

Surprise Encounters

**Stories of Immigration,
Hospitality,
and Changed Lives**

Coordinated and written by:
Ezio Castelli

Designed and edited by:
Maura Kate Costello

Produced by:
Alexi-Noelle O'Brien-Hosein

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INTRODUCTION



The present global trends in immigration can certainly be explained by several key factors: poverty, hunger, violence, disregard of human rights and the search for economic and intellectual fulfillment unavailable at home are among the root causes of this exodus. Any approach to immigration that ignores its root causes is short-sighted and will ultimately fail. On the one hand, neither abstract legalism nor nativism are adequate responses to the question posed by the presence of immigrants. On the other hand, a naive, openness to immigration, forgetful of the profound and complex challenges facing a society that hosts and welcomes immigrants, is also not enough. Thus does immigration pose a huge and complex challenge to political institutions, governments, and private agencies involved in regulating and assisting it.

However, the real question that concerns each one of us, in our day-to-day life, is not how we face immigration, but how we face immigrants, real human beings with needs, talents, limits, and expectations. When this personal dimension is put at the forefront, we may find, as this exhibit shows, surprising stories of immigration and hospitality going to the heart of the problem and bearing witness to an “impossible unity.”

*“Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave, or who are forced to leave their home for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all, for **being** more.”*

Pope Francis for the 2014 day of Migrants and Refugees).

HUMANITY ON THE MOVE

Human beings have always been on the move, and they have done so in search of new economic opportunities; to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses; or in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or other environmental factors.

Today, more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born. In 2015 alone there were over 244 million people who immigrated to a new country.



Health Inspection of Immigrants in the 19th Century.

Photo credit: National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health.

Notably, civil and transnational conflicts have caused a significant increase in displacement in recent years (Figure 1). Of the 244 million immigrants in 2015, roughly 65 million have been forcibly displaced, including over 40 million people internally displaced, over 21 million refugees, and around 3 million asylum-seekers (Figure 2).

244 million immigrants in 2015

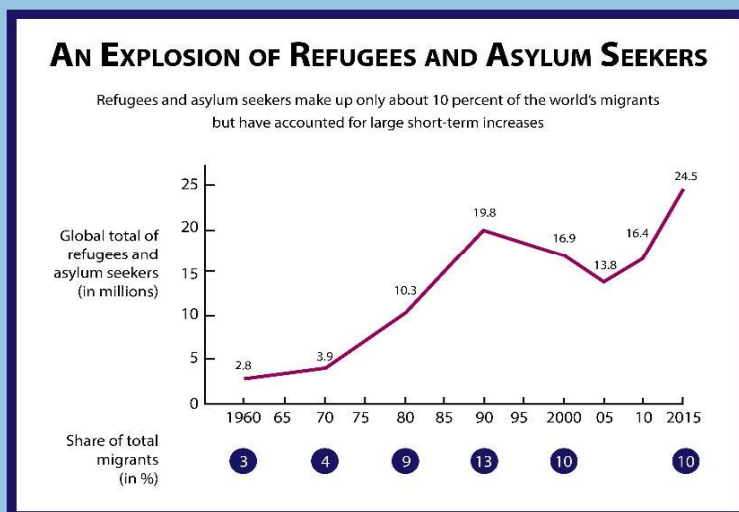


Figure 1. An Explosion of Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
Source: Ilaria Schnyder, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame

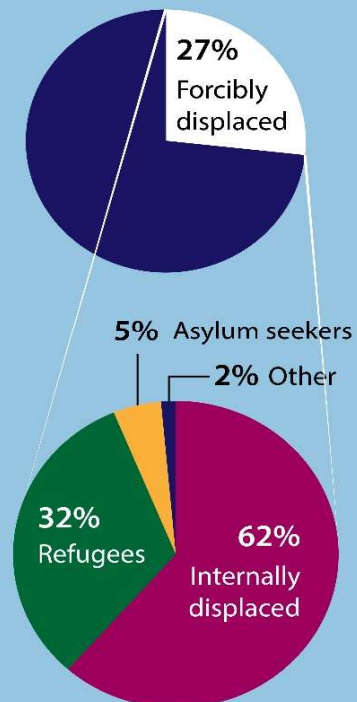


Figure 2. Percentage of displaced persons in 2015
Source: United Nations

OPPORTUNITY, DANGER, AND RISK ON THE JOURNEY

Immigration has always provided tremendous opportunities for countries, businesses, and communities to grow and develop, but not all immigration occurs in positive circumstances or along safe routes. Many people have lost their lives in transit. In addition, refugees and immigrants are at greater risk of being trafficked for forced labor and/or sexual exploitation.

