

## *Jesus the Global Refugee*

### Key Facts about the World's Refugees

By Phillip Connor and Jens Manuel Krogstad The Pew Foundation, 2016

**1. Nearly 1 in 100 people worldwide are now displaced from their homes**, the [highest share](#) of the world's population that has been forcibly displaced since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees began collecting data on displaced persons in 1951. Displacement levels are higher in some regions of the world than others. For example, more than one-in-twenty people living in the Middle East (5.6%) are displaced. Meanwhile, about one-in-sixty people living in continental Africa (1.6%) are displaced (not including Egypt, which is considered part of the Middle East). In Europe, 0.7% of the population is displaced, similar to levels following the collapse of Eastern Bloc countries in the early 1990s.

**2 About six-in-ten Syrians are now displaced from their homes**, a number unprecedented in recent history for a single country. The Syrian conflict has displaced millions of citizens since protests against the al-Assad government began more than five years ago. Today, [an estimated 12.5 million Syrians are displaced](#), up from less than 1 million in 2011, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of global refugee data. Displaced Syrians worldwide include those internally displaced within Syria, refugees living in neighboring countries or relocated to other countries like Canada and the U.S., and those in Europe awaiting a decision on their asylum application.

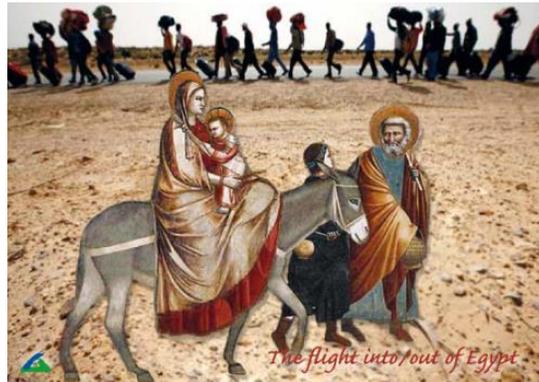
**3 European Union countries plus Norway and Switzerland received a [record 1.3 million refugees](#) in 2015**, accounting for about one-in-ten of the region's asylum applications since 1985. About half of refugees in 2015 trace their origins to just three countries: Syria (378,000), Afghanistan (193,000) and Iraq (127,000). Among

destination countries, Germany (442,000 applications), Hungary (174,000) and Sweden (156,000) together received more than half of asylum seeker applications in 2015.

**4. The foreign-born shares of populations in several European countries, unlike the U.S., [have dramatically increased](#) since mid-2015**, as more than 1 million migrants applied for asylum in Europe between July 2015 and May 2016. This growth in the share of foreign born is due to migration of both asylum seekers and economic migrants entering European countries, but is largely driven by the rapid rise of asylum seekers. Sweden saw the greatest percentage-point change, with the foreign-born share of its population rising from about 16.8% in 2015 to 18.3% in 2016. Norway and Austria also saw the immigrant shares of their populations rise about 1 percentage point each during this time. But increases were small for France and the United Kingdom because they did not take in a large number of asylum seekers. By comparison, the immigrant share of the U.S. population increased by 1 percentage point over a *full decade*, rising from 13% in 2005 to about 14% in 2015.

5. After the 2001 passage of the Patriot Act, which broadened the definition of a terrorist group and what it means to support one, the annual number of refugees allowed into the U.S. dipped dramatically to fewer than 30,000 refugees in 2002 and 2003. But upticks in refugee arrivals started again in 2004 with a wave of Somali refugees. In 2008, thousands of Burmese and Bhutanese were granted refugee status.

**6. The U.S. public has [seldom approved of welcoming large numbers of refugees](#).** In the aftermath of the November 2015 Islamic State attacks in Paris, 53% of Americans said they didn't want to accept any Syrian refugees at all, and an additional 11% said they would accept only Christian refugees from Syria, according to a [Bloomberg Politics poll](#). A look back at U.S. public opinion from previous decades shows that Americans have consistently opposed admitting large numbers of foreigners fleeing war and oppression, regardless of official government policy.



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### **Facts about Refugees Fleeing to the U.S. from Central America**

Source: Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas

**1. High levels of violence continue to plague Central America's Northern Triangle; in the case of El Salvador, violence is not only high, but increasing.** Central America's Northern Triangle region is among the most violent in the world.

