

Justin Bullock:

Welcome back to Bush School Uncorked. This is your host Justin Bullock. As we've been saying in the podcast, we have had plans to make a number of episodes on asylum seeking in the US and refugees that are trying to come into the US and trying to understand that as a policy question, as a human question, as a social science question and get views from lots of different folks on what's going on at the Texas and Mexico border in particular.

Justin Bullock:

This has been something that's been a lot in the news and has also been heavily politicized across our federal and state politicians. So those of us at Bush School Uncorked wanted to take some time to delve into this issue a little bit more to see what was going on. This series is going to be probably between about three and five episodes, depending exactly on how many people we end up chatting with.

Justin Bullock:

You're going to get out a few numbers and big picture policy from me today. We're going to be talking to some other experts from Texas A&M, a couple of folks who are affiliated with the Migration and Borders Lab that the Mosbacher Institute here at the Bush School is getting up off the ground.

Justin Bullock:

So some great experts from across Texas A&M that we're going to talk with. Also going to be sharing the experiences that I had along with our podcast producer and current Bush School student, Faith Dingas, former student Mary Lu Hare, and a couple of other folks that traveled with us down to the refugee camp in Matamoros a few weeks ago.

Justin Bullock:

So the layout of this series is going to be today I'm going to be telling you a little bit about the series. I'm giving you some background on refugees and asylum seekers. Then we're going to share a couple of the experiences, conversations about the experiences we had while being down in Brownsville and traveling over to Matamoros to help provide some relief to the folks that are in those refugee camps as they're waiting for their asylum case to be heard in the US Court System.

Justin Bullock:

You get to see some responses to that. Then we'll talk with a couple of experts about what this process has looked like in the past, what are the more details of the legal aspect, what are some of the precedent throughout history and kind of giving you a more full picture of what's going on with refugees at the Texas and Mexico border.

Justin Bullock:

So there's a lot of terms here. We're going to be focusing mostly on asylum seekers as our specific group that we're going to be talking about. These are in general people who have fled their home country and in general they do it for a number of reasons that can allow them to qualify for asylum status in the US. This is coming from the United States citizenship and Immigration Services page on asylum.

Justin Bullock:

They say every year people come to the United States seeking protection because they have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to one of the following characteristics. These are their race, their religion, their nationality, their membership in a particular social group or their political opinion.

Justin Bullock:

The page goes on to say if you're eligible for asylum, you may be permitted to remain in the United States. To apply for asylum file a Form I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal, within one year of your arrival to the United States. There is no fee to apply for asylum.

Justin Bullock:

This is kind of the high level picture of how the asylum process just most generally works. If you went to go find the information on it on the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and as you may have heard in the news, some of the actual policies for this on the ground don't exactly mirror this description.

Justin Bullock:

In particular, at the beginning of 2019 the current US administration proposed what they were calling the Migrant Protection Protocols, which you can also find information about on the Department of Homeland Security's website, which is where this following information is from.

Justin Bullock:

The Secretary of Homeland Security, Nielsen, had this to say when the Migrant Protection Protocols were released on January 24, 2019. The Secretary says, "We have implemented an unprecedented action that will address the urgent humanitarian and security crisis at the Southern border."

Justin Bullock:

This humanitarian approach will help to end the exploitation of our generous immigration laws. The Migrant Protection Protocols represent a methodical, common sense approach, exercising longstanding statutory authority to help address the crisis at our Southern border."

Justin Bullock:

So that's kind of the unveiling quote and keeping in mind what we just read from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services website let me tell you a little bit about what Department of Homeland Security means when they say Migrant Protection Protocols. This is also commonly referred to as the Remain in Mexico Program.

Justin Bullock:

Again from the Department Homeland Security, they describe what are the Migrant Protection Protocols. The Migrant Protection Protocols, or MPP, are a US government action whereby certain foreign individuals entering or seeking admission to the US from Mexico, you legally or without proper documentation may be returned to Mexico and wait outside of the US for the duration of their immigration proceedings where Mexico will provide them with all appropriate humanitarian protections for the duration of their stay.

Justin Bullock:

We'll have links to both of these on the publishing of this episode that you can check out. There's been some followup to this from human rights organizations, in particular Human Rights Watch in studying with a couple of major universities have found some challenges with Remain in Mexico Program in part for the actual level of services that have been provided to the asylum seekers while they're waiting in Mexico to have their court time in the US.

Justin Bullock:

We'll talk a little bit more of some details about what that process actually looks like in some of the following episodes. So for now I want you to just have a general understanding that as US Citizenship and Immigration Services define asylum, the process for that can be if you've suffered persecution or fear that you might suffer persecution from things like race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion and that if you are eligible for asylum, you may be permitted to remain in the United States within one year of your arrival to the United States.

Justin Bullock:

That's kind of the basic process. Then the idea with MPP, the Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as Remain in Mexico, was that asylum seekers would not be allowed to come into the US as they wait for their hearing to be held about their asylum case. Whether they have credible fear of being persecuted for the reasons that we've mentioned.

Justin Bullock:

There'll be more about that. That's kind of the high level piece of that policy. We talk a little bit more when our podcast producer Faith Dingas interviews me for the first episode of this that we will have posted.

Justin Bullock:

Another thing that I wanted to give you as we get ready to bring you more episodes on asylum seeking in the US in particularly at the Texas and Mexico border, is getting you a few basic historical numbers that come from the Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics also, which we can provide a link for in this episode.

Justin Bullock:

This document does a nice job coming out of the Homeland Security's Department to talk about the history of US refugee resettlement, what it means to be eligible for a refugee to get that status and the refugee application process.

