

A Record 60 Million People Flee Their Homes in 2015

The year 2015 saw a record number of people fleeing their homes, with more than 60 million people uprooted by wars, conflict and persecution in countries ranging from Syria to South Sudan and Afghanistan, according to the United Nations.

Worldwide that means one person in every 122 has been forced to flee their home, displaced within their own country or forced to move to another country.

Here are some of their stories and their hopes for 2016:

Sandy Khabbaze, 26, a Syrian now living in Oakland, New Jersey, United States

"I am from Aleppo City. Our house is on the line between ISIS (Islamic State) and the Syrian government. If the Syrian army wants to attack ISIS, they put tanks near our house. When ISIS wants to attack the Syrian government, they come to our neighborhood. My family is stuck there. It's like a nightmare, but it's true.

One time ISIS went next door and put snipers there. When I was going to school, a sniper shot at me three times. I was lucky he missed me.

My mom came a couple of times to America and she loved America so she named me Sandy. It is an American name because she wanted me to come back here. And here I am. Her dream came true.

I came here as a student. I came because I'm an ambitious woman. I want opportunity to build my future. My dream was to work with NASA. But I'm struggling financially because education here is so, so expensive.

I'm a civil engineer, and I'm working a job for people who graduated from high school. With that money, I trained to become a concrete inspector certificate.

One day I went to a church. The pastor and I we started talking, and he told me: "I will help you." Until now, the church keeps sponsoring me and they offered me a place to stay.

My hope is in 2016 to be reunited with my family here in America and to be a good American. I love America."

Mustafa Asefi, 28, an Afghan living in Vancouver, Canada

"I'm from Afghanistan, from Kabul, and I was working for an international company. In 2014 in December, I got a warning letter from the Taliban. They warn people who are working with international companies. They assume these people are their enemy, are helping the enemy of the Taliban, or the foreigners.

These are normal strategies that the Taliban and other militias use in Afghanistan. They just send you a letter which is called 'shabnama'; it's like a warning letter. And along with that they call you and send you text messages. They continue these threats and you have to obey them. Otherwise they will take action.

Because I was working for an international company, I was lucky enough that we got a U.S. visa and from the United States, we eventually came to Canada. We applied for protection. When they accepted me as a refugee, it was like someone issued me a new birth certificate.

For me, it was a very tough year because I never expected I would have to flee everything, leave everything behind. I was working as a professional engineer, and I wanted to work with my country, with my people. But my life was in danger and I had no choice.

My hope is to start my normal life as it was in my home country. I want to have a job, I want to work, as I was working in my home country, because now this is my country and this is my people.”

Hassane Chetim, 36, a Nigerien living in Bosso, Niger

“The first day Boko Haram entered my village, Gogone, was Oct. 1, 2014, and now for a second time on Nov. 25, 2015. That’s what caused all villagers in my town to flee.

Last year I moved here to settle in the town of Bosso. I have a family of six boys and six women, and everyone works. Everyone contributes their stone to the building.

It forced us to leave the land on which our ancestors have lived for many years. We never thought that some of our villages that have existed for more than a hundred years would be deserted in an instant.

We grew peppers and so we had something with which to survive. I’m a teacher, but since 2012 I haven’t taught. People are afraid that Boko Haram will catch their children at school, so they don’t send them.

During the last attack there were 19 dead and nine people were wounded. One of my nieces has died, and a nephew of mine was wounded. There is a constant fear that doesn’t let our conscience rest.

I hope that this war ends and that the people return home and retrieve their freedom to work the fields and fish in the lake. If I live, I thought about writing a novel about the fact that we are the youth of the crisis. Because it is youth that is being lost. It hurts me.”

Luoy Liay, 29, living in Juba, South Sudan

“It was on Dec. 15, 2013 that my displacement started. It happened after the presidential guard clashed among

themselves, which later led to massive killing – ethnic killing of civilians who are part of the Nuer tribe. Political differences in the leading party, too, was at play. We ran, we ran for our lives.

I was a college student pursuing a bachelor's degree in development studies.

Conditions are totally unacceptable in the protected site in which I live. A lot of violence, stress, and too much thinking about losing hope for the future. We worry about goods, education, health care, basic things.

The conditions are not normal here. In here, you sleep in open shelter, regardless of your sex. Many people lose hope for their future. That pushes some to commit crimes. It is so difficult for someone who was studying to stop for three years.

2016 may be different in some ways, but the truth is the trauma remains. It will be hard to recover smoothly without getting better education and health care systems.”

Ragheda, 30, a Syrian living in Mafraq, Jordan

“My life in Syria was good. Not very rich, but easy. My husband was in construction but was injured and cannot move. I am the head of my household.

Why did I have to leave in 2012? It was, simply, the war. Air strikes next to the house. My daughter suffers from post-traumatic stress. She frequently has night terrors. She is 10 years old.

I live in a very good neighborhood in Mafraq (northern Jordan) where my Jordanian neighbors are very kind. But I would like to be in a place where I don't need anyone to help me. I receive cash assistance from UNHCR, but it is barely enough to cover the rent.

The services in Jordan aren't enough to cover all my needs.

I am currently four months behind in rent. I hope that in 2016 I can catch up on my payments and be able to pay rent on time. I would also like to find psychological help for my daughter."

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