

EDUCATION GUIDE

MoCP Museum of Contemporary Photography

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

STATELESS

VIEWS OF GLOBAL MIGRATION

JANUARY 24 – MARCH 31, 2019



"In Lebanon, I found myself in narrow places. I start feeling anxious now when I am in an open space."

Omar Imam
Untitled (Found myself in narrow places), from the *Live, Love, Refugee* series, 2015

This guide serves as an educational supplement to the exhibition **STATELESS: VIEWS OF GLOBAL MIGRATION** and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, and suggested readings.

You may download this guide from the museum's website at mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators

To schedule a free docent-led tour, please complete the form here: mocp.org/education/exhibition-tours

The MoCP is supported by Columbia College Chicago, the MoCP Advisory Board, the Museum Council, individuals, and private and corporate foundations. This exhibition is generously sponsored by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Art Dealers Association Foundation, the Illinois Arts Council Agency, the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and the Efroymson Family Fund. Community partners for *Stateless: Views of Global Migration* include Heartland Alliance and the Transatlantic Refugee Resettlement Network.



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STATELESS

VIEWS OF GLOBAL MIGRATION

JANUARY 24 – MARCH 31, 2019

While global migration has existed for tens of thousands of years, we are currently facing an unprecedentedly vast movement of people across borders. Fueled by intense conflict, political battles, economic inequality, and climate change, global migration is at its highest level since World War II. This exhibition seeks to humanize this stark data by addressing the individual stories that define this global human crisis. Through the individual lenses of eight contemporary artists, this exhibition lays bare the contradictions inherent to the crisis, finding beauty and strength in the face of collective trauma. These powerful works of art contemplate memory and explore one's human connectivity to place, even when one can no longer return.

Bissane Al Charif

Leila Alaoui

Shimon Attie

Fidencio Fifield-Perez

Daniel Castro Garcia

Tomas van Houtryve

Omar Imam

Hiwa K

Fidencio Fifield-Perez

Mexican, lives in the
United States, b. 1990

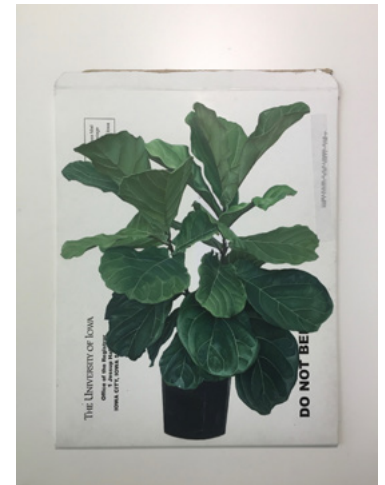


El Hielo / I.C.E. (2017)

For his site-specific sculptures *El Hielo / I.C.E.* (2017) and *Barn Quilt* (2017) Fidencio Fifield-Perez paints onto maps and then painstakingly cuts into them, removing land masses while leaving roads and rivers intact. His process references a traditional intricate Oaxacan paper-cutting technique, while referencing systems of **immigration** and labor exploitation. The pieces resemble webs, fences, and nets, pointing to formal similarities between them as well as the very different function of each. In this way, Fifield-Perez pays tribute to those who attempt to navigate U.S./Mexico border crossing.

Questions for looking

- After looking closely at the work, why might he have chosen maps as his source material?
- Consider the color palette of the work. What mood or feeling does it provide to the piece? What might the color choices represent?
- The artist spends months creating these works and the process of hand-cutting is slow and repetitive. How might his process help tell his story in relation to larger immigration and labor issues?



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Dacaments 6, 2018
Dacaments 13, 2018
Dacaments 12, 2018

Born in Oaxaca, Mexico, but brought over illegally into the United States at the age of seven with his mother and three brothers, Fidencio Fifield-Perez became a recipient of **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** in 2012. DACA allowed him to drive and work without the fear of being deported and he began to show his artwork nationally and internationally. For his *Dacaments* series, Fifield-Perez paints detailed renditions of houseplants onto envelopes that have been mailed to him. On the series the artist says:

In order to qualify for DACA, nearly 800,000 undocumented youth have had to prove our existence by collecting and presenting to the government ephemera, bills, school report cards, social media posts, mail, and receipts. How is it that the government trusts and honors papers over the people they represent? The process of applying and reapplying for DACA ingrained in me the habit of holding on to envelopes, whether from the government, loved ones, museums and galleries, my husband. By painting the envelopes, I'd like to believe I am no longer just a passive force in this unbalanced relationship I have with the government.

