

# Philanthropy for Refugees

## A Brief Guide

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A refugee is someone who fears persecution based on his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, membership in a certain social group, or other characterization, and who is unable or unwilling to return home.

Refugees are forced from their homes by war, civil strife, political conflict, or gross human rights violations. According to the United Nations, there are over 17 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world. Other estimates double that figure.

The refugee crisis is a global issue that affects almost every country. Refugees are frequently denied protections such as legal rights including status designation, freedom from forced return, and physical safety while detained. In camps, the safety of refugees must be protected, such as protection from forced recruitment and protection for women and girls. Basic material needs such as food, shelter, and medicine may be in short supply and available only through donations and relief organizations.

Policies must be changed in order to acknowledge and address the underlying causes of the refugee problem, to protect the rights and safety of refugees including their right to seek asylum, and to facilitate the return and rehabilitation of refugees when appropriate.

### How Can Philanthropists Help?

The scopes of refugee support groups' activities range from supporting particular refugee camps to assisting specific ethnic or national groups, to focusing on particular issues refugees face, to addressing refugees' needs around the world. Many organizations regularly use professional volunteers such as health care personnel, counselors, and lawyers. Specific ways to help include:

- **Legal Protection:** Refugees' legal rights must be protected, most importantly their status as a refugee, their right of no forced repatriation, and their right to seek asylum. Legal representation, forcing adherence to the rule of law, and advocating policy change are some of the means of enhancing a refugee's legal protections.
- **Basic Needs:** Food and shelter are basic needs that every refugee has. Displaced people have lost their homes, many of their possessions, and frequently their ability to carry out their livelihoods. Food, clean water, sanitation, and proper shelter are all basic human requirements. Refugees are particularly vulnerable to disease, and medical care may be insufficient or non-existent. Rape, physical assault, and kidnappings are threats that must be guarded against.
- **Additional Needs:** Education, job training, and employment opportunities are additional needs, particularly when people are displaced for long periods of time. Resettlement assistance for refugees awarded asylum improves integration and the long-term prospects of success.
- **Reporting and Advocacy:** Evaluating the conditions of refugee camps and identifying and highlighting the needs of refugees are necessary actions that can improve a refugee's well-being. Making others aware of the refugee crisis can improve assistance to refugee support organizations and can inform and improve public policy debate. Pressure exerted on governments through other governments and through organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees can be very effective in changing policies.

### **Where can you go to learn more?**

The websites of the following organizations contain a wealth of information about refugees in general and about specific crises around the world.

#### **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)

#### **Human Rights Watch**

HRW believes that the right to asylum is a matter of life and death and cannot be compromised. HRW seeks to address the root causes that cause people to flee and to advocate for greater protection of refugees and internally displaced people.  
[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

#### **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 and Immigrants**

Since 1911, the USCRI has been defending the rights of uprooted people everywhere, whether they are refugees, internally displaced persons, or asylum seekers. The website includes Refugee Reports, focusing on specific examples, and the annual *Refugee Survey*, which includes regional summaries and articles on specific topics.  
[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 80 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 and its partners have distributed over \$1.25 billion worth of resources to more than 40 million people in some 120 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)

#### **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 "Resources and Links" at the top of the page, click on "Links", then select REFUGEES from the first drop-down menu and click on the 'Go' button.