

# What in the world is a refugee?

Because of dangerous situations in their countries, refugees decide to leave everything they have ever known, to begin life once again in an unfamiliar country. They leave only when there seems to be no chance for survival in their country. They leave with what little they can carry with them, often less than would fit in a backpack.

The official definition of a refugee is a person who has fled his or her country because of persecution or a fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. This means refugees are people who have left their country because they were hurt or were afraid of being hurt. Sometimes they were hurt because of their religion; sometimes they were hurt because they spoke out against the leaders of their country; and sometimes they were hurt because they belonged to a group of people the authorities didn't like – like a labor union, or a teacher's organization, or a farm worker's association.

The world is full of refugees. Estimates vary, but there are at least 12 million refugees in the world. Can you imagine how many people 12 million is? Think about the number of grains of sand in a playground or think about the number of rain drops it would take to fill a swimming pool. Imagine that many people having to flee for their lives, from countries all over the world.

Talk about some of the refugees you've heard about in the news recently.  
Use the Internet to find stories and pictures about refugees.



Darfur Sudan



Afghanistan



Iraq



Burma