When asked, "Where is home?" I often reply, "Home is where the plants are."¹

1. "VISUALIST." Fidencio Fifield-Perez: *Dacaments*. Accessed November 07, 2018. <http://www.thevisualist.org/2017/12/fidencio-fifield-perez-dacaments/>.

Questions for looking

- What object or belonging represents home for you? Why?
- In what ways is this artist's work photographic? Does this work change your perception of what a photograph can or cannot be? Why or why not?

**Tomas
van
Houtryve**
Belgian, b. 1975



Divided, 2018

Filmed from above with a drone, Tomas van Houtryve's video, *Divided* (2018), focuses on an area in the Pacific Ocean where Baja, Mexico meets Alta, California—a border established in 1848. This political boundary has grown from a simple demarcation line to the first official ten-foot-high chain link fence, installed in 1945. Today that fence is extended in the form of high steel barriers protruding into the Pacific Ocean on the boundary line. Van Houtryve's video installation focuses on the timeless repetition of the ocean waves as they crash into the barrier, become divided and wash back the opposite direction. One side of the wave reaches the land of the United States and the other reaches Mexico—same water, same beach, different political states.

Questions for looking

- Consider the vantage point. How does van Houtryve's point of view—captured from a drone—affect your understanding of the artist's perception of the border?
- How would this piece read differently if it were a still photograph? How does movement and sound add to the narrative?
- What conversations are happening currently about the US Mexico border? How do border discrepancies play a role in the global refugee crisis?

**Shimon
Attie**

American, b. 1957



The Crossing (still), 2017

Shimon Attie's *The Crossing* (2017) presents seven elegantly dressed individuals engaging in a game of roulette. The players are not actors, but **refugees** from Syria who recently arrived in Europe, many on rafts over the Mediterranean just weeks before filming. The participants hold static poses while the camera floats around them, the wheel spins, and they slowly place their bets. With each consecutive tableau, a player disappears from the game without a trace or explanation. By the film's end only one person remains, a striking metaphor for the thousands left behind, dead or alive, and illuminating the extraordinary risks refugees take in times of crisis—literally gambling for their lives.

**Questions
for looking**

- The Syrian Civil War—one of the largest drivers of the **global refugee crisis**—only began in 2011. There were zero Syrian **refugees** only eight years ago but now there are 5.4 million (about 30% of its total population). What do you know—or not know—about the war in Syria already? How has this war been depicted in the media?
- Why might Shimon Attie portray the individuals as still and motionless when depicting the transit of people?
- How would you describe the film's soundtrack? How does sound add to the overall mood of the film?

Hiwa K

Iraqi, German citizen,
b. 1975



A View From Above (still), 2017,
single channel HD video

Hiwa K's film, *A View From Above* (2017), highlights the real and complicated bureaucratic challenges that confront **asylum-seekers** in their quest to flee war-torn countries. Using a large-scale model originally built in the 1950s to depict the destruction of Kassel, Germany after World War II, the artist narrates a story of an anonymous soldier who deserts his army under the power of a dictatorship to seek asylum in Europe. Based on the artist's personal experiences, the film describes the painstaking process required of **asylum-seekers** to prove they are residents from a **UN designated "unsafe zone."** Applicants are put through an extensive interview by an official who asks questions about very small details of their home city to then match with a map of the area; if one makes a small mistake, they are denied.

In Hiwa K's film, the protagonist is denied asylum on his first interview because he is from a "safe zone." He tries again as an applicant from a different town—one that he has never visited. To prepare, he spends weeks interviewing people who had fled the town, drawing his own map and learning the names of every street, school, and building. After memorizing the details from the birds-eye perspective of a map, he answers the interrogator's questions with perfect accuracy and is granted political asylum in 20 minutes. Meanwhile, thousands of applicants with ground-level knowledge continue to wait years for their requests to be processed.

Questions for looking

- Hiwa K's film illustrates a less common view of one of many obstacles people overcome to flee areas of conflict. What other social or political barriers might be in place that prevent movement of those in danger?
- Why might the artist choose the model of a town destroyed by WWII as his imagery? What statement might he be making?

