



JUNE 2005 SPOTLIGHT:

World Refugee Day

On June 20th we observe "World Refugee Day," a day to stand in unity with those around the world who have been forced to leave their homes and hearts in a place to which they cannot safely return. It is a day to raise our awareness of the hardships faced by refugees and the ways that we can welcome and protect refugees both near and far.

The U.S. has a long history of welcoming refugees. This noble effort provides safety and permanence to many people fleeing persecution, while also strengthening the fabric and cultural breadth of the U.S. The nationalities have changed over time, depending on world events, but the tradition of protecting the persecuted continues.

Every year, the President and Congress designate the number of refugees who may be admitted in the coming year ([Presidential Determination No. 2004-53](#).) For 2005, this number is set at 70,000 refugees total, broken down regionally as follows:

- Africa 20,000
- East Asia 13,000
- Europe and Central Asia . . 9,500
- Latin America/Caribbean . . 5,000
- Near East/South Asia . . . 2,500
- Unallocated Reserve 20,000

How much do you know about refugees? Start by taking this simple quiz to test your knowledge or learn something new.

1. What is the definition of a refugee?
2. What international document(s) establish the definition of a refugee?
3. How is a refugee different from an immigrant?
4. How is a refugee different from an asylum seeker?
5. How many total refugees are there in the world today?
6. How many refugees may be admitted into the U.S. in 2005?
7. How many refugees were admitted into the U.S. in 2004?
8. What are the top 5 refugee hosting countries?
9. What percentage of the world's refugees are children?
10. What other countries resettle refugees?

Answers are found at the end of the spotlight.

Among those refugees to be resettled are two newer groups: the Meskhetian Turks (also known as Ahiska or Akhiska Turks), and **Burmese** refugees living in Thailand and Malaysia.

The Meskhetian Turks have faced upheaval twice in the past 60 years, dating back to 1944 when they and other ethnic groups were deported by Stalin from the Soviet state of Georgia to Uzbekistan, another Soviet state. While many of these ethnic groups were eventually allowed to return to their homeland, the Meskhetian Turks have yet to be granted the right of return. In 1989, this group faced violence again, and nearly 70,000 left Uzbekistan and dispersed into 7 neighboring countries. Of these, the 15,000 – 20,000 Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Kray region of the Russian Federation are of particular concern to UNHCR since they are essentially stateless [1] and denied basic civil, political, economic and social rights. Krasnodar officials have denied Russian citizenship to Meskhetian Turks, and Georgia is still not allowing them to return to their traditional homeland. Due to these concerns, around 11,000 Meskhetian Turks from the Krasnodar Kray area in Russia have been offered the opportunity to be resettled in the U.S. Around 1,400 have already arrived in the U.S. Their traditional religion is Sunni Islam, and they speak a dialect of Turkish. One new refugee now living in Lansing, MI marveled at the ability to check out a library book, one privilege among many denied to Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar region.[2]

Another newer refugee group being resettled in the U.S. are Burmese who fled their homeland due to political and religious persecution, seeking temporary safety in neighboring Thailand. These refugees, often ethnic minorities within Burma (or Myanmar to which the country is now referred) face insecurity in Thailand where they are considered illegal migrants if they are not living in refugee camps. An estimated 140,000 Burmese refugees live in crowded camp conditions along the Thai/Burmese border, where more than 8,000 of these refugees are unaccompanied and separated children. An additional one to two million Burmese refugees live illegally elsewhere in Thailand.[3] The Thai government recently ordered about 3,000 refugees living in urban areas to move to refugee camps by March 31, 2005.[4] These urban refugees, facing displacement again, have been of particular concern to the U.S. Refugee Program (USRP), which has begun resettling limited numbers of Burmese refugees from urban areas in Thailand. The Department of State is also in discussions with Thai officials about resettlement possibilities for Burmese refugees in the Tham Hin camp, near the border. About 3,100 urban Burmese in Thailand are expected to be resettled through the USRP, and about half of this group has already arrived in the U.S. In addition, an estimated 1,000 Burmese Chin refugees who have sought refuge in Malaysia are expected to be resettled in the U.S. in 2005.[5]

