



Refugees Prayer Guide

THE ISSUE

Wars, conflicts, human rights violations, and persecution have caused 65.6 million people around the world to flee their homes (as of June 2018). Some are internally displaced people, living in camps inside their home countries. Others are asylum seekers—those whose request for sanctuary in another country is in process. Approximately 24.5 million live outside their home countries and have refugee status under international law; they've fled armed conflict or life-threatening persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group.¹ There are more refugees today than at any time since World War II.²

While fleeing, refugees are faced with extreme insecurity, not knowing where their next meal will come from or where they will sleep each night. It is difficult to know who to trust along the way, or even where they should go to for safety. While trying to find their way, they must also deal with significant trauma from what they are fleeing. And some are additionally exploited by human-smugglers who take advantage of their situation for monetary gain.

The vast majority of refugees are hosted in countries in the Majority World. Turkey, Pakistan, and Lebanon currently host the most refugees.³ Uganda, likewise, has opened its borders to more than a million South Sudanese refugees (as of August 2017).⁴ With an influx of refugees, resources quickly become depleted, leading tens of thousands to be trapped in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions or forced to migrate from one poor country to another.

Refugee camps are meant to provide temporary shelter until refugees can either return home or be resettled in a new country. But too often, people find themselves trapped in these camps for ten years or even longer. For instance, since borders into Balkan nations have closed to refugees, 60,000 people are now living indefinitely in what were meant to be transit camps in Greece.⁵ The needs are greater than just food, water, and shelter. Most fled with little or nothing of their own possessions, so they need clothing, cooking equipment, and health and hygiene items. Provision is needed for the education of the children, security for women and girls, new skills for the adults, and internal leadership to be developed.

Most refugees want to return home, if it becomes safe to do so. The number able to return home varies greatly from year-to-year, with an all-time low of 126,800 in 2014, and a high of more than 600,000 (2.7%) in 2017. Less than one percent of refugees ever resettle to a third country.

The long-term solution to the global refugee crisis requires reform and reconciliation in the refugee-producing nations. When the violence of civil wars, genocide, and persecution stop, so does the flow of people fleeing their homes. However, there is much the international community—and especially the churches in receiving communities—can do right now to minimize the suffering of those who have fled violence. Christ commands His followers to care for the foreigner, the orphan, the widow and the poor—characteristics that so often describe refugees.

CHALLENGES AND ROOT CAUSES:

Once people become refugees, having run for their lives from their home countries, they face a new set of challenges.

The Center for Victims of Torture has a framework called the Triple-Trauma Paradigm⁶, describing the trauma endured by refugees not just when they flee their homes, but also when they live in a temporary, unsettled situation, and when they (the fortunate few) resettle.

For those who are seeking or have been granted temporary asylum:

- Refugees in urban areas face discrimination from authorities and other residents. They may be considered inferior because they are poor, speak a foreign language, and don't fit in culturally. Or native-born residents may feel that migrants are "taking over" or see them as a burden to society. Refugees rarely have access to education, healthcare, legal employment, or rights of any kind. Many describe abuse by police and living in constant fear in the shadows.
- Refugees in camps face stiff competition for limited resources, total dependence upon the United Nations or officials running the camp, isolation from the outside world, and little if any access to medical care, education, or employment. One refugee described his time in a camp as, "Like being in a prison without bars."
- It is not uncommon for refugees to live decades in camps or cities of asylum, in a perpetual state of limbo and vulnerability.
- Women and children (who make up the vast majority of refugees) are particularly vulnerable to violence once they have been displaced. Living in asylum, in a camp, or in a city, they risk sexual assault, extortion, exploitation, and other human rights violations.⁷ Unaccompanied children are extremely vulnerable to assault and human trafficking. More than 10,000 migrant and refugee children have gone missing in Europe alone since 2014.⁸

For those permanently resettling in a third country:

- Many western countries have greatly restricted the number of refugees allowed to resettle within their borders. So opportunities for refugees to resettle in a third country are extremely rare. The few who do resettle often find less-than-welcoming host communities.
- Refugees who don't have friends and allies to help them integrate are especially vulnerable to predatory landlords, employers, lenders, and others whose claims of "This is just how we do things here" go unchallenged. Unfamiliar with local laws, typically learning a new language, and conditioned by years of oppression, refugees often hesitate to challenge those in authority.
- Refugee children face their own challenges, including "third-culture" confusion, attending school in a new language, adolescence in communities with gang presence, and high pressure to succeed even with limited resources. Children usually learn language more quickly than their parents. The downside to this is that children often carry adult-sized responsibilities: getting a job, translating documents and conversations, and in many ways, protecting the family. This reversal of traditional family roles is challenging for everyone.