Bissane Al Charif

Palestinian-Syrian,
French citizen, b. 1977



Personal Things (detail), 2014–15

For her *Women Memories* project consisting of film, photography, and sound, Al Charif focuses on stories of ten women who fled their homes in Syria. Interviewing them in their new homes in Beirut, London, and Paris, Al Charif asks a series of questions:

What is the home you left like?

How did you leave?

What did you take with you?

Where do you imagine your home will be in 10 years?

The women's answers are revealed in the installation. In her film, *Home*, the women's voices underlie fragmented scenes of exterior and interior imagery filmed in Damascus and Beirut from the windows of buildings and cars. The scenes are nondescript, shifting the emphasis to the women's stories of their everyday lives before fleeing their homes. In another film, *In 10 Years*, women speak about where they see their lives in ten years, dreaming of the day they can return home, finish school, and find better lives for themselves and their children. The two films play near a series of 36 photographs of objects—such as ID cards, telephones, keys, and cash—that were carried in the women's handbags. The seemingly simple objects, such as a small bottle of hand cream that belonged to one woman's sister still in Syria, act as precious relics reminding the carrier of life before conflict.

Questions for looking

- Ask students to answer another question posed in this installation: **where do you imagine your home will be in ten years? Are there any current political factors in your home country that could potentially create the need to move? Explain.**

Omar Imam

Syrian, living in
Amsterdam, b. 1979



"There was only grass, but I couldn't pass it through my throat. Yet I forced myself to swallow in front of the children so they would accept it as food."

Untitled (There was only grass), from the Live, Love, Refugee series, 2015

In his *Live, Love, Refugee* project (2015), Omar Imam uses irony and absurdism to address violent events currently taking place in Syria. In 2012, Imam fled his home in Damascus as a **refugee** and began to volunteer at a camp in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. While there he became stunned by media stories that did not match his own experience. Imam began collaborating with people living in Lebanese **refugee camps** to restage their dreams or memories. Asking them to describe and re-enact certain stories, his surreal photographs reveal both remarkable resilience and the darkness of trauma. The works question prevailing perceptions of justice, home, and collective human experiences.

Questions for looking

- After reading the captions that accompany each image, how do you think the text impacts the way you initially saw the images? Would the images function in the same way without the text? Why or why not?
- Imam has said: "refugees are overphotographed, but underseen." What do you think he means by this? Why?

Leila Alaoui

French-Moroccan,
1982–2016



Crossing (still), 2013

Blending her interests in fine art, photojournalism, and activism, Leila Alaoui's video *Crossings* poetically depicts **sub-Saharan African persons of concern** who embark on the life-threatening journeys across the Mediterranean Sea to seek better lives in Europe. According to the Pew Research Center in 2018, between 2011 and 2017, the number of sub-Saharan Africans living outside of their birth countries rose from 10.2 million to 24.2 million, with most fleeing areas of conflict or violence. Viewed in three channels, the film intertwines landscape imagery with portraits and spoken stories, emphasizing the psychological and physical impacts of both the decision to leave as well as the arduous journey.

Questions for looking

- Consider how the film is presented. What effect does the overlap of audio and imagery have on the narrative? How would the film read differently if presented in a linear fashion?
- Alaoui also worked as a photojournalist before she was tragically killed in 2016 in a terrorist attack in Burkino Faso while on an assignment covering women's rights for UN Women and Amnesty International. What vulnerabilities do conflict journalists face? How does this film differ from photojournalistic imagery?
- Why might the artist choose to use both fine art and journalism to cover this subject? What strengths or weaknesses do each format have?

Daniel Castro Garcia

Spanish, British citizen,
b. 1985



Amadou Mbenga sits for a portrait. This room is located at the entrance of the Zingale centre and the way it is painted resembles the view of looking at the horizon at sea. During his journey, Ams' best friend was killed in Libya and the news has affected him greatly. I have on occasion found him sitting in one of the dark corridors of the centre with his head in his hands rocking back and forth. "My thoughts are too many. I am stressed..." was his response when I asked him what was wrong. On other occasions he has been very vocal about his suffering, pacing rooms telling me, "Look at how we're living, this is not life. I feel pain. This is not right, I am not afraid of dying." Without professional medical help present, the mood swings endured by all of the boys individually and collectively has at times been alarming. There is an urgent need for psychologists to work in this region, or at the very least, more effort needs to be made by refugee organizations to make it an accessible service. The range of stories I have collected and the range of issues faced by these young people is extensive and the pressure is too much for a minor to handle. He also has great difficulty sleeping at night, high anxiety, night terrors etc., 2017