The images in the news on immigration in recent years have shocked the world: rickety boats piled high with people seeking safety; women, men, and children drowning in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, thousands dying in their attempts to escape violence and poverty on the U.S.-Mexico border or in the Sahara desert; governments erecting fences and walls at borders where people used to cross freely; and thousands of missing children, many falling prey to criminal groups.



Hamida Begum, 27, in yellow headscarf, takes a boat with her five children and other refugees to the Teknaf peninsula in Bangladesh, after crossing the Naf river from Myanmar the previous night. *Photo credit: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Caritas*

According to the International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrant Project, 7,927 immigrants worldwide died or went missing in 2016, 26% more than in 2015 (Figure 3).

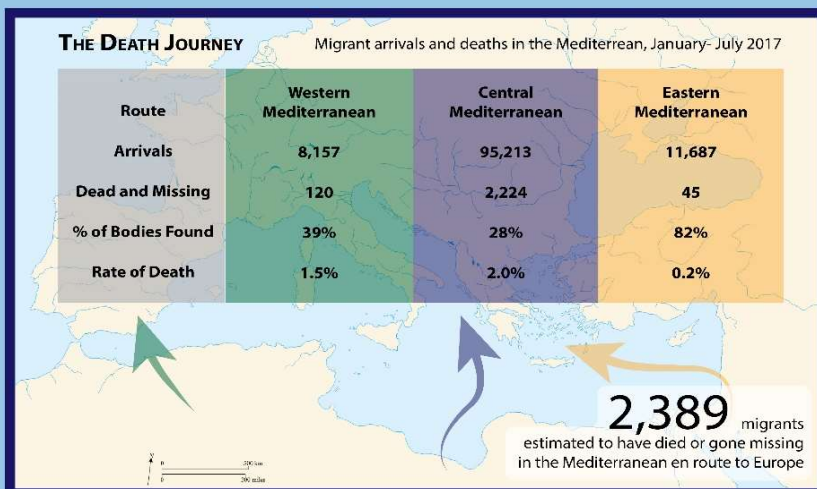


Figure 3. Death on the Mediterranean by Ilaria Schnyder

Individuals who arrive at their destination safely, then have to face the risk of deportation. Additionally, even those who immigrate legally, particularly those who come as domestic and construction workers through private licensed agencies are confronted with abuse, violation of basic human rights, and disregard for labor legislation.



Syrian refugees wait on the Syrian side of the border near Sanliurfa, Turkey, June 10, 2015. *Photo credit: CNS/Sedat/Suna, EPA*

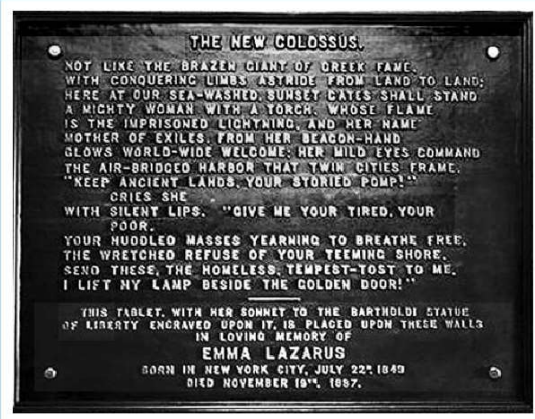


Migrants thread their way along footpaths just north of the Mexico/Arizona border in 2007. *Photo credit: LA Times*



Lampedusa, Italy, June 2017. *Photo Credit: Ilaria Schnyder*

WELCOMING THE "HUDDLED MASSES"



The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 established three primary paths for legal immigration into the United States. An individual seeking to immigrate must fall into one of the following categories:

- Reunifying with family members that are either US citizens or lawful permanent residents
- Meeting legitimate labor needs
- Seeking humanitarian protection as a refugee or asylum-seeker.