According to police statistics, El Salvador's 2015 national murder rate reached approximately 103 homicides per 100,000 people, a level of violence not seen since the end of the country's civil war. Last year's 6,650 homicides are an approximately 70 percent increase over 2014, following the unraveling of a truce between rival gangs and an aggressive crackdown by security forces. While El Salvador received the unwanted designation of the most violent country in the hemisphere, violence levels remain high in neighboring Honduras and Guatemala.

Honduras' homicide rate was 57 murders for every 100,000 people in 2015. Though this was a drop from 69 homicides per 100,000 people in 2014, the rate remains among the world's worst. In Guatemala, the homicide rate slightly decreased in 2015 from 32 to 29.5 violent deaths per 100,000 people. With a total of 4,778 homicides in 2015, Guatemala saw an estimated 13 murders per day, according to the country's national police.\* To put these numbers into perspective, the murder rate in the United States is

around 5 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is one seventh of the rate in Guatemala, and one twentieth of the rate in El Salvador.

Homicide statistics are just one measure of the pervasive violence in many marginalized communities in all three countries. Extortion is also widespread. Data compiled by the Honduran daily *La Prensa* revealed that Salvadorans pay an estimated US \$400 million a year in extortion fees, while Hondurans pay around \$200 million and Guatemalans an estimated \$61 million. Small businesses, the public transport sector, and poor neighborhoods are the most heavily hit. A 2013 report revealed that 70 percent of small businesses in El Salvador are victims of extortion. According to a Guatemalan human rights organization, between January and July of 2014, at least 700 people had been killed for failing to pay extortion fees.

**2. People are fleeing community-level violence, which is often personal and direct. They face real and specific threats from street gangs, extortionists, drug traffickers, and from domestic abuse, and so may be potential targets if returned.** In many poor and marginalized communities in all three countries, women and children are victims of extortion, abuse, rape, murder, and gang-related violence. In many of these communities, citizens face explicit threats on their lives for reasons that may include bearing witness to a crime, attempting to leave a gang, or failing to pay an extortion fee or war tax. A 2015 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found that women in particular face a “startling” degree of violence in the Northern Triangle and Mexico, including rape, assault, extortion, and threats by armed criminal groups. Sixty-four percent of women interviewed for the study cited targeted threats or attacks as one of their primary motivations for leaving their communities.

**3. These individuals have nowhere to turn for protection if they are sent back. Countries of the Northern Triangle are not providing security for their citizens.** Victims of violence, extortion, sexual abuse, and death threats rarely find protection from the authorities. In fact, many victims fear the police as much as the criminals. In the Northern Triangle countries, rule of law and law enforcement institutions are weak and corrupted. The majority of police forces are underfunded, plagued by poor leadership, and sometimes complicit in criminal activity. In El Salvador, growing concerns of reports of police and security force involvement in extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses are troubling. Among the Northern Triangle countries as a whole, the statistics on criminal investigation and prosecution are appalling: only five percent of homicide cases lead to a conviction in the region. Given this context, it is not surprising that women, children, and youth consider fleeing their communities in search of safety and protection.



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### **Stories of Unaccompanied Central American Refugee Children Who Fled to the U.S.**

**Cristian Omar Reyes**, an 11-year-old sixth grader from **Honduras** lost his father in March after he was robbed and murdered by gangs while working as a security guard protecting a pastry truck. Three people he knows were murdered this year. Four others were gunned down on a nearby corner in the span of two weeks at the beginning of this year. A girl his age resisted being robbed of \$5. She was clubbed over the head and dragged off by two men who cut a hole in her throat, stuffed her panties in it, and left her body in a ravine across the street from Cristian's house. [New York Times, 7/11/14](#)

**Anthony O. Castellanos**, a 13-year old from Honduras, disappeared from his gang-ridden neighborhood, so his younger brother, Kenneth, hopped on his green bicycle to search for him, starting his hunt at a notorious gang hangout known as the "crazy house." They were found within days of each other, both dead. Anthony, 13, and a friend had been shot in the head; Kenneth, 7, had been tortured and beaten with sticks and rocks. They were among seven children murdered in the La Pradera neighborhood of San Pedro Sula in April alone. [New York Times, 7/9/14](#)

**Nodwin**, an 11-year old from Honduras: "Big people force the children to sell bad things, and if they don't do it, they rape them or they kill them." Nodwin once witnessed a boy his own age gang raped in a neighborhood park after the child refused to join a local drug gang. "They were stripping a kid naked, and I went to tell the kid's mom. Later, I went home, but I didn't want to leave my house, because they could have done the same thing to me." [PBS NewsHour, 6/20/14](#)