For his *I Peri N'Tera (Feet on the Ground)* project (2015–present), Daniel Castro Garcia examines migration stories of those traveling from Africa to Italy via Libya. Garcia was moved to begin the project after seeing insensitive media coverage and imagery of two ships carrying **persons of concern** that capsized in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, resulting in approximately 750 deaths. Working to counter the sensationalist visual representation of **migrants** and **refugees**, Garcia aims to add dignified imagery into the larger narrative of the humanitarian crisis. The artist matches each image with lengthy captions, giving a fuller depiction of the struggles and culling a more empathetic response to the people enduring traumatic journeys only to be met with difficulties in their new lives.

Questions for looking

- Consider this quote by the artist: “An online search of the words “migrants/refugees Europe” produces chaotic scenes of hundreds of people defined by a single moment, often violent, traumatic or pitiful. There are no names and no personal accounts. The dignity and image of the individuals in question must be protected and clearly communicated, and furthermore the intelligence of the audience must not be so readily underestimated and manipulated.” Do you find this statement to be true? What is a photographer or photojournalist’s responsibility in documenting conflict? How do images shape our perception of world events for better or worse?
- Look at each image first without looking at the captions. What do you see? What story is the photography trying to tell? Then read the extended captions. How is your perception of the story changed now with more information? What is a documentary photographer’s responsibility in writing down the details of their subjects and communicating that to the audience?
- Compare Castro’s images to the film by Leila Alaoui in the stairwell who is also representing sub-Saharan Africans on their journeys to Europe. How do the artists approach their subjects and their stories differently or similarly? Which do you find to be a more effective approach? Why?



Omar Imam
*Untitled, (I felt safer when I listen
to music)*, from the *Live, Love,
Refugee* series, 2015

-
- Have students consider the question **Bissane Al Charif** asked her subjects: If you suddenly had to leave your home and could only take one item with you, what would it be? Ask students to bring one object to class to photograph in the style of Al Charif. Why did they choose this object? What significance does it have in their lives? Does the object seem different once photographed? Why?
 - Ask students to restage a dream or memory inspired by the work of **Omar Imam**. Have them consider clothing choices, props, and poses to tell their story. After printing the images, have students summarize the pictures in two sentences, writing the text at the bottom of the image. Ask students to describe their works and choices, detailing the significance of their props, settings, and words.

Person of concern

An individual who qualifies under any of the six terms below.

Asylum seeker

According to the UNHCR, an asylum seeker is defined as “an individual whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Every year, around one million people seek asylum.”

Immigrant

People who have traveled from their countries of birth to new countries for the purpose of establishing permanent residence.

Internally displaced person (IDPs)

A person forced from their home due to conflict or oppression but remain in their country of origin, most commonly due to fear or inability to leave. Because they remain displaced in their home countries, IDPs are unable to rely upon the protection of international laws that apply to refugees. As of 2018, IDPs number approximately twice as many as refugees worldwide.

Migrant

An individual who *voluntarily* leaves their country of origin seeking an improvement in quality of life.

Refugee

According to the UNHCR, a refugee is defined as an individual who is *forced* to leave their country of origin due to violence or persecution.

Stateless

According to the UNHCR, stateless is defined as people who are not part of any nation or country. People who are stateless do not have access to government provided or assisted services, including education, healthcare, or documentation to gain employment. Some causes for statelessness include children being born in foreign countries with varying nationality laws or changes in borders or newly created states which can exclude certain populations. There are currently over ten million people in the world who are considered stateless.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

A United States immigration policy implemented in 2012 by Barack Obama that provides a renewable two-year period of protection against deportation measures for immigrant children brought illegally to the US. DACA does not offer a pathway to citizenship.

Global refugee crisis

Refers to the exceptionally high number of displaced people in the world today, including—but not limited to—those categorized as internally displaced persons, refugees, and migrants (see terms above). The crisis also refers to the legal and social complications of settling populations into new host countries.

Refugee camp

According to *Boston Review*, a refugee camp is defined as a temporary shelter built to house refugees or those in similar circumstances. Although refugee camps are intended to be brief settlements, the average duration of occupancy ranges from twelve to sixteen years.

Sub-Saharan Africa

According to Pew Research Center, sub-Saharan Africa is defined as all countries and territories in continental Africa except Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara. This region also includes islands Cape Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Reunion, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, and St. Helena.