In addition to legal entry, there are also many immigrants who have no other choice than to immigrate illegally.

MEETING LABOR NEEDS

Employment-based visas for permanent immigration are limited to 140,000 visas per year and have accounted for 12-22% of legal immigration in the last decade. Additionally, approximately 50,000 foreign individuals are granted permanent residency every year through the diversity visa lottery, which is open to all legal immigrants.

Noncitizens who enter the United States for tourism, work, or study reasons are admitted with a temporary nonimmigrant status. There are over 70 categories of visas for nonimmigrants. In 2011, the US granted or issued 7.5 million nonimmigrant visas, 447,410 student visas, and more than 240,00 temporary work visas.

Immigration has shaped the identity of the United States as a nation. Immigrants have contributed and continue to contribute profoundly to many of the economic, social, and political processes of the US. Today, according to the 2016 Current Population Service (CPS), there are 84.3 million citizens that were foreign-born or children of foreign-born parents currently living in the US.

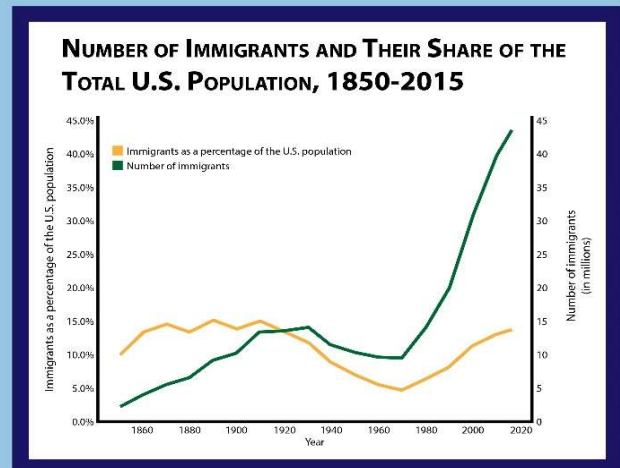


Figure 4. Number of Immigrants and Their Share of the Total U.S. Population, 1850-2015

Source: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub

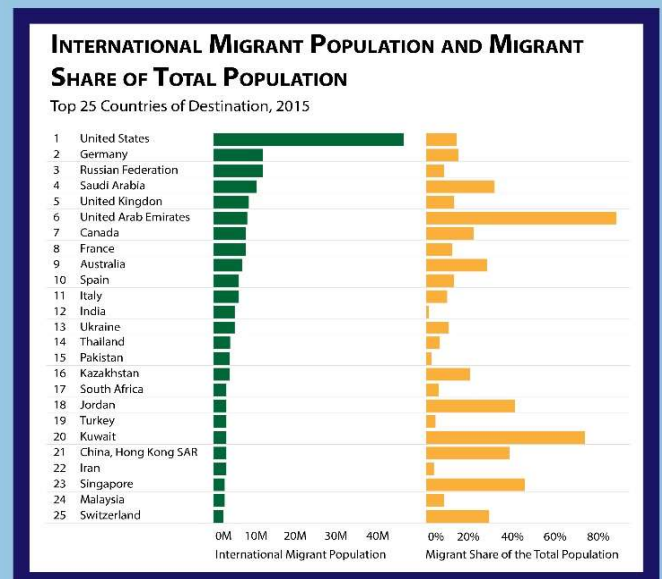


Figure 5. International Migrant Population and Migrant Share of Total Population, Top 25 Countries of Destination

Source: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub

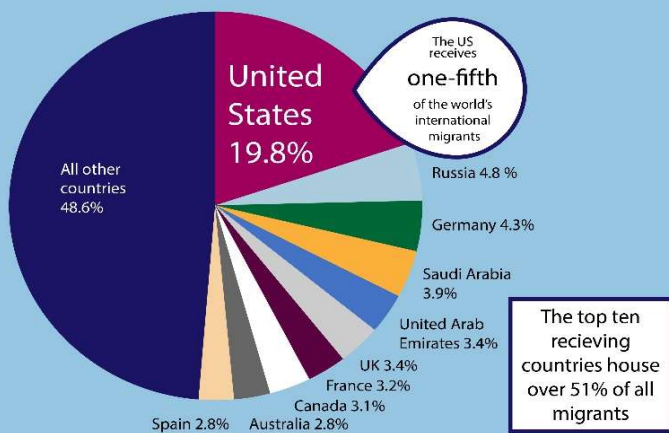


Figure 6. Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin, 2013
Source: United Nations

