

June 20 is World Refugee Day (WRD) --

By Susan Martin, PhD, Professor Emerita of International Migration, Georgetown University [\[1\]](#)

This is no ordinary World Refugee Day, however.

Governments around the world have closed their borders to refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced persons just when it is most needed. In doing so, they are violating their obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which was adopted in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the failure of countries, including the United States, to admit refugees from Nazi Germany.

The theme of WRD in 2025 is Solidarity with Refugees. As described by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, WRD celebrates “refugees' contributions and seeks to build empathy and understanding for their plight and their resilience to build a bright future.” Usually, WRD is a day of hope for the millions of people who have fled their homes because of conflict, persecution, and other human rights violations. WRD tells refugees and asylum seekers that people care about them and will be working to find solutions for them.

According to UNHCR’s Global Trends report, there were 122.1 million forcibly displaced people at the end of April 2025, up from 120 million at the same time last year. Low and middle-income countries host 73 per cent of the world’s refugees. Most of the increase in displacement stems from the failure to stop conflicts in countries such as Sudan, Myanmar and Ukraine. A further cause is the paucity of durable solutions for refugees who are unable to return home because of those conflicts.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has been an important champion of refugees. Under the current administration, however, the U.S. has suspended its refugee resettlement program indefinitely, with the exception of a few visas for Afrikaners. It has also cut assistance to refugees overseas. And, it has curtailed access to asylum for thousands of those seeking safety.

The U.S. is not alone, though, in reducing the number of refugees who will be admitted. Canada, another champion of refugees, will not take new applications for its private sponsorship program throughout the end of 2025. The European Union is considering legislation allowing member states to forcibly send people seeking asylum to countries where they have no connection, without the possibility of appeal. Tanzania, long a developing country that has granted refuge to millions of people, is now tightening its admissions criteria.

It is poor public policy that governments are rejecting refugees and asylum-seekers, besides being a humanitarian tragedy. Refugees are amongst the most resilient people in the world. They are survivors who have faced the worst and still want to contribute. As many were persecuted for their commitment to democratic values, refugees remind the rest of us of what makes our countries strong—commitment to the rule of law, to the concept that all persons are created equal, and to the peaceful transfer of power through elections.

Refugees also contribute to economic growth. A study of the net fiscal impact of refugees on the U.S. economy from 2005-2019 concluded that refugees contributed \$123.8 billion more than they cost in governmental expenditures. Moreover, refugees have been successful entrepreneurs. According to a study by the American Immigration Council, a higher proportion

of entrepreneurs in the U.S. are refugees (188,000/13%) as compared to other immigrants (11.7%) and US born citizens (9%). Refugees have contributed their talents as well; Albert Einstein fled Nazi Germany and Enrico Fermi fled Fascist Italy to come to the United States. Refugees also contribute to the arts. Marc Chagall, Salvador Dali, and Mark Rothko are among the most famous refugee artists. Viet Thanh Nguyen and Khaled Hosseini wrote about their own refugee experiences, winning critical acclaim.

So, on this World Refugee Day, let us thank the millions of refugees for their contributions while we chastise our governments for abdicating their responsibilities under international law to protect refugees and asylum seekers. We can do better and save lives in the process.

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