Undocumented youth

According to *USA Today*, undocumented youth is a term specific to the United States referring to children under the age of 18 who came to the U.S. illegally but have spent most of their lives as Americans. This population is also known as “DREAMers,” referring to a bill seeking to create a path to citizenship that was first proposed to Congress in 2001 but never passed. There are an estimated 3.6 million undocumented young people in the U.S. today.

United Nations safe zone/unsafe zone

According to *Foreign Policy*, United Nations safe zones/unsafe zones are defined as areas designated by the United Nations Security Council where civilians, in theory, are protected from conflict. However, these zones are often problematic and rarely function as intended. For example, the northern part of Iraq was established as an autonomous region in 1991 called Kurdistan, is considered a safe zone by the UN. Refugees from that area were denied asylum as refugees from the non-Kurdish part of the country were not.

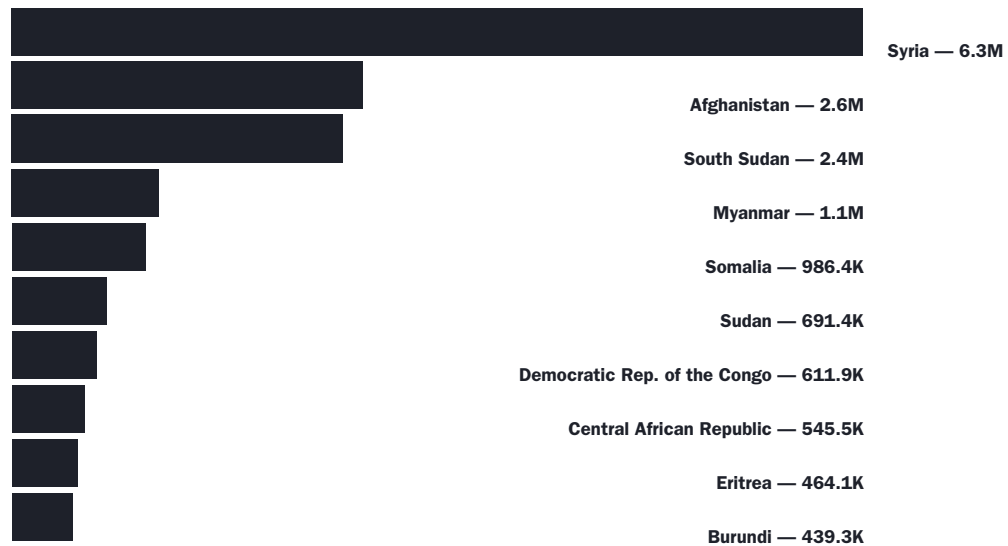
In the year 2018 there are

- 68.5 million people displaced worldwide.
- 25.4 million refugees, over half of which are children.
- 10 million stateless people
- Only 105,000 people resettled
- 44,400 people displaced each day forcibly, or 20 people every minute

According to the United Nations
Refugee Agency (UNCHR)