- Many refugees exhibit physical scars, but all refugees have invisible scars. Mental health is hard to treat because of stigma and language barriers. Rates of depression and suicide are higher among refugees than the general population of their receiving communities. Research shows that mental health improves simply when refugees are embraced by their new communities, befriended, and given opportunities to thrive.

The root causes of much of the ongoing suffering of refugees is embedded in wrong beliefs and broken systems built on those beliefs.

Closed-system thinking - Many people in host countries believe, “There are only so many resources to go around.” We see people as “mouths to feed.” This leads to deep concern that immigrants will take our resources, leaving less for ourselves and our families. This sentiment in Kenya, for example, has led to ration cuts in Dadaab refugee camp, discrimination against urban refugees, and policies forcing refugees to return to their home countries.

Cultural Protectionism - When many refugees settle in a new area, the local people often worry that their culture will change or be destroyed. For instance, the influx of Syrian refugees into Europe has been followed by a new wave of fear of Islamic influence in Germany and France.

But the Bible tells a different story—that every person is created in the image of God with inherent value. We were made to create, not only to consume, resources. When people are given the opportunity to reach their God-given potential, problems can be solved, resources multiplied, and good works done that benefit society. The Bible is also clear that God’s people are called to show hospitality to foreigners among us (Leviticus 19:33-34) and that we are to care for orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27). For those who follow Christ, these commands overshadow cultural norms or personal comfort.

Furthermore, a theme of the book of 1 Peter is that we should consider ourselves citizens of the kingdom of God living as exiles in an ungodly world—a teaching that precludes nationalism and puts all Christians shoulder-to-shoulder with the most vulnerable among us.

STATISTICS

Of all the refugees in the world today, **less than one percent** will ever get the chance to resettle to a third country.

(National Immigration Forum)

1 in every 113 people on earth are either asylum seekers, internally displaced or a refugee. More than half of the refugee population is under the age of 18.

(UNHCR)

More than half of today’s refugees come from only three nations: Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan.

(UNHCR)

More than 3,100 migrants (many fleeing violence in Sub-Saharan Africa) drowned in 2017 alone, while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

(NPR)

HOW TO PRAY

Begin by worshipping God for who He is. He is our Shepherd (John 10:11-18) who promises to never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrew 13:5). He enters into our sorrows—He allowed His own son to experience life as a refugee when Joseph took the family to Egypt to escape Herod's plan to murder Jesus (Luke 2:13-18). He is a shelter, a fortress, and a shield (Psalm 46, 91).

Pray for those who are fleeing violence to be brought into a place of safety. Pray that their basic needs for clean food, water, and adequate shelter will be met. Pray that they would know God as their protector, provider, and redeemer. Pray that families that have been separated would be reunited with displaced family members and that they will remain unified as they reach places of asylum, resettle together in a new nation, or work toward returning to their home country. Pray that God would become the refugees' anchor in the midst of turbulent transition and uncertainty.

Pray for those in camps to have hope in the midst of ongoing trauma and deprivation. Pray that camps would be well-organized and provided for by the church and the international community, to serve all the needs of the refugees. Pray for protection, especially over women and girls, who often face further violence and sexual abuse while living in camps. Pray for opportunities to resettle outside of camps or to return home.

Pray for relief agencies to be used by the Lord as outlets for physical and spiritual provision. Pray that these agencies would have adequate supplies to meet the needs of the families they serve. Pray that Christian workers would be sent out to partner with relief work in nations accepting refugees and would be used as vessels to pour out God's hope and generosity.