Like the Meskhetian Turks, Burmese children born to refugees in Thailand also face the problem of statelessness. For more information on statelessness among the Burmese in Thailand, see the Refugees International article, "[Stolen Futures: The Stateless Children of Burmese Asylum Seekers](#)"; for more on the Tham Hin camp, see the Refugees International article, "[Thailand: Resettlement as a Durable Solution for Burmese Refugees in Tham Hin.](#)"

Representatives from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recently visited Burmese refugees in Thailand and Malaysia in order to make recommendations about future resettlement needs for this vulnerable group. A summary of the delegation's findings is available in the report, "[A Shady Tree: Hope for Vulnerable Refugees in Malaysia and Thailand.](#)" This report particularly emphasizes the needs of, and resettlement possibilities for, refugee children and youth who have been separated from their parents.

The Meskhetian Turks and Burmese refugees now coming to the U.S. remind us of the struggles for safety and normalcy faced by the millions of uprooted people around the globe. On World Refugee Day we recognize the courage and difficulties faced by refugees, as well as our part in welcoming refugees nearby and aiding those still seeking safety.

Answers to the refugee quiz:

1. A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."
2. The United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, are the principal international instruments governing the protection of refugees. The text can be viewed at: www.unhcr.org
3. In a very general sense, immigrants are those who choose, for a variety of reasons, to leave their home to go to another country. Refugees are those who feel forced to leave their home due to persecution.
4. A refugee is granted legal status and protection before entering the U.S. An asylum-seeker is someone requesting legal status and protection after entering the U.S. Those granted asylum are called asylees. For a general overview documents on "Refugees and Asylum" by the National Immigration Forum, go to: <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=0085>
5. At the beginning of 2004, there were 9.7 million refugees in the world, and 17.1 million "persons of concern" to UNHCR. This larger number includes refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and returned refugees. (Source: UNHCR "2004 Global Refugee Trends," p.2, <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=1466>)

6. For the 2005 fiscal year (i.e. October 1, 2004 - September 30, 2005), the total ceiling is set at 70,000 admissions (<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/refugees/>)
7. 52,868 (Source: U.S. Department of State)
8. Top five refugee hosting countries as of 2003 are: Pakistan (UNHCR estimate: 1.1 million), Iran (UNHCR estimate: 985,000), Germany (960,000), Tanzania (650,000) and the United States (UNHCR estimate: 452,500). All five saw declines of between 2 and 25 percent in refugee numbers. (Source: UNHCR)
9. For 2003, some 43% of the population of concern to UNHCR are under the age of 18. (Source: UNHCR "2003 Global Refuge Trends," p.5, <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=1466>)

**MAIN COUNTRIES OF RESETTLEMENT OF
REFUGEES (IN 2003)**

Source: Governments, UNHCR

Country	Total
United States	28,420
Australia	11,860
Canada	10,730
Norway	1,630
Sweden	940
New Zealand	650
Finland	560
Denmark	510
Netherlands	170
Ireland	50

Of the 191 member states of the U.N., less than 20 have established annual resettlement quotas, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA. In 2003, a total of 23 countries resettled refugees under UNHCR auspices. According to 2003 numbers, the top 10 resettlement countries included:

1 People who are stateless have no country which claims them as a citizen.

2 Stacy Range, Lansing State Journal (3 April, 2005). "Turkish Families Begin New Lives American Dream." See: <http://www.tacam.org/Documents/AkhmedovFamily.doc>

3 Benjamin Sand, Voice of America (16 March, 2005). "Thai Government Sets Deadline for Burmese Refugees." See: <http://www.voanews.com/english/2005-03-16-voa12.cfm>

4 Ibid.

5 See the Department of State report, "Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY 2005 -- Report to the Congress," <http://2002-2009-fpc.state.gov/38265.htm>

Additional resources on specific cultural and ethnic groups can be found listed under [BRYCS' Refugee Populations](#).