

# Philanthropy for Refugees

## A Brief Guide

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In the daily life of a refugee nothing is secure. Home is gone, possibly irretrievably. With home goes the small details of everyday normalcy: shoes, books, spoons, clocks, anything and everything with which one builds a life. Food may be available on the road, but then again, it may not. So may other basics such as aspirin, diapers, water, and even family members.

The number of refugees in the world today is staggering: experts estimate that there are anywhere from 14.5 to 40 million. According to the UN, more than 80% are women and children. According to one estimate, 1.5 million children were killed in armed conflicts in the 1990s alone; 4 million were disabled; 10 million psychologically traumatized; 12 million left homeless. Whether displaced by war, epidemic or disaster, ethnic persecution, government indifference or civil conflict, the needs of refugees are multiple and complex, requiring a commitment of spirit, time and resources that may take years or even decades to deliver.

### Who Can Help the World's Refugees?

The world's refugees are in desperate need of assistance from all quarters. Governments can be encouraged to adjust foreign policy accordingly. Industry can make available medicines, clothing, shelter, and food. Faith-based or community groups can reach out to refugees in a specific camp or in a certain region. Private individuals can volunteer professional services or financially support organizations that work to bring refugees the aid they need.

### How Can Private Philanthropists Help?

The aims of refugee support groups range from meeting the needs of a particular national or ethnic group, to providing for the recently resettled, to assisting anywhere on earth, at any stage of displacement or rehabilitation. Many organizations regularly use professional volunteers, such as health care personnel, counselors, or lawyers; all need the financial support of caring and committed individuals.

- **Basic Needs:** Where can refugees find food, water or shelter; how will they locate loved ones or care for their ill and infirm? Each individual and every family endures unique hardships, many of which cannot be predicted. There are many organizations that attempt to anticipate these needs and provide assistance of every kind from the earliest possible moment.

- **Threat to Health and Well-Being:** With the refugee experience comes an immediate threat to health and well-being. Those who are already sick may not survive displacement; many may be injured in the catastrophe which sends them into exile; rape and physical assault are constant dangers; poor sanitation can lead to epidemic disease. Certain organizations focus on trying to meet the myriad of medical needs which massive displacement can create.

- **Advocacy:** Refugees are among the world's most vulnerable populations. Without the advantages and security of a country and its institutions, they become a voiceless mass. Refugee support organizations serve as witnesses to the struggles of the displaced, providing a voice for those who might otherwise go unheard.

## Where can you go to learn more?

### ReliefWeb

A project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ReliefWeb was created to meet the information needs of the humanitarian relief community. The website features an exhaustive directory of humanitarian organizations, reference documents, information on training programs, and much more.  
[www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)

### UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The UNHCR provides for some 22 million people recognized as refugees and displaced persons. Its website offers information about the agency's programs, as well as facts and figures about the refugee population served.  
[www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)

### International Rescue Committee

The IRC was first established to aid opponents of Hitler, at the request of Albert Einstein. Today it works to meet the needs of refugees from the moment they lose their homes through job training and resettlement.  
[www.theirc.org](http://www.theirc.org)

Children often bear the brunt of any disaster; the IRC addresses their specific needs through its Children Affected by Armed Conflict program.  
[www.theirc.org/children](http://www.theirc.org/children)

### US Committee for Refugees

Founded in 1958, USCR defends the rights of uprooted people everywhere, whether they are refugees, internally displaced persons, or asylum seekers. The website provides basic information and statistics on refugees around the world, and features a directory of refugee assistance organizations.  
[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

### Mercy Corps

Headquartered in Scotland and the US, Mercy Corps is noted for giving over 95% of its resources directly to programs that help people in need. Since its establishment in 1979, the agency has provided assistance in 73 countries; its programs currently reach some five million people, from New York to Afghanistan.  
[www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org)

### Brother's Brother Foundation

Since 1958, BBF has distributed over \$860 million worth of resources to more than 40 million people in some 110 countries. More than half of this total has been distributed since 1995. Individuals, groups, or businesses can donate funds or gifts-in-kind, such as medical, educational or agricultural supplies.  
[www.brothersbrother.org](http://www.brothersbrother.org)

### Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders

MSF began practicing what it calls "rebellious humanitarianism" in 1971, when a small group of French doctors committed themselves to providing medical aid in international emergencies. In 1999, the group's efforts won it the Nobel Peace Prize. Today, more than 2,500 volunteers work in over 80 countries.  
[www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)

### Immigration and Refugee Services of America

IRSA develops and manages education and assistance programs that help refugees resettle in the US, helping them to recover from past trauma and to gain personal independence and economic self-sufficiency.  
[www.RefugeesUSA.org](http://www.RefugeesUSA.org)

### War Child

Founded in Great Britain in 1993, War Child is a global network of independent organizations dedicated to providing immediate, sustainable aid to children in war zones, those in refugee camps, and to children who are threatened by poverty, violence, and disease.  
[www.warchild.org](http://www.warchild.org)

### Additional General Information

For information on organizations which provide aid to specific populations of refugees, go to:  
[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)  
Once there, click on "Links," go to "Other Human Rights Related Sites," and then click "Refugee" and/or "Human Rights: Specific Countries."