

What is the difference between a refugee and an asylum?

The world is a vast place, and with all the news flying around these days, it's easy to get confused about the terms "refugee" and "asylum seeker." These words pop up all the time, especially when discussing global conflicts and the movement of people seeking safety. But what exactly do they mean? Are they the same thing?

Nope, there's a key difference! Understanding the distinction can help us have more informed conversations and offer relevant support to those in need. So, whether you're curious about current events or have encountered refugees and asylum seekers in your community, I am here to shed some light on them. We'll break down the difference between these terms in a clear and simple way, making you a refugee-and-asylum-seeker pro in no time.

What do refugees and asylums exactly mean? Are both the same thing?

Refugee and asylum is a very confusing term to most people around the world. The reasons for seeking protection under refugee and asylum programs are quite similar, but both are not the same thing. Then what is the basic difference between them?

Well, let me clarify...Refugees are basically considered people who do not feel safe in their own country because of war, crime, violence, and other dangerous issues. When their home country can not give them enough protection and legal rights to stay safely, they leave their country as refugees and go to another country. They experience severe threats or are forced to leave the country. Some of them want to shift to another country voluntarily for fear of an upcoming alarming condition.

The situation of those people is so vulnerable that they try to cross the national border to seek protection and safety from nearby countries. According to the program of US refugee admission, the United States gives protection to those helpless people and brings them here as refugees.

On the flip side, asylum is another program of protecting people who are already staying in the US temporarily but do not want to leave due to the fear of persecution in their home country. Any political, social, or racial issues stop them from going back to their country. Suppose, you came here with a [temporary visa](#).

Before expiring your temporary status, you heard that serious political violence or civil war had started in your home country. Because of this sudden uncertain condition, you do not feel safe to go back there. In such a situation, you can ask for protection from the US government through asylum.

In which situation can you ask for refugee or asylum?

If you suffer from serious danger in your country, you can ask for refugee status. On the other hand, an asylum seeker can show other problems to seek protection from the government. Suppose, you are dealing with immigration issues and facing deportation, you can ask for asylum. To get asylum, you have to show a specific reason that you are in danger, not just because you are feeling insecure in your country.

How are refugees and asylum seekers different from each other?

Refugees and asylum seekers are different from each other in various ways.

Key aspects	Refugee	Asylum
In terms of physical presence	Refugees are not physically present in the US when applying	Asylum seekers are already present here or at the port of entry
Timing of granted status	Before entering the US	After entering the US
Medium of application	Refugees need to apply through the refugee application program of the US	Asylum seekers can apply through USCIS affirmatively (those who are not in removal proceedings) or defensively (those who are in removal proceedings)
Based on which they are categorised	Based on the level of priority established by the refugee program	based on their situation
Timing of application	Before entering the US. If your application is denied, you can not appeal. But you can ask the USCIS to review your case.	Within one year after entering the US. You can appeal showing some evidence if your application is denied.
Travel restrictions	Refugees can travel outside the US showing proper documents	Asylum holders can not travel to their home country until getting a green card. But they can travel to other countries with special permission.
Permanent residency	Refugees can apply for a green card one year after their arrival in the US	Asylum holders can apply for a green card one year

		after their asylum application is approved.
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What are the similarities between a refugee and an asylum?

As I already said, most people can not differentiate between refugees and asylum status, because these two have some similarities.

- ⇒ A refugee and an asylum holder, both of them do not get protection in their own country.
- ⇒ Both of them get almost similar rights and facilities from the US government. They can move freely without any risk. They also get healthcare benefits, education, and employment opportunities.
- ⇒ Refugees and asylum holders can ask permission from the government to allow them to bring their immediate family members to the US.
- ⇒ The citizenship pathways for both are also similar. They can apply for citizenship 4 years after their green card is approved.

Can refugees and asylum seekers work legally in the US?

