



People trying to reach Europe to seek political asylum rest near the Turkish city of Edirne, which borders European Union members Greece and Bulgaria, September 15, 2015\). They planned a sit-in protest near the border with Greece, hoping authorities would allow them to cross into Europe overland instead of them having to risk their lives by sea trying to reach Greek islands. AP Photo/Emrah Gurel

Issue Overview: Political asylum

Bloomberg, adapted by Newsela staff

Some people in the world are frightened to live in their own countries. They worry about being harmed by their governments because of the things they believe or because of a war in their country. So they ask another country to let them live there. This is called asylum.

Asylum might be the world's most controversial idea. Most countries offer asylum. The United Nations (U.N.) is a group of countries that work for cooperation in the world. The U.N. says asylum is a human right, just like the right to equal treatment and freedom.

The number of people seeking asylum has risen. It is now at a record level. This has happened at the same time as some wars have happened in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa.

DEFINITIONS

asylum

Protection given by a government to someone who has left another country to escape being harmed

human rights

Basic rights and freedoms that all people are entitled to, no matter their nationality, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, or political views

refugees

People fleeing wars, conflict, or persecution in their countries

There is disagreement over who should be given asylum. The idea is that nations should protect those who may be harmed. But it is not clear if asylum is the best choice for all of today's refugees.

The Situation

U.S. President Donald Trump issued a ban on people leaving war-torn Syria. He said they could not come into the United States. This also does not allow other refugees from seven countries to enter the United States for 90 days. Most of the people in these countries are Muslim. They follow the religion of Islam.

Terrorist attacks around the world have caused fear. Some people think that potential terrorists are among the people who want asylum in their countries.

In 2015, there were 2.45 million people who wanted asylum or to be a refugee. This is an increase of almost 50 percent from 2014. The largest number are from Syria. There also have been tens of thousands of refugees fleeing Myanmar in Asia as well as Iraq. Also, the number of asylum claims made by gay, bisexual and transgender people has increased.

A refugee in one country may be wanted by the police in another country. One example is Edward Snowden. He is the American who revealed details of classified U.S. government programs. Snowden was given asylum by Russia. This means Russia will not force him to leave the country and go back to the United States for a trial.

The Background

The U.N. says the idea of asylum has been around almost since the beginning of civilization. It is mentioned in 3,500-year-old writings.

The U.N. defines refugees as people who can show they will be persecuted in their countries. They could be in danger because of their race, religion or political beliefs. Hundreds of thousands of people receive asylum every year. Almost as many people are turned down.

Asylum has been used as a political tool. Examples of this are when America welcomed Cubans and Vietnamese seeking refuge from their communist governments. The United States was against communism then, so it accepted people running away from communist countries. People like Snowden and Charles Taylor have used it to either avoid or delay criminal prosecution. Taylor is the former president of Liberia who was found guilty of war crimes. He was given short-term asylum in Nigeria.

The Argument

More people fleeing their countries means more debate over asylum. Those against it say asylum rules are too loose. They say it threatens to overthrow the regular rules that immigrants must follow to move to the United States.

Trump argues that America has not done a good enough job looking into the backgrounds of refugees to keep out terrorists.

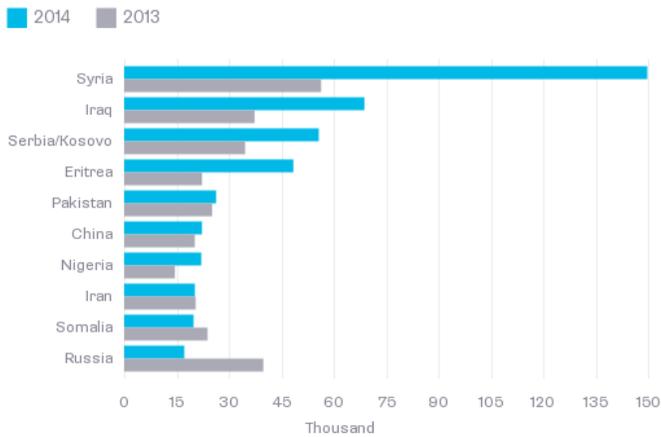
Those in favor of asylum say it is necessary as human beings to protect other human beings. They say many of the people Trump would keep out are trying to escape terrorism in their own countries.

Some say asylum should be given to people fleeing any danger, not just harm from their government. One example is children fleeing gang violence in some countries.

Some people who support Trump's ban say people wanting asylum may not be truthful. For example, some asylum seekers give exaggerated or false stories to help them get into another country.

Where Asylum Seekers Come From

Origin of applications to 44 industrialized countries



Where They Want to Go

Asylum applications submitted

