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World Refugee Day 2020: How attitudes toward refugees have changed since the COVID-19 outbreak

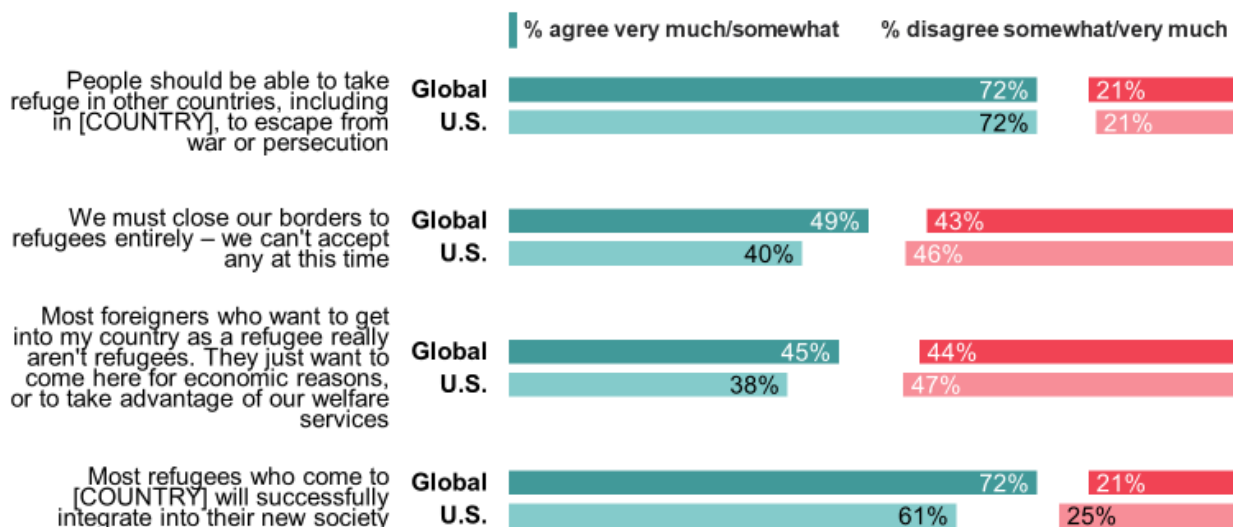
New survey shows global and U.S. opinion more supportive of the right to seek refuge from war or persecution, but less open to welcoming refugees and increasingly skeptical about their status.

Washington, DC, June 19, 2020 — A new Ipsos global study to mark World Refugee Day 2020 finds widespread and increasing agreement among Americans that people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including in the United States, to escape war or persecution. It is a view now held by 72% of U.S. adults, up from 62% a year ago. Globally, public opinion about the right to seek refuge in other countries, including in one’s own, is nearly identical to what it is in the U.S.

However, both in the United States (47%) and on average across all 26 countries in the study (49%), nearly half of all adults surveyed say their country should be less open to accepting refugees than before the coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak. Amid the pandemic, four in ten Americans (42%, up from 36% last year) and half of all adults globally (49%, up from 40% last year) agree that “we must close our borders to refugees entirely, we can’t accept any at this time.” The survey shows increasing skepticism about whether migrants coming into their country as refugees are genuine refugees.

On the other hand, Americans and, more generally, people across the world, have become more positive about the ability of refugees to successfully integrate into their new society.

The survey was conducted online, May 22-June 5, 2020, among nearly 18,000 adults aged 16-74 across 26 countries.





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Key findings:

- **Seven in ten adults globally (72%) believe in the fundamental right of refugees to seek refuge – including in their own country - to escape war or persecution, which is up 11 points from 61% in 2019. One in five (21%) disagree.**
 - There is majority support in favor of the right for people to seek refuge across all countries, which is a noticeable change from last year when opinion was much more divided.
 - Countries whose citizens are most likely to agree with the principle of the right to seek refuge are Sweden (81%), the Netherlands (80%) and Spain (79%). Levels of agreement have markedly increased in France, Belgium and Germany since last year. Among all 26 countries surveyed, agreement is lowest in South Korea (55%), Hungary (57%) and Malaysia (60%).
 - *In the U.S., the exact same proportions of adults agree (72%) and disagree (21%) as on average globally. Agreement is up 10 points from last year.*
- **Half of people globally (49%) agree that their country must close its borders to refugees and not accept any at this time, up nine points from 40% in 2019. However, four in ten people (43%) disagree.**
 - Those who agree that their country's borders should be closed to refugees at this time make up more than two thirds in Malaysia (82%), Turkey (71%) and India (68%), but less than four in ten in Spain (35%), Japan (37%) and Poland (37%).
 - Countries where views have hardened most about closing their borders since 2019 include Malaysia, Peru, South Africa and Chile.
 - *While Americans remain more likely to disagree (48%) than to agree (42%) that U.S. borders should be closed to refugees entirely, views have hardened since last year, when only 36% agreed. Support for closing U.S. borders varies widely across age groups, from only 27% among Americans aged 18-34 to 53% among those aged 50-74.*
- **When asked specifically about the coronavirus outbreak, again half across all 26 countries (49%) say that their country should be less open to accepting refugees compared with one in ten (10%) who say it should be more open. Three in ten say that it should remain the same as before the outbreak.**
 - There is not a single country with more than one in five people in favor of being more open to refugees at this time. Countries where there is greatest support for being less open are Turkey (67%), Russia (66%), Peru (65%) and Malaysia (64%).
 - Proportions of Americans who think that at this time, the country should be more open (11%), no more no less open (27%) and less open (47%) are very similar to those among all people surveyed globally.
 - *U.S. adults aged 50-74 (59%) are more likely to call for less openness than are those aged 18-34 (36%) and those aged 35-49 (43%).*





