Refugees glossary

Asylum seekers
A person who has fled their own country in fear of persecution, and sought sanctuary or asylum in another. The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees guarantees the right of asylum from persecution. When people are granted asylum, the Convention requires that they be offered the same protection and benefits as other citizens of the host country. In cases where asylum seekers are unsuccessful in their attempts to gain sanctuary in a second country, the Convention provides that they must not be returned to a situation in which they will be in danger.

Internally displaced person (IDP)
Internally displaced people are people who have fled their homes in fear of persecution or conflict, or because of natural disasters, but who are still within their own country’s borders. Although their own Government is responsible for them, it may be either unable or unwilling to assist them. IDPs can only come under international protection if their government allows for that to happen.

Migrant
Someone who has chosen to leave their own country and has been accepted by another country for settlement. Often they choose to leave to improve their life situation or reunite with family. They are free to return to their country of origin.

Nationality
The status of belonging to a particular nation by virtue of birth, ancestry or naturalisation.

People of concern
Refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people and returnees are people of concern and are protected under the mandate of the UNHCR.

Poliomyelitis (Polio)
A highly infectious disease caused by a virus that affects mainly children under three years of age. It invades the nervous system and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours. A three stage immunisation program is necessary for protection against the disease.

State
In international law, a state is an entity which has supreme political and legal autonomy over a given geographical area or territory. In general usage, the term 'state' is usually synonymous with 'country'.

Stateless
A person not considered to be a national of any State. Stateless people include those who have been unable to claim a new nationality with the creation of new States, and those denied citizenship altogether, for example, some minority groups or children of parents of mixed origin, or children born in a country other than their parents' country of origin.

Refoulement
The Refugee Convention has a principle of non-refoulement to protect refugees from being returned to their own country if there is a danger they may be subjected to persecution.

Refugee
A person who is outside of their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.

Returnees
Refugees who have been able to return home after conflict has ended, a degree of stability has been restored and basic infrastructure has being rebuilt.

Unauthorised arrivals
The term most commonly used by Australian Government’s Department for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) for people who arrive in Australia without a valid visa. Under the Migration Act the correct legal term is ‘unlawful non-citizens’. Under Australian law they must be detained until removed from Australia or granted a visa.