Pray for many millions of **unaccompanied refugee minors** who have no parent or relative to care for them. Pray for trustworthy strangers around the world to open their homes to these children.

Pray for refugees who are resettling in third countries:

- Pray for resettled refugee elders who feel disoriented and purposeless, often isolated and lonely inside their apartments. Pray for God to send friends to them and for them to envision new lives.
- Pray for resettled refugee mothers who are isolated inside their apartments, caring for young children and unable to venture out into a strange society. Pray for God to send friends to them and for them to be able to learn the local language.
- Pray for refugee parents who often work multiple minimum-wage jobs to provide for their families. Ask God to encourage them and give them avenues to prosper.
- Pray for pastors of refugee congregations who carry the extremely heavy burdens of their flocks. Ask God to protect, equip, and bless them as they serve.

Pray for nations receiving refugees to be marked by the generosity and hospitality of the gospel. Pray that compassion would motivate them to open their borders and provide in abundance for refugees' needs. Pray that national leaders would operate from a place of humility and mercy rather than fear or prejudice as they care for refugees and asylum seekers.

- Pray for teachers, counselors, and administrators in schools with refugee students, that they would have the wisdom and resources they need to empower this unique population of children.
- Pray for people in the receiving communities to break free of their fear of those who are different and to reach out with love and friendship to their refugee neighbors.
- Pray for people in power—whose words and signatures can change the course of a whole family's future—to realize the sanctity of human life, to hear the Spirit of God, and to take actions that lead to the flourishing of all people.

- Pray for revival in the Church in the receiving communities—that the body of Christ would embrace its call to be salt and light, to humble itself and sacrifice itself, to find its security in the Lord alone, and to share the hope of Christ with the lost and hurting people arriving at our doorstep.

Pray for governments, rebel groups, terrorist organizations, and persecutors to cease the violence that is causing so much displacement. Pray that redemption would come to those whose desire for power and control fuels the refugee crisis. Pray that God would reveal His love and forgiveness to them; pray His kindness would lead them into a place of repentance. Ask God to restore justice, peace, and godly governance to nations around the world.

Worship God for His promises and faithfulness. He promises to provide for every need, even as He provides for the birds and flowers (Matthew 6:25ff). He hears the needy (Psalm 69:33) and delivers the afflicted (Job 36:15).

SCRIPTURES FOR MEDITATION

Praying through scriptures and songs as we intercede for vulnerable people can help us connect with the heart of God.

God's Response to the Refugee:

Genesis 16:13	Psalm 91
Deuteronomy 10:17-19	Psalm 107:4-6
Psalm 146:7-9	John 14:18
Psalm 12:5	
Psalm 46	

Our Response to the Refugee:

Exodus 23:9	Zechariah 7:8-10
Leviticus 19:9-10,	Matthew 25:25-36
Leviticus 19:33-34	Galatians 5:14
Deuteronomy 10:18-19	Hebrews 13:1-2
Deuteronomy 31:12-13	James 2:14-17
1 Samuel 23:16	1 John 3:18
Jeremiah 22:3-5	

REFUGEES IN SCRIPTURE:

Adam and Eve	Esau	Ezra	All of Israel
Cain	Joseph	Nehemiah	Jesus
Noah	Moses	Esther	Peter
Abraham and Sarah	Joshua	Mordecai	John
Lot	Naomi	Jeremiah	The early church
Hagar and Ishmael	Ruth	Ezekial	
Isaac	David	Daniel	
Jacob	Elijah	Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego	



Truths to declare or pray:

God's faithfulness
God's plans for good
God celebrates a diversity of cultures
He is the God who sees (El Roi)
Each person is made in the image of God and loved by Him
God can work anything into good for those who love Him

Related Songs and Hymns:

To Every Generation
My Defender
Never Once
Great is Thy Faithfulness

SOURCES TO GO DEEPER

The Refugee Highway Partnership - <http://www.refugeehighway.net/>

International Association for Refugees - <https://iafr.org/>

Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis (2015, by World Relief) Includes free small-group study guide. - <https://www.worldrelief.org/seekingrefuge/>

What Is the What, by Dave Eggers

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SOURCES

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