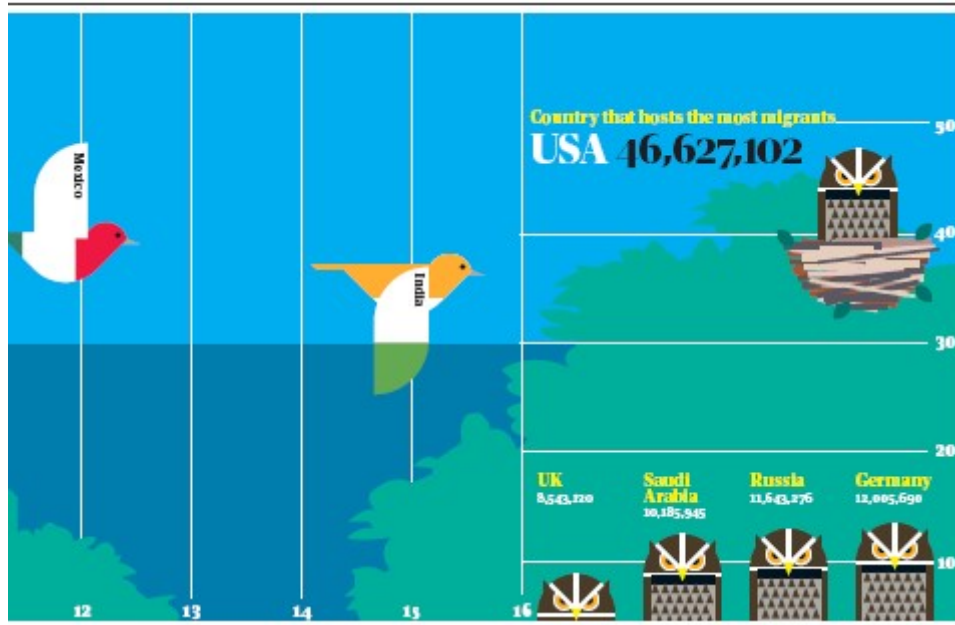


The great displacement

How migration became the biggest story of our times

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Migrants, expats, asylum seekers, refugees, IDPs – what are the differences?



According to the 1951 United Nations refugee convention, the difference between refugees and asylum seekers is clear. An asylum seeker has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution. A refugee has already received that protection.

Refugees have the right to international protection, while seeking asylum is a human right – everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum. Internally displaced people (IDPs) are essentially on the run in their own country: putative refugees who have not been able or willing to cross an international border.

When it comes to migrants, definitions are far woollier. Some presume a migrant is moving for a better life. But if that person is leaving the starvation of a dustbowl farm in the Sahel to survive, are they a migrant or a refugee?

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) therefore defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state regardless of legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, whatever the causes and the length of the stay.

Expatriate is a weakly defined term that essentially means anyone living outside their native country. In practice, however, expat has come to be used to describe migrants from rich countries.

How many of each are there?

We are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. About 258 million people, or one in every 30, were living outside their country of birth in 2017. That is both a record high – there were 173 million in 2000 – and an alarmingly volatile figure: a 2003 projec-

tion anticipated that by 2050, there would be up to 230 million international migrants. The latest revised projection is that there will be 405 million international migrants by 2050. These increases, however, are dwarfed by the great majority of people who migrate within countries: there were an estimated 740 million internal migrants in 2009.

Even those figures, however, fail to capture the full reality. There were 25.9 million refugees and asylum seekers in mid-2017. But registered refugees represent only a fraction of all those forced to leave their homes for reasons spanning from war to environmental crisis. In total, at least 66 million people globally are experiencing forced displacement – approximately 40.3 million of whom are IDPs.

As for expats, estimates vary wildly, depending on definition. The state department reckons 9 million Americans live overseas. About 5 million Britons are thought to do so.

Finally there are 10 million people who are stateless, with no citizenship at all.

Which countries produce – and which receive – the most migrants?

According to the IOM, the US, Germany, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UK were the top five destinations for migrants in 2015. The US has about 46 million foreign-born residents, Germany about 12 million. India, Mexico, Russia, China and Bangladesh were the top five origin countries. Nearly half of all international migrants came from Asia, although it is still far more common for Asians and Africans to move within their own continent than to settle further afield.

And which countries take and produce the most refugees?

The US has historically resettled more refugees than all other countries in the world combined, though in recent years, its intake has slowed. In 2016, it took in 85,000 refugees. That same year, the then president, Barack Obama, committed to resettling 110,000 refugees in the 2017 fiscal year, a 57% increase from 2015 numbers.

Later in 2017, however, the new president, Donald Trump, slashed the cap to 45,000. According to the International Rescue Committee, in the current fiscal year the US will only resettle 21,292 refugees.

By contrast, some of the world's poorer and often less stable countries – such as Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan and Uganda – are now the long-term hosts to the world's largest populations of refugees.

Turkey is currently the leading

host of refugees, with 3.5 million, followed by Uganda and Pakistan, which both host about 1.4 million, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

In all, 57% of refugees come from just three countries: Syria (6.3 million) Afghanistan (2.4 million) and South Sudan (2.3 million). Meanwhile, Colombia hosts the greatest number of IDPs – 7.6 million as of 2017.

But many refugees slip through the gaps when attempts at recordkeeping take place. For example, official figures usually exclude Palestinian refugees because they don't fall into the specific mandate of UN refugees.

How long do people remain refugees and IDPs?

Not only are the numbers of refugees and migrants underestimated but so too is the chronic length of time refugees remain displaced in camps and “temporary” situations.

There are still Palestinian refugees forced from their country in 1948 living in camps in Syria, Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees who have been living in camps in Sudan since the mid-1960s, and Afghan refugees who have been in camps in Pakistan since the Soviet invasion in 1979. The list goes on.

Moreover, many of the countries from which large numbers of people are forced to flee conflict – such as Syria, South Sudan, Iraq and Yemen – are also host to very large internally displaced populations.

What about the political response?

Migration is arguably politically less acceptable than at any point since the 1940s. The anti-immigration response of governments across Europe, and in America and Australia, has sent quite clear signs to some frontline countries that they can build walls and force back those seeking safe havens.

There's an additional complication involving those fleeing environmental disasters. The 1951 convention doesn't define these people as refugees but, as Bill Frelick, Human Rights Watch's refugee rights programme director, says: "If someone's life is in danger, it really shouldn't matter if it's because of a gun or a landslide or earthquake."

Where does trafficking fit in?

Political and public hostility to freedom of movement has resulted in a dramatic reduction in legal routes to migration in the past 20 years. This has encouraged a burgeoning business in illegal people trafficking, now reckoned to be worth more than \$150bn each year.

Principal areas of activity are from south to north in the Americas; from Africa and the Middle East into Europe; and from south-west Asia to the Gulf and Europe beyond.

Death is common. According to the IOM's missing migrants project, almost 30,000 people have died in transit over the past five years, with the Mediterranean, north Africa and central America particularly deadly places of passage.

What next?

The UN is to formally agree a new Global Compact on migration in Marrakech this December, following 18 months of negotiations. Protagonists say the deal promises a better, more coordinated approach to migration, though efforts have been damaged by the US pulling out of the talks halfway through.