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- **Globally, three times as many people say their government should decrease the amount it spends on support for refugees around the world due to coronavirus/COVID-19 (38%) than say it should increase that amount (13%). Roughly one third (34%) say that their government should be spending the same as before the outbreak.**
 - People in India are most likely to support an increase in spending (33%) followed by those in Saudi Arabia and Chile (both 23%). Countries with the largest proportions of those who say spending should be decreased are Mexico (52%), Hungary and Canada (both 49%).
 - Americans are broadly in line with the global average with 12% supporting an increase in financial support for refugees around the world, while 32% want spending to stay the same and 40% want it to decrease.
 - *In the U.S., support for decreasing government spending for refugees is twice as large among those aged 50-74 (52%) than it is among those aged 18-34 (25%).*
- **Globally, close to six in ten people (59%) believe most foreigners who want to come to their country as refugees are not really refugees but come for economic reasons or to take advantage of welfare services – up five points from 54% last year. Three in ten people (31%) disagree as was the case last year.**
 - Doubt about the authenticity of refugees coming into their country ranges from as much as 75% in Malaysia and 74% in both India and Russia to only 44% in Canada and 47% in Brazil.
 - Countries where skepticism has grown significantly (by 10 points or more) since 2019 are Malaysia, Russia, Chile and Japan.
 - *Skepticism is not as prevalent in the U.S. as it is globally considering that only half of Americans (51%) agree most refugees coming to the country are not genuine. However, Americans show a broad generation gap as 66% of those aged 50-74 have doubts that most refugees are “real” while only 34% of those aged 18-34 do.*
- **However, the perception that most refugees will successfully integrate into their new society has gained ground since last year. Globally, close to half (45%) agree that refugees in their country will do so, up seven points from 38% in 2019. Global opinion on refugees’ ability to integrate is now evenly split as 44% disagree.**
 - Countries where optimism about refugees’ integration into their new society is most prevalent are Saudi Arabia (65%), India (64%) and Argentina (61%).
 - Those where it is least prevalent are South Korea (26%), Hungary and Belgium (both 28%).
 - Optimism has shifted significantly (by at least 10 points) in a positive direction in the United States, Australia, Japan, Brazil and Saudi Arabia as well as a number of European countries including France, Italy and Poland. The only country trending in the opposite direction is Peru.
 - *In the U.S., 54% agree that refugees will integrate successfully (up from 44% last year) while 35% disagree.*





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About the Study

These are the findings from a Global Advisor survey conducted by Ipsos among 17,997 adults aged 18-74 in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa, and Turkey and 16-74 in 21 other markets, May 22 – June 5, 2020. It was carried out via the Ipsos Online Panel System in 26 markets.

Approximately 1000+ individuals were surveyed in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S. Approximately 500+ individuals were surveyed in Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Hungary, India, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey.

The samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S. can be taken as representative of these countries' general adult population under the age of 75.

The samples in Brazil, Chile, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for these markets should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more "connected" segment of these populations.

The data is weighted so that each market's sample composition best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data.

Where results do not sum to 100 or the 'difference' appears to be +/-1 more/less than the actual, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of don't knows or not stated responses.

The precision of Ipsos online polls are calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 4.8 percentage points. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please visit the [Ipsos website](#).

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For more information on this news release, please contact:

Nicolas Boyon
Senior Vice President, US Public Affairs
+1 646 309 4879
nicolas.boyon@ipsos.com

Kate Silverstein
Media Relations Specialist, US Public Affairs
+1 718 755 8829
kate.silverstein@ipsos.com





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