The history of US immigration law and policy has always reflected the nation's variable political climate and diverse values. Today, the United States looks to be on the threshold of major immigration reforms. Even though current immigration legislation needs to be updated since its last revision in 1960, nevertheless, federal immigration agencies have the authority to exercise discretion in deciding whether or not to enforce immigration law according to current needs and values.

SEEKING HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION

TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS

More than 320,000 individuals from the countries listed in Figure 7, have time-limited permission to live and work in the U.S. under Temporary Protected Status (TPS). They can acquire this status if, in their countries of origin, they face war, hurricanes, earthquakes, or other catastrophic events that made it dangerous for them to live there.

Nation	Estimate	Expires
Haiti	46,000	Jan. 22, 2018
El Salvador	195,000	March 9, 2018
Syria	8,300	March 31, 2018
Nepal	8,950	June 24, 2018
Honduras	57,000	July 5, 2018
Yemen	1,000	Sept. 3, 2018
Somalia	250	Sept. 17, 2018
Sudan	1,040	Nov. 2, 2018
Nicaragua	2,550	Jan. 5, 2019
South Sudan	70+	May 2, 2019

Note: Syrian estimate includes 2,500 people who were expected to apply for TPS

Figure 7. Immigrants from 10 Nations with Temporary Protected Status
Source: Pew Research Center, U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimates included Federal Register notice, 2016-2017

UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRATION

Unauthorized immigrants enter the United States by crossing the land border clandestinely between formal ports of entry, using fraudulent documents for admission at a port of entry, or overstaying a valid temporary visa. The population of unauthorized immigrants began to rise in the 1970s, and peaked at around 12 million in 2007. Since then, it has slightly declined; for example, in 2011, around 11.1 million people immigrated to the US, according to the Pew Hispanic Center (Figure 8).

The arrival of large numbers of unauthorized immigrants has revitalized many communities in the US and contributed to local economic growth. At the same time, rapid and unchecked social change, in addition to the pressure on public services that this population brings, has sparked anger and resentment, making immigration a contested issue of national concern.

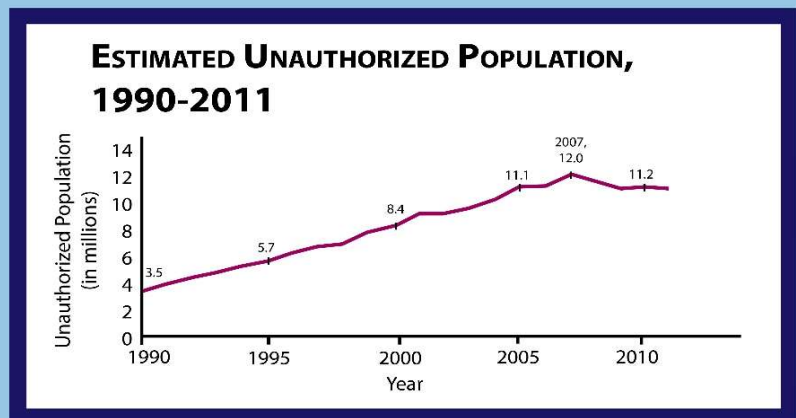


Figure 8. Estimated Unauthorized Population, 1990-2011
Source: Pew Hispanic Center, Bob Warren

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Refugees are granted humanitarian relief in a foreign country, often a neighboring country that offers a safe haven. From there, they enter the United States for resettlement under refugee status. Asylum-seekers apply for humanitarian status once they have already reached or are living in the country.

The United States has historically accepted more refugees for resettlement than all other countries combined. In the last 30 years, the US has capped the number of admitted refugees to 100,000 per year, on average. However, that number was lowered to 50,000 in 2017.

