small van packed with other refugees, they finally reached the country of Malaysia.

Once safely in Kuala Lumpur, Deborah and her children lived with several other refugee families in a small apartment with a single bathroom. There, police officers would harass the Chin refugees, threatening them if they did not pay a bribe.

Finally, four years after registering with the United Nations as refugees, Deborah and her children boarded an airplane to travel to their new home in the U.S.

Years later, Deborah is now involved in her church, the Falam Christian Church of Chicago, where she teaches Sunday school and occasionally preaches. Her faith, she says, is what gave her the strength to seek refuge.



six.

Refugees want to be part of their new community.

From the moment they arrive at the airport, life as a refugee in the U.S. can be lonely. Experiencing life in a brand new country with new customs and ways of living can be overwhelming. And while many refugees love the culture of their home countries, many also want to find ways to adopt American customs, make friends and feel at home in the U.S.

Sadly, like many other immigrants, many refugees are never invited into an American's home. But it doesn't have to be this way. Over the years, we've seen individuals, churches and other organizations welcome refugees, learn from one another and build deep friendships. These friendships can make all the difference in the world, especially in the first few years of resettlement.

Free from Danger, Filled with Hope

Rami and his three siblings grew up in a middle-class home in Syria. He describes his life in Syria as “wonderful” and “beautiful.” But after the Syrian civil war began, the region was decimated. As rocket fire intensified it became risky to even go outdoors. But when electricity was cut off and bread and water became scarce, Rami and his family fled to Turkey.

While grateful to be safe from war, life in Turkey was very difficult. Without knowing the language and without legal work authorization, Rami and his family found it almost impossible to sustain themselves.

Eventually, Rami and his whole family received notice that they would be among the first Syrians to be resettled to the United States as refugees.

Within a few months, and with World Relief’s help, Rami also found work, allowing him to cover his rent payments. Rami enrolled in English classes at the local community college, hoping to resume work as a veterinarian.

While grieving all that his family has lost, and ever mindful of the vast majority of Syrian people still in harm’s way, Rami feels grateful to the people of the United States for receiving him and his family. He is hopeful as he sees a safe, peaceful future for his family.³

seven.

Refugees need help to rebuild their lives.

Refugee resettlement agencies, like World Relief, partner with the U.S. State Department to help refugees rebuild their lives. That partnership helps provide immediate support for refugees when they arrive. But as they continue to resettle, refugees face the challenge of learning a new language, finding a new job and beginning to support themselves and their families. As it would for any one of us, these challenges require help.

World Relief provides vital services to arriving refugees such as ESL classes, job training and cultural orientation. Through our partnerships with local churches and other organizations, we come alongside refugee families, welcoming them and providing them with the expertise, services and relationships needed to help them thrive in the U.S.