Countries With Largest Outflows of Refugees

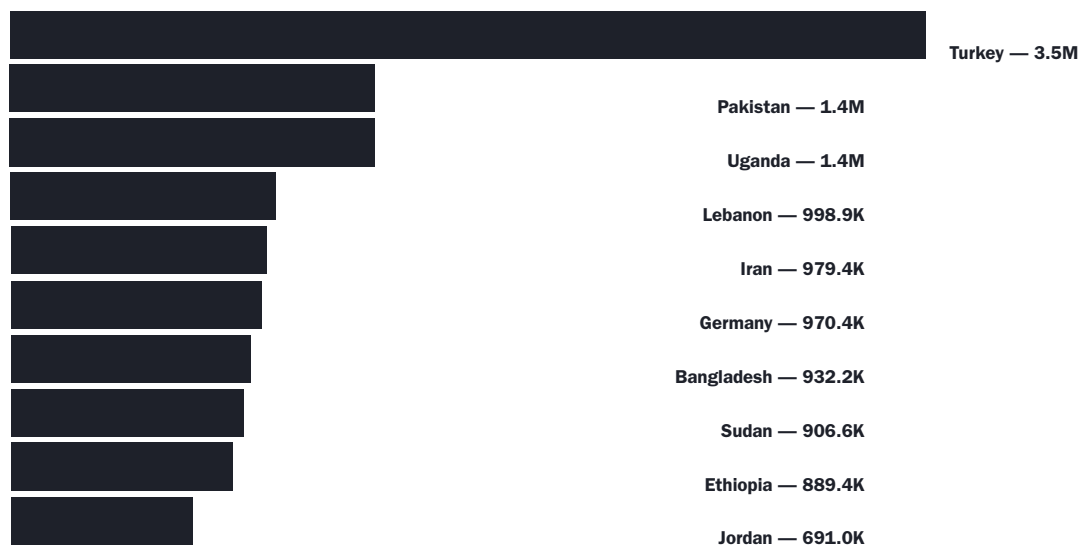
Number of refugees as of
December 2017



Source: UN High Commissioner
for Refugees

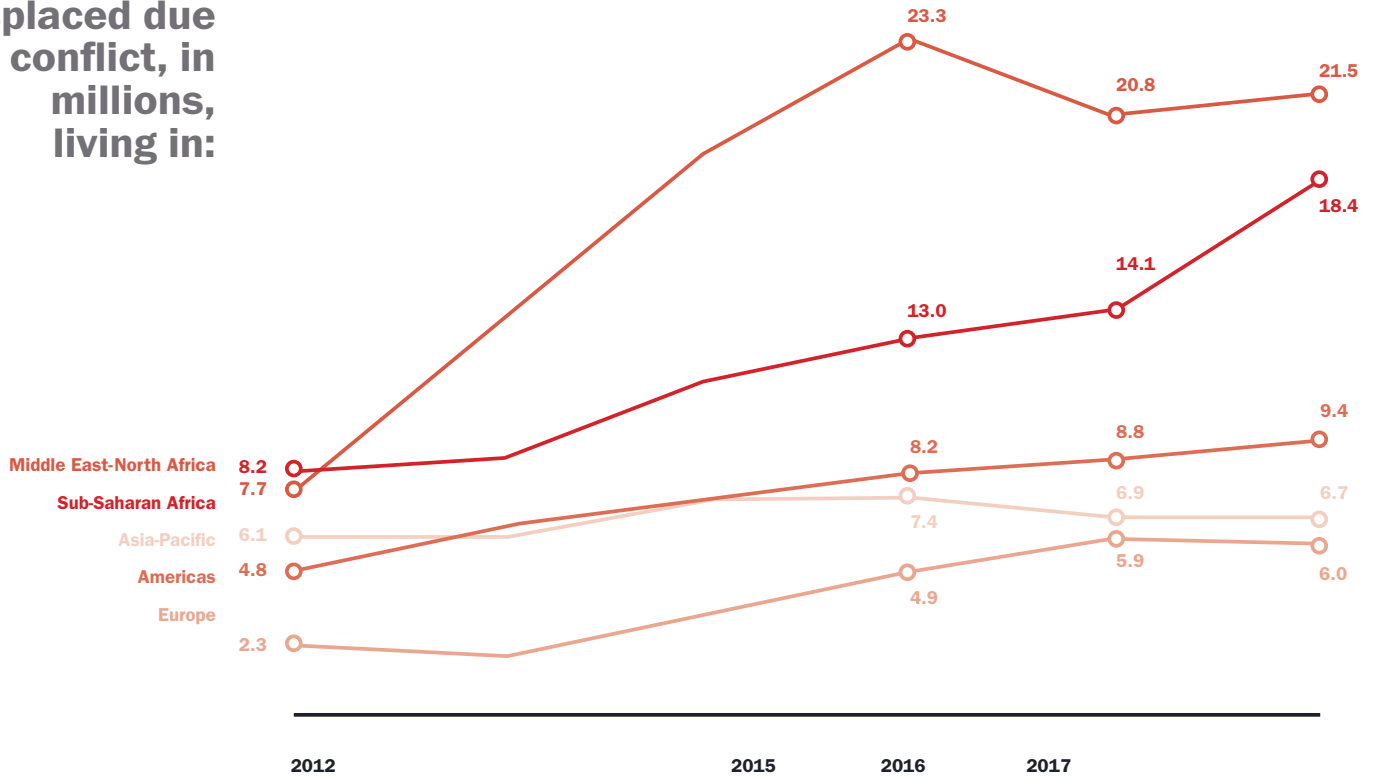
Countries Hosting Largest Number of Refugees

Number of refugees as of
December 2017



Source: UN High Commissioner
for Refugees

Number of persons displaced due to conflict, in millions, living in:



What are some causes of the crisis?

