



Office for
Human Life
Catholic Diocese
of Cleveland

Trends in Forced Displacement (Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers)

A Catholic guide to seeing the person behind the headlines

Human dignity does not depend on nationality or legal status.

“It is urgent to remember that every migrant is a human person who possesses fundamental, inalienable rights... [Too often] it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person. No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings; yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human” (*Dignitas Infinita*, no.40).

A World on the Move:

At the end of 2025, **one in every 70 people** in the world had been forced to flee their home.



117.8 million

Forcibly Displaced

people uprooted by persecution, conflict, violence, or serious disorder at home. This is equivalent to the total population of the Philippines, the world's 13th largest country.



68.7 million Displaced at Home

Internally displaced people who remain in their home country.



41.6 million Refugees

A person who has fled persecution, war, or violence and is approved for protection outside their home country.

Most displaced people never come to the United States

65% of refugees are hosted by neighboring countries, and 70% have lived displaced for five years or longer. Children make up 39% of the refugee population.

Limited Paths to Safety:



Needed Resettlement

2.9 million

refugees estimated to need resettlement in 2025.



Resettled Worldwide

81,800

refugees resettled through formal programs in 2025.



Resettled in the USA

11,500

refugees admitted into the United States in 2025.

Important Terms to Distinguish:



Refugee

Approved for protection before arriving in the U.S.A. after fleeing persecution or a well-founded fear of it.



Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

Temporary permission granted to remain and work in U.S.A. because their home country is designated as unsafe to live in.



Asylum seeker

Requests for protection after arriving in the U.S.A. or a port of entry; their claim is still pending approval



D.A.C.A. recipient

A person, who was brought to the United States unlawfully as a child, that qualifies for deferred action and work authorization.



Asylee

An asylum seeker whose claim has been granted and who now holds authorized (lawful) status.



Humanitarian Parole

A case-by-case temporary permission to stay for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.

What does “Unauthorized” Mean

Understanding and Encounter

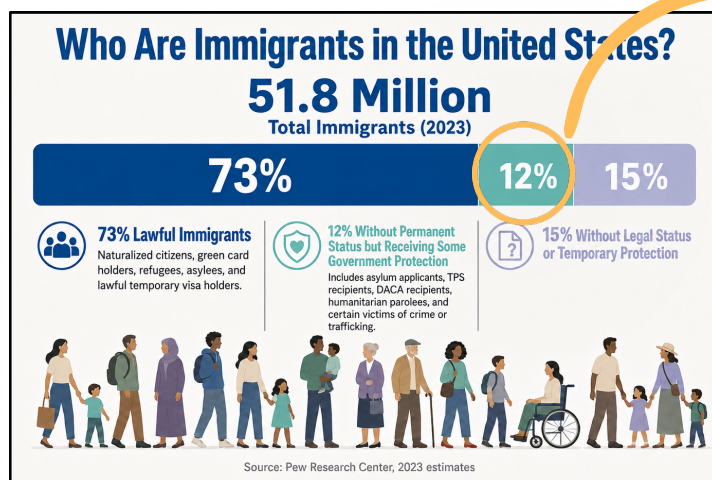
Language Matters:

The words we choose influence how we see others. Terms such as *illegal alien* can unintentionally reduce a person to a legal status or immigration violation. While immigration laws distinguish between lawful and unauthorized status, the Church invites us to speak about people in ways that respect their inherent dignity. Phrases such as *person with unauthorized status*, *person without legal status*, or *person living in the country unlawfully* acknowledge the reality of the person's situation while still affirming his or her humanity and dignity.

Remember: People may enter the country unlawfully, but no person is illegal.

A more nuanced picture of the 2023 PEW Estimate:

A 2023 Pew Research Center study estimated that there were 14 million immigrants living in the United States without full legal status. However, this number includes people in a variety of different circumstances.



Roughly 6 Million

had some protection from deportation

- 2.6 million asylum seekers
- 700k humanitarian parolees
- 700k victims of crime or violence
- 650k TPS recipients
- 600k DACA recipients
- 750k some other form of temporary protection

A Catholic Lens on Migration Policies: *Rights & Responsibilities*

Every person has the right to live with dignity in their homeland and, when necessary, to seek a better life elsewhere.

People should have opportunities to flourish in their country of origin, but when conditions make a dignified life impossible, they possess a natural right to migrate to support themselves and their families.

Every human person, has a right to protection and respect for their God-given dignity.

Regardless of legal status, migrants retain their fundamental human rights and deserve humane treatment, safety, and respect.

Nations have a responsibility to welcome those in need while promoting the common good.

More prosperous countries should, as they are able, offer hospitality and protection to those fleeing danger or seeking opportunities unavailable in their homeland.

Governments and migrants share responsibility for fostering just and orderly communities.

Nations have the right and duty to regulate immigration and maintain secure borders, while immigrants have a responsibility to respect the laws, culture, and civic life of the country that receives them.

Information Used in this Resource:

Catholic Sources: *Dignitas Infinita* (2024) | *Strangers No Longer* (USCCB, 2003)

Data Sources: *Global Trends in Forced Displacement* (UNHCR, 2025) | *U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population* (PEW, 2025)

Definitions: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Data describe different dates and should not be combined as one total.



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