**Jenny** opened her front door one day and there were pieces of a body thrown in a plastic bag on her doorstep as a warning from the gangs about what would happen to her if she did not become the "girlfriend" of a gang member. *As related to a [Women's Refugee Commission](#) staff member during a focus group discussion.*

**Maritza**, a 15-year old from El Salvador reported the following: I am here because the gang threatened me. One of them "liked" me. Another gang member told my uncle that he should get me out of there because the guy who liked me was going to do me harm. In El Salvador they take young girls, rape them and throw them in plastic bags. My uncle told me it wasn't safe for me to stay there. *[UN Refugee Agency \(UNCHR\) report](#)*

**David**, a 16-year old from Guatemala, reported the following: Gangs in a nearby neighborhood wanted to kill me and some other people. They wanted me to give them money, but what money was I supposed to give them? I didn't have any. They asked me if I knew who they were, if I could identify them. I said no, because I knew if I said yes they would kill me. They held my cousin and me for three hours, tied up. My cousin was able to untie the rope and he helped me untie mine. We heard gun shots and we ran. They kept looking for us, but we escaped. *[UN Refugee Agency \(UNCHR\) report](#)*

**Kevin Briseño**, 18, and his friend **Omar Barrera**, 19, from El Salvador, both spoke about why it may be a death sentence for those who try to leave but are caught and sent back. One friend fled a year and a half ago after he was threatened and gang members murdered his father, a policeman. Their friend was trying to reach his mother in Maryland, but he was stopped in Mexico and returned to San Salvador. "He was murdered the week after he got back," Barrera said, shaking his head. *[The Desert Sun, 7/13/14](#)*



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### **Facts about How the U.S. Admits Syrian Refugees**

By [Carol Morello](#) The Washington Post, November 17, 2015

The United States has accepted for resettlement [about 12,000] refugees from Syria since the conflict began in 2011, [10,000 were admitted in 2016] The vast majority arrived within the last year. They are now arriving at the rate of 45 a week. ...It typically takes 18 to 24 months for a Syrian refugee to be considered and checked before being admitted. Here are some other important facts to know:

**Only two percent of the refugees are single males of combat age.**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] refers agencies to most countries, including the United States, the agency's the biggest donor. One factor for consideration is whether a refugee already has family in the country. The United States has asked the UNHCR to prioritize refugees who are considered vulnerable – women with children, the elderly, people who have been tortured or who may require modern medical treatment they cannot easily get elsewhere. Half the accepted refugees so far have been children. A quarter are adults over 60. They are roughly 50/50 men and women, though there are slightly more men. Because of the criteria, many refugee families have women as the head of household, or live with multiple generations under one roof.

**The United States has one of the world's strictest systems for checking the backgrounds of refugees. Syrians are vetted even more carefully.**

Once refugees are referred by the UNHCR, the U.S. government takes over, conducting extensive background checks under security measures enacted after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Refugee specialists with the departments of State, Homeland Security and the National Terrorism Center collect their basic biographical information, and run their names, birthdates and fingerprints through databases, including the Defense Department. They also check background information the refugees provide to the UNHCR detailing where they came from and why they decided to flee. In a version of fraud detection, they double check the information with both classified and unclassified records, to see if it is consistent with what is known. So if a refugee claims his house was barrel bombed, for example, they see if Syrian forces used barrel bombs on that location in the same time frame.

Then the government agents do face-to-face interviews with applicants at regional centers in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. In some cases they travel to refugee camps to conduct lengthy interviews. The refugee specialists have all had 8 weeks of training on how to elicit testimony and test credibility. The final decision of whether a case is approved or rejected is made by the Department of Homeland Security.

**Once refugees arrive, they can live wherever they want in the country. Faith-based and non-profit groups—not governors—help determine the best places in the country for them to relocate.**

Most refugees go to orientation programs run by a coalition of six faith-based and three refugee non-profit groups. These groups receive federal funds to help welcome the arriving refugees, determine the best place in the country for them to relocate, find housing, learn some English and start looking for jobs.

The nine [faith and nonprofit] networks participating in the program meet once a week to coordinate their efforts. They have so far sent refugees to 180 locations around the country, from coast to coast. On arrival, people active in their community associations and religious institutions often meet them the airport, help find them homes, donate furniture for their first apartment, get refugee children enrolled in school and help able bodied adults find jobs.