Justin Bullock:

So just a little bit from that report and the history of US refugee resettlement. Again, just quoting directly from the Office of Immigration Statistics, Office of Strategy, Policy and Plans from the Homeland Security.

Justin Bullock:

Says, "The United States has a long history of refugee resettlement. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was passed to address the migration crisis in Europe resulting from World War II wherein millions of people had been forcibly displaced from their home countries and could not return.

Justin Bullock:

By 1952 the United States admitted over 400,000 displaced people under the act. The United States extended its commitments to refugee resettlement through legislation, including the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and the Fair Share Refugee Act of 1960. The United States also used the attorney general's parole authority to bring large groups of persons into the country for humanitarian reasons, including over 38,000 Hungarian nationals beginning in 1956 and over a million Indochinese beginning in 1975.

Justin Bullock:

Obligations of the United States under the 1967 United Nations Protocol relating to the status of refugees to which the United States seceded in 1968 genuinely prohibits the United States from returning a refugee to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of a protected ground."

Justin Bullock:

We mentioned some of the protected grounds. "The Refugee Act of 1980 amended the INA to bring U.S. law into greater accord with US obligations under the protocol, which specifies a geographically and politically neutral refugee definition." The act also established formal refugee and asylum programs. The largest regional allocations in 2018, which is when the year which this report was released, were to the Africa and near East South Asia regions.

Justin Bullock:

These two regions together accounted for more than two thirds of all refugee admissions to the United States. Right. To qualify for refugee status, just to kind of bring this back to you one more time, a principal applicant must be of special humanitarian concern to United States, meet the refugee definition as set forth in the INA, be admissible under the INA, and not be firmly resettled in any foreign country.

Justin Bullock:

Then there's a little bit here just to keep in mind on the refugee application process, the US refugee admissions program establishes processing priorities that identify individuals and groups who have special humanitarian concerns with the United States and who are eligible for refugee resettlement consideration.

Justin Bullock:

The priority categories are priority one, individuals referred by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, a US Embassy or certain NGOs; priority two, groups of special humanitarian concern; and priority three, family reunification cases.

Justin Bullock:

So with those things in mind, I want to give you a little bit of an idea about how these numbers have looked in the most recent kind of several years, which again is shown in this Department of Homeland Security report. Let's see here, what should be good to highlight. Refugee arrivals by country, won't break it down by country, but we'll give you kind of the total amounts going back to a couple of years.

Justin Bullock:

So the refugee arrivals total amounts into the US in 2016 was 84,988, in 2017 was 53,691, and in 2018 that number was 22,405. So you'll see that there's about a three quarters fewer, 75% less of refugees admitted between 2016 down to 2018.

Justin Bullock:

Another piece of this that kind of gives you some broad ideas about the trends of asylum seekers. With seeking asylum there are affirmative cases and defensive cases. Affirmative cases, essentially again, we'll talk more about this are people who show up into the US and declare that they'd like asylum. Whereas defensive cases are protection against being sent back to a home country where they do not feel safe.

Justin Bullock:

So in 2016 there were approximately 115,000 affirmative asylum cases filed. In 2017 that was 139,000 and in 2018 that was 105,000. Defensive cases across the same year was 81,000 in 2016, 142,000 almost 143,000 in 2017, and 159,000 in 2018. So you can see from 2016, 2017 in 2018 a three quarters drop in the number of refugees admitted into the US. You can see about a steady number of asylum seekers declaring affirmative asylum cases. You can see defensive claims rising from 81,000 in 2016 to almost double in 2018.

Justin Bullock:

With specifically having asylum granted, individuals granted asylum either affirmatively or defensively across the same time span from 2016, 2017, 2018. In 2016 that number was 20,000, in 2017 that number was 26,000 and in 2018 that number was 38,000 with a increase there of about 10%.

Justin Bullock:

One of the things that these numbers highlight is there some trends that we'll be exploring together from 2016 all the way up through 2018. We'll also maybe get a little bit more information on more historical trends and what are some of the general precedent for, in particular asylum seekers, but also refugees and their relationship with US policy. What that's played out like in Texas.

Justin Bullock:

So this is just meant to give you a little bit of an overview of some of the policy pieces to be thinking about in terms of refugees and asylum seekers in US. We're going to be focusing again on the Texas case, given we're at Texas A&M.

Justin Bullock:

We've been able to see some of the things on the ground, which will be what we take you to next as responses to some of the things we've seen in an encampment in Matamoros as those who are hoping to get asylum in the US are waiting on their cases to be heard while living in a tent encampment just across the border and just across the fence from the tent court as it's known where those cases are being heard.

Justin Bullock:

Hope you follow us for these episodes. This is a little bit of a different series. It's not just going to be interviewing academic experts. It's going to have some of that. It's going to have some kind of giving you information like we've done today. There's also going to be just a piece of human experience from

people on the ground, people like us and some others who've actually gone to the refugee camps to see what life is like there and see what's going on there. Also from some people within these communities that might give us some idea of the grassroots what's going on within these communities.

Justin Bullock:

So we're trying to paint a broad picture for you in this series. Be a little bit different for us here at Bush School Uncorked so we hope you enjoy it. Thank you for listening to this intro to what's coming. We wanted to give you a heads up.

Justin Bullock:

So, looking forward to the continued conversations at Downtown Uncorked that we have coming up and for this mini series where we'll be bringing to a few episodes on the specific topic of refugees and asylum seekers as they try to seek entrance into the US, what the policy is, what are the impacts. Thanks for listening.