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), migration caused by displacement is credited to many factors, with the most common being armed conflict, natural disasters (such as flood, drought, earthquake, etc), famine, and economic changes.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Volunteer

Local organizations serving refugees in need of volunteers include

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)

The ICIRR strives to assist refugees with integrating into the local community while advocating to boost access to health care, food, education, language, and civic informational resources throughout Illinois' immigrant and refugee population. ICIRR accepts volunteers, donations, and may assist anybody looking to reach out to the policy makers and advocate for the refugee and immigrant communities. To learn additional information, visit ICIRR.org.

World Relief Chicago (WRC)

Rooted in the local church communities, WRC assists with English education, employment services, medical services, and many other services across the Chicago immigrant and refugee population. WRC accepts donations and volunteers for medical appointment transportation, youth mentorship programs, classroom and after-school programs, English tutoring, and health advocacy. To learn more, please visit WorldReliefChicago.org.

RefugeeOne

Serving more than 2,500 refugees every year, RefugeeOne is the largest resettlement agency in Illinois and works to assist refugees from the moment they arrive at the Chicago airport. RefugeeOne provides furnished apartments, language classes, help finding employment, mental health services, and community programming to assist refugees as they become self-sustaining members of the Chicago Community. RefugeeOne accepts donations and volunteers to help with transportation, mentorship programs, translation, and tutoring. To learn more about RefugeeOne, please visit RefugeeOne.org.

GirlForward

GirlForward is an organization based in both Chicago, IL and Austin, TX, that supports young women within the local refugee populations. They facilitate Mentorship, Education, and a Safe Space Programs that focuses on connecting young women with workshops and tutoring. GirlForward accepts donations and volunteers to assist with tutoring, as well as, female identifying volunteers for the Mentorship Program. To learn more about GirlForward, please visit GirlForward.org.

Centro Romero

Based in the northeast side of Chicago, Centro Romero has been working for over 30 years to serve Chicago's refugee population. They run a variety of programs including youth learning and leadership programs, family services, adult education, and legal services. Centro Romero accepts donations and volunteers. To learn more about Centro Romero, please visit CentroRomero.org.

Donate funds

Heartland Alliance

Established in 1888 in Chicago, Heartland Alliance assists in providing vulnerable populations with healthcare, housing, employment, and legal needs. Heartland Alliance has a long history of aiding those trapped in poverty during the United States' most tumultuous times including the great depression, both world wars, and the AIDS epidemic. Heartland Alliance is currently not accepting volunteers but has valuable resource to learn about methods to better advocate and support vulnerable populations. To learn more about Heartland Alliance, please visit HeartlandAlliance.org.

Donate pro bono services

The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)

NIJC is a part of Heartland Alliance that provides legal information and assistance to immigrant populations to ensure the protection of human rights and access to justice, The NIJC accepts donations and seeks qualified attorneys to donate their time pro bono. To learn more, please visit <https://www.immigrantjustice.org>.

Stay informed and create awareness

#IBELONG Campaign

A ten-year global UNHCR campaign that aims to end the devastating legal limbo of statelessness, which affects millions of people around the world and makes their lives difficult. Sign the Open Letter to End Statelessness by visiting <http://www.unhcr.org/ph/ibelong>.

Recommended Reading

Ai Weiwei and Larry Warsh, *Humanity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Refugees*. New York: Grove Press, 2018.

Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*. New York: Custom House, 2018.

Jackie Spinner and Jenny Spinner, *Tell Them I Didn't Cry: A Young Journalists Story of Joy, Loss, and Survival in Iraq*. New York: Scribner, 2007.

Recommended Films

Ai Weiwei, *Human Flow*, 2017

Alexandria Bombach, *On Her Shoulders*, 2018

Thomas Mogan, *Soufra*, 2017

Andres Caballo and Sofian Kahn, *The Interpreters*, 2018

Illinois Arts Learning Standards Addressed in This Guide

Visual Arts Standards

VA:Re7.2.K-12

Perceive and analyze artistic work. Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

VA:Re8.K-12

Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

VA:Re9.K-12

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. People evaluate art based on various criteria

VA:Cn11.K-12

Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

Social Science Standards

SS.G.12.9-12

Evaluate how competition for scarce natural resources contributes to conflict and cooperation with in and among countries.

English Language Arts Standards

CC.K-12.L.R.6 Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

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Columbia College Chicago
600 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60605

(312) 663-5554
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