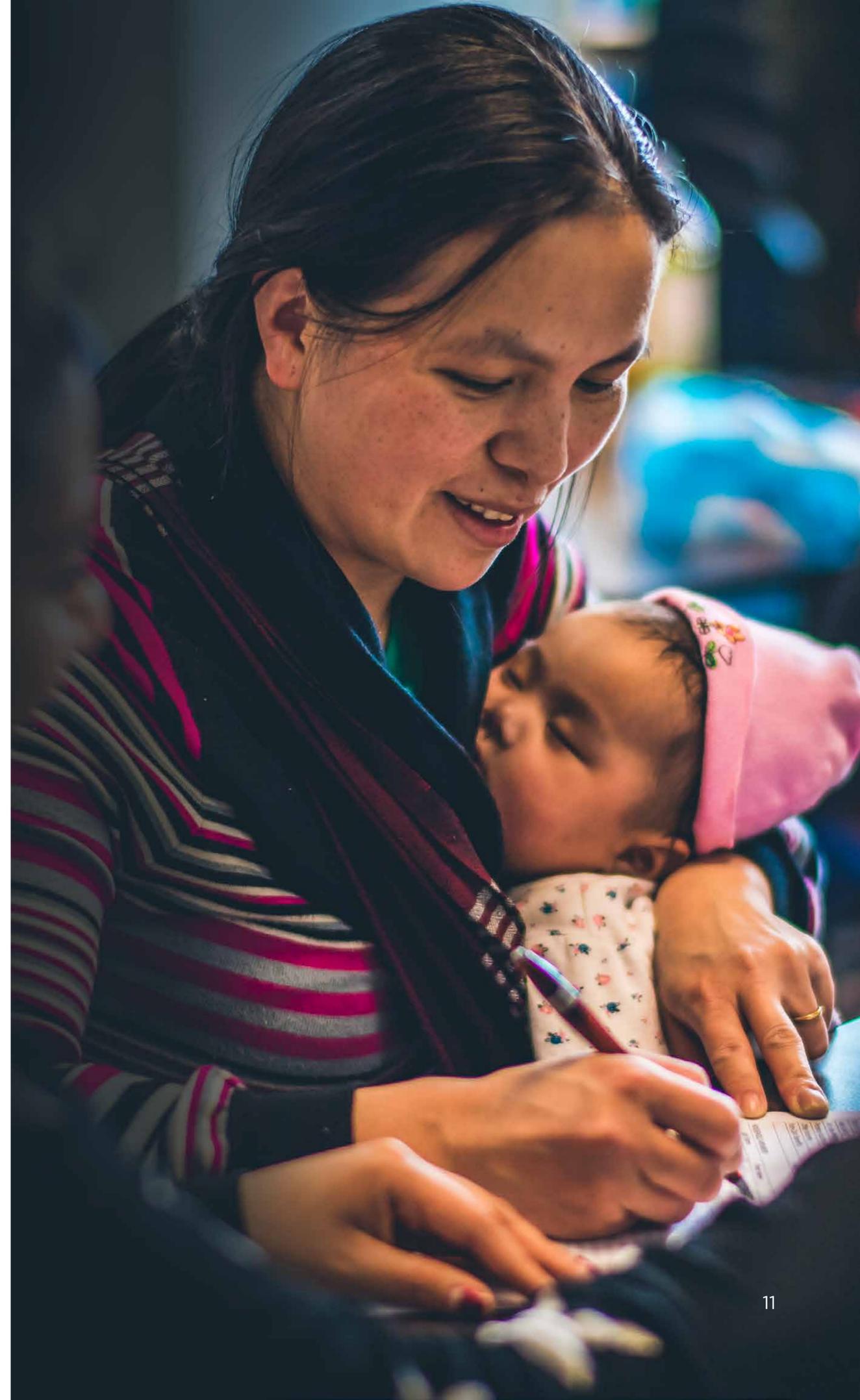


eight.

Refugees want to provide for their families.

You may have heard someone say that refugees are a drain on the U.S. economy. But that's simply not true. The truth is that prior to arriving in the U.S., many refugees already established successful careers in their home countries. But job and education requirements in the U.S. often differ, requiring many refugees to start over and rebuild their careers. Through hard work, refugees establish careers in manufacturing, hospitality, food service, pharmacology, medicine, accounting and more, now providing meaningfully for themselves and their families.

Some refugees even open their own businesses. In fact, in 2015, 13% of refugees in the U.S. were entrepreneurs, compared to just 9% of the U.S. born population.⁴ That's not only good news for refugees; it's good news for the U.S. economy! A 2017 report found that over the past ten years, refugees have contributed \$63 billion more in tax revenue than they receive in public benefits.⁵



⁴ http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/NAE_Refugees_V6.pdf pg. 10
⁵ <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-breene-refugees-economy-20180212-story.html>



Unlocking Potential

At twenty years of age, Come Nzibarega worked as a translator for a United Nations peacekeeping force sent to his country of Burundi. He was kidnapped and tortured by a rebel group for this work. Fearing for the safety of his family, he decided to flee Burundi altogether.

Come ended up in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. He missed his family desperately, and the living conditions in the camp were deplorable, with a roof that could not keep water out when it rained. Come was not allowed to work in the camp. “Refugee camps are full of people who are full of potential, but who cannot use it,” he said.

Come found community in a church within the camp. “The church helped me a lot,” Come reflects, “giving me hope that God would one day open the door for me to get out.”

Finally, after six years and as many interviews with both UNHCR and the U.S. government, he was on a list of refugees selected for resettlement.

Come was resettled to Spokane, Washington, and eventually joined the staff of the World Relief office in Spokane where he was able to help other refugees to find their first jobs. He enjoys seeing them find the dignity of working and providing for themselves, which most were denied in a refugee camp.

GO DEEPER

Want to learn more about the refugee crisis and what you can do to help? Visit worldrelief.org/refugees-immigrants-and-displaced-people/

Selected stories and information in this ebook originally appeared in the book [*Seeking Refuge*](#), by Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens and Dr. Issam Smeir. Learn more and [download a free chapter](#) of the book.