Refugees can get permission to work legally immediately after arriving here. Whereas, asylum seekers get legal work authorization when their asylum application is approved. When your [asylum is pending for a long time](#), you can also get permission to work. If you do not get any decision about your asylum application for more than 150 days, you can apply for legal work authorization by filling out a [form I-765](#).

How does the application process for seeking asylum differ from obtaining refugee status?

Although there are some similarities between a refugee and an asylum status, the application process for both is not similar. So, you have to follow a different pathway while applying for refugee or asylum status.

The application process for refugee status:

- ⇒ First, you have to contact the UN refugee agency called the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is a global organization, to register yourself as a refugee. It might be difficult for you to search for this agency in your home country. If you are currently living in a refugee camp, you will find the volunteers of UNHCR, who will help you with this purpose.

- ⇒ Now, you have to gather all the required documents to prove your danger or insecurity living in this country, and you want to resettle in another country that will give you protection. If you don't have your [passport](#), you can show your birth certificate, ID card, or other papers to prove your eligibility for refugee status.
- ⇒ In this step, UNHCR will refer you to any country for resettlement, including the United States. You are not allowed to say which country you want to move to. However, you can say which particular countries you don't want to go to. If UNHCR sends your case to the US, you can start applying for refugee status there.
- ⇒ When UNHCR sends your case to the US, you have to attend an appointment with the Refugee Support Center (RSC). They will help you to prepare for attending the interview with the USCIS refugee officer, who is the representative of the US government. This refugee officer will decide whether you are allowed to come to the US or not.

So, the volunteers of RSC will ask you some questions to understand why you are willing to move to the US. You have to answer all the questions correctly. Do not give any false information. They can also help to fill out the required forms to make you ready for the interview with the refugee officer.

- ⇒ After completing all the processing of your documents, the RSC will set up your interview with the US refugee officer. You may wait some more time to attend the interview, as the refugee officer will visit your home country to interview all the refugees.

They will make the decision based on international rules, not only US law. So, the duration of your interview might be longer. During the interview, the refugee officer will ask you everything about the reason for seeking this refugee status. You have to say everything in detail.

- ⇒ When USRAP approves your request to live in the US as a refugee, the RSC will help you and your family to conduct your health condition check-up. This is needed to avoid contaminated disorders that can spread from person to person. If the report of your medical checkups is okay, the RSC will arrange your travel to the US.

After entering here for the first time, the Refugee Resettlement Agency (RRA) will pick you up from the airport, and they will support you by bearing your financial expenses for the first few months.

The application process for asylum:

After coming to the US with a non-immigrant visa, some people seek asylum if they feel scared to go back to their own country due to various acceptable reasons. If you are in such a situation, you can apply for asylum within one year of your arrival in the US. So, you have to follow some steps to apply for asylum.

- ⇒ First, determine your eligibility and whether you are qualified to take asylum or not. If you are really in danger of returning, then you can apply for asylum, showing the actual reason with proper documents.
- ⇒ Then, you can apply for asylum by filling out [form I-589](#). If your family members are here, you can also apply for them at the same time.
- ⇒ If your family members are not with you in the US, then you can sponsor them to bring them here after completing two years with asylum status. So, you have to fill out a [form I-730](#) to request that the government allow your family members to join you here.

To sum up,

In the US, refugees and asylum seekers both want protection from the government, but a refugee enters here with a protected and granted asylum status. On the flip side, asylum seekers get this granted status after passing a certain period in the US showing the specific problem that stops them from returning to their country.

Apart from the difference in their legal status, there are some more differences between a refugee and an asylum seeker that most of you don't know. So, today I have tried to explain the overall differences between the two popular groups who want safety from the government of another country to live a peaceful life.

If you find our small and informative discussion useful, please leave a comment to inspire us more. And, remember to share this discussion with others who are concerned about understanding the basic differences between a refugee and asylum status.

Meta Heading:

Refugee Vs asylum, do you know the differences between them? Click here to learn what sets refugees apart from asylum seekers!