RESETTLEMENT EFFORTS

Around 10 national voluntary resettlement agencies, either within the State Department or the Department of Health and Human Services, provide reception and placement

services for refugees arriving in the United States. These agencies rely on government funding, in addition to their own human and financial resources, such as donations, fundraising, countless volunteers, etc., to provide refugees with a range of services, including sponsorship, initial housing, food and clothing, orientation, and counseling.

One such agency, the Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the US Catholic Conference of Bishops, in partnership with Catholic Charities, has resettled approximately 30% of the refugees that arrive in the U.S. each year. In addition, the MRS is one of two agencies that cooperates with the State Department and the HHS in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URM). The URM ensures that eligible unaccompanied refugee minors receive the full range of assistance, care, and services available to all foster children in the United States. Between 2011 and 2015 the MRS served more than 9,205 unaccompanied minors.

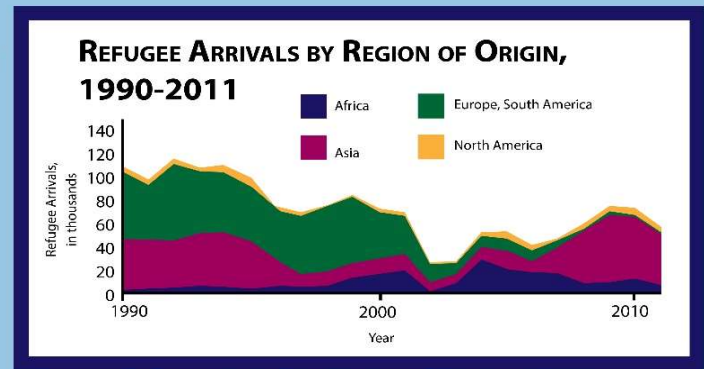


Figure 9. Refugee Arrivals by Region of Origin, 1990-2011
Source: DHS, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 1990-2011

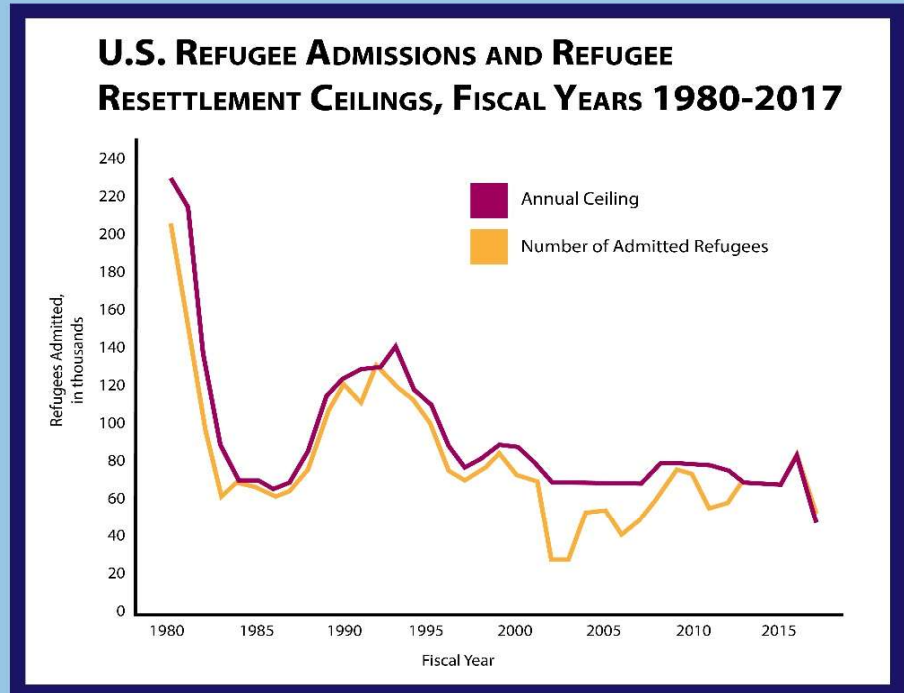


Figure 10. Refugee Admissions and Refugee Resettlement Ceilings, Fiscal Years 1980-2017
Source: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub

ACCOMPANIMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS

Amidst the sea of numbers, statistics, policies, all of our opinions, and the many current debates, we risk forgetting the heart of the matter. The game of immigration is played at the ground level, the grassroots, and the key players are the immigrants and those who welcome them.

