



CAMP OUT FOR CONCERN

THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS EXPLAINED

In 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that the number of people in the world fleeing violence was the highest it had been since World War II. The figure was 70.8 million, including 25.9 million refugees. It was a record, until it was broken the next year. And the next. And the next...



Image: Musenyi refugee camp in Burundi. Photo: Alphonse Dioh/ICRC

We are now at a total of 123.2 million people displaced around the world, 31 million of whom are refugees. Compared to just six years ago, this represents an increase of over 20% and overall global displacement has nearly doubled in the last decade.

How did it get to be so bad? Here's what you need to know about the global refugee crisis in 2025.

WHEN DID THE REFUGEE CRISIS START?

When you look at the history of the 20th century (estimates place the total number of people

displaced by World War II at around 50 million) refugee populations began to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, owing to major, protracted conflicts in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Vietnam and a number of smaller, localised conflicts. That increased through the 1980s and 1990s with large displacements coming out of Iraq, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia. Since 1982, UNHCR has consistently had at least 10 million refugees under its protection.

"DISPLACEMENT HAS NEARLY DOUBLED DURING THE LAST DECADE, INCLUDING OVER 31 MILLION REFUGEES."



Image: Father-of-three Josue Lunyere (36) lives in an IPD camp site in the Democratic Republic of Congo where conflict has driven millions of people from their homes. Josue was a teacher and fled to the settlement with his children and six-months pregnant wife in 2024. He's pictured with his sister Maombi (13) (left), baby son Jaden (8 months) and wife Kito Kasao (right).

Photo: Eugene Ikua/ConcernWorldwide

WHEN DID IT GET SO BAD?

Between 2008 and 2012, the global refugee population sat at around 10.5 million people. In 2013, that number went up to nearly 11.7 million, and in 2014 it grew again to 14.3 million.

The crisis in Syria was a key tipping point. In 2012, one year into the conflict, there were 729,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR. The following year, there were nearly 2.5 million – an increase of nearly 250%. In 2016, conflict in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo also led to more refugees seeking shelter in neighbouring countries. The following year, the Rohingya crisis led to another massive displacement. In the last two years, renewed crises in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Ukraine have also tipped the scale. As conflicts become more and more protracted, not only do refugees not return home as quickly as they have in previous generations, but we also see more waves of displacement as situations deteriorate.

However, this isn't the only reason that so many people have uprooted their lives and left home.

Violation of human rights or persecution, hunger and famine and climate change are also causes of displacement. They won't automatically guarantee refugee status, but they're three key considerations and factors in the current situation.

CONCERN'S WORK WITH REFUGEES

Emergency response is part of Concern's DNA and working with refugee communities in this context has become a core skill for our teams over the last six decades. We work with both refugee communities and host countries to ease the pressure that mass displacement can put on a host community. In addition to meeting their immediate needs - including food, shelter, protection, and other non-food essentials - we also work with refugees on longer-term initiatives, including skill-building and livelihood development and psychosocial support. We also put a special focus on the needs of child refugees (who make up 40% of the global refugee population), including education, family support, and providing safe spaces where they can play and enjoy their childhood.

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