The issue of immigration invites us to see immigrants and refugees “as persons, [to see] their faces and [listen] to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation,” responding to them “in a way which is always human, just, and fraternal” (Pope Francis’s address to the US Congress, September 2015).

With their arrival, their presence in our midst, and their need to be welcomed, to settle, to flourish, to integrate into our communities, they are a reminder and a challenge to revitalize and invigorate our openness to what is different from us. They provide us with the opportunity to be interested in and to “encounter” the other, whose dreams and desires are the same as ours: to move toward fulfillment.

While institutions and programs are necessary in assisting individuals through the immigration process, the real story unfolds at the human level. The will and drive to seek a better life driving the immigrants, and the generosity and compassion in those who welcome them are what turns immigration into integration, thus creating the impossible unity that all of us desire.

“Nothing in the entire universe can compare with a person, from the first instant of his conception until the last step of his decrepit old age . Every human being possesses within himself a principle by which he depends on no one, a foundation of inalienable rights, a fount of values”

Luigi Giussani, At the Origin of the Christian Claim

“Hope is the force that drives the hearts of those who depart, leaving home, their homeland, at times their relatives and families — I am thinking of the migrants —, in search of a better life which is worthier of them and their loved ones. And it is also the impulse in the heart of those who welcome: the desire to encounter, to get to know each other, to dialogue.... Hope is the force that drives us “to share the journey”, because the journey is made jointly: by those who come to our land, and by us who go towards their heart, to understand them, to understand their culture, their language. It is a joint journey by two parties”

Pope Francis, General Audience, September 27, 2017

Griffin and Noor Families

Houston, TX

Mark and Katherine Griffin had always given to charities, but they wanted to make a more personal contribution. Through inquiries at Katherine's work, they were connected to Catholic Charities, which, in turn, connected them with Iqbal and Wazeera Noor and their children, a refugee family from Afghanistan. Katherine shares her experience here.

"We wanted an opportunity that allowed us to share the experience with our children [...] to grow in empathy for others, and to hold an appreciation for all the privileges [we] enjoy."

Getting Started

The Griffins started by gathering some of the things that the family needed (list provided by Catholic Charities). One of the items were shoes, so on their first visit, they took them to buy them. "The Noors insisted on getting shoes that were a couple of sizes too big so that the children would have room to grow. They are so very careful with their limited finances, and so it's the "extras" that are beyond their budget."

After their first visit with the Noors, Katherine shared the rest of the list of things they needed on a neighborhood Google group. An unbelievable number of donations poured in from neighbors. "We filled an entire minivan and SUV! [This also gave us] the opportunity to meet a few neighbors we did not know, as they dropped donations off at our house and asked about our efforts to help. It was humbling to see how much



"extra" we all have, and very satisfying to share it with a family that could really use it."



Since their arrival, the Griffins and Noors meet frequently, alternating homes, to share meals, their cultures, and to experience different things in Houston. "Whenever we say goodbye to the Noors [after a visit], we are filled with a remarkably deep sense of fulfillment. There's something about reaching far outside of yourself that is incredibly rewarding."

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

The biggest challenge they faced was “definitely the language barrier. Only Iqbal, the husband and father, speaks English fluently. However, it is amazing to watch our children play together, completely unhindered by what we would consider a lack of ability to communicate.”

To attempt to bridge the communication barrier, Katherine has been learning Pashto, which she has found very challenging. “It gives me an appreciation for what they are experiencing, and particularly how difficult it is to acquire a new language as an adult.



EXPERIENCE GAINED

The Noors have given me an appreciation for how very little we actually need. Iqbal only makes about \$300 more per month than rent for his family, but he manages to provide everything they absolutely need. He works a night shift so that he can be around to help his family as they need him during the day, since he is the only English speaker (doctor appointments, school appointments, etc.). He has enrolled at a community college to obtain a degree so that he will be able to get a better job in the future. It is inspiring to watch him and his family work so hard to make a life for themselves here.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

“We have heard that the biggest single factor for refugee families settling successfully is having a personal connection with someone already established within the community. We hope we can help the Noors achieve that success. What we are doing is nowhere near radical, but I believe it’s a step in the right direction. If more people made a conscious effort to make a difference, I think we could actually make this world a better place.



The Hamou Family

Old Lyme, CT

Hani Hamou and his wife, Yaldiz, moved to the U.S. a little over a year ago with their children Darin, Kamber, and Mohamed. The Hamous are Syrian, and their children were born and raised in Aleppo. Four years ago, they fled their home in Syria, and they haven't been back since.

The Hamous loved their life in Aleppo; Hani had a nice job, the schools were good, and they had a nice home. Yaldiz lived in Aleppo her whole life, and to this day, she still misses it. Four years ago, when Kamber was 14, Darin 15, and Mohamed 8, they left Syria for Turkey. The conditions in Turkey were difficult— it was very crowded and people did not treat refugees kindly.

However, things changed when the Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS), located in New Haven, CT, matched the Hamous with a group in Old Lyme, CT, who would welcome them and assist them in resettling there. On May 24th, 2016, the family left Turkey for America.

When they arrived, they faced many challenges, ranging from the mundane—filling out endless amounts of paperwork, visiting doctors and dentists, getting registered and enrolled in school, to the monumental—learning English, actually going to school after years of no formal education, adapting to a totally new culture, finding jobs and becoming independent—the list is endless.

Nevertheless, the Hamous have been undaunted. They come from a world where daily struggle is the rule rather than the exception. But now, for the first time in years, their struggle is not a burden: instead of fighting for survival, they are striving for a better life.



The Hamous have made incredible strides since arriving. They're finding work, learning English, learning the customs of our country, and at the same time are keeping some Syrian traditions alive as well.

One member of the group that received the Hamou family, Doina Lovoie-Gonci, said of the Hamou family: "What stands out in sharp relief is the incredibly resilient, patient, open, generous, kind and good humored spirit with which the family embraced each new step and challenge. They have shown incredible grace, courage and heart in taking on this new life, and they have opened their hearts to us in the process. We thought we were doing a good thing... instead we were rewarded with a gift that will continue to give: their friendship as full members of our community."

Source: Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services

THE WORLD IN A CLASSROOM

“They tell me that one of the nice things about this school, about your work, is that some students come from other places, and many from other countries. That is nice! Even though I know that it is not easy to have to move and find a new home, to meet new neighbors and new friends. It is not easy, but

you have to start. At the beginning it can be pretty hard. Often you have to learn a new language, adjust to a new culture, even a new climate. There is so much to learn! And not just homework, but so other many things too.

The good thing is that we also make new friends. This is very important, the new friends we make. We meet people who open doors for us, who are kind to us. They offer us friendship and understanding, and they try to help us not to feel like strangers, foreigners. People work hard to help us feel at home. Even if we sometimes think back on where we came from, we meet good people who help us feel at home. How nice it is to feel that our school, or the places where we gather, are a second home. This is not only important for you, but also for your families. School then ends up being one big family. A family where, together with our mothers and fathers, our grandparents, our teachers and friends, we learn to help one another, to share our good qualities, to give the best of ourselves, to work as a team, for that is very important, and to pursue our dreams.”

Pope Francis, Visit to Harlem High School, September 25, 2015



Source: Vatican News



Source: Vatican News

THE LAW OF EXISTENCE

Above all, our very nature requires us to be interested in others. When there is something beautiful within us we desire to communicate it to others. When we see others who are worse off than we are, we desire to help them with something of ours. This need is so original, so natural, that it is within us before we are conscious of it. We call it the law of existence. We become ourselves to the extent that we live this need and this requirement. Communicating to others gives us the experience of completing ourselves. This is so true that, if we are not able to give, we experience ourselves as incomplete beings. To be interested in others, to communicate to others, enables us to fulfill the supreme and, indeed, the only task in life: to become ourselves, to complete ourselves.

Luigi Giussani, The Meaning of Charitable Work

Hospitality and sharing one's own life and resources comprise the only way to be in relationship with others that is worthy of our humanity, because it is only through welcoming and sharing that a person is really a person, that is to say, a relationship with the Infinite.

Luigi Giussani, Il Miracolo dell'Ospitalità
