

JUST WORLD

Seeking Refuge

“It is one thing to take people from the water, but another to offer a life of dignity.” (Bishop William Crean, Trócaire)

Refugees or Immigrants?

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the great crossroads of the Refugee Highway. These are the well-worn routes that forcibly displaced people travel in search of safety, peace and a normal life. For some people, it is hard to grasp the concept of the difference between a refugee and an immigrant.

An immigrant is a person who makes a conscious decision to leave their home country in order to settle in another. Their decision is often prompted by the promise of a more prosperous life, work and education.

The difference between a ‘refugee’ and an ‘immigrant’ is ‘choice’. Whilst immigrants have the choice to relocate from their country of origin, refugees do not have this choice. They are often fleeing an area of war or persecution where their lives are at constant risk. The UN’s refugee agency reported that last year there was a 20% increase on the number of refugees worldwide.

Why are people leaving?

More than 60 million people worldwide are now forcibly displaced as a result of **conflict and persecution**, the highest number since the mid-1990s. Several million people remain displaced because of **natural disasters**, although updated statistics are not available.

More than 15 million of the uprooted are refugees who fled their home countries, while another 27 million are people who remain displaced by conflict within their own homelands – so-called ‘internally displaced people.’

Major refugee populations include Syrians (3 Million externally and 6.5 million internally), Palestinians (4.8 million), Afghans (2.9 million), Iraqis (1.8 million), Somalis (700,000), Congolese (456,000), Myanmar (407,000), Colombians (390,000), Sudanese (370,000). Trócaire works in most of these countries.

Risking the Journey:

In 2014, more than 250,000 people tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea, of whom 3,702 are known to have died. The deaths of all migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe by sea in 2015 now total 2,373. The International Organisation for Migration has said that last year, from late August through the end of December, over 1200 people died at sea

“Refugees have been deprived of their homes, but they must not be deprived of their futures”

(UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon)

Lara's Story*:

Lara is a Palestinian from Syria and 40 year old mother of four. She has been living in Lebanon for the past 2 years where she fled with her twin girls now aged 7 yrs. Lara was married at the age of 15 and has a son and daughter in their 20's. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria more than 4 years ago, Yarmouk refugee camp, has been besieged for long periods by Syrian armed forces, so that many people had little or no access to food. Some of the worst affected resorted to eating domesticated animals and grass. Lara and her second husband both activists in Syria had been involved in trying to bring food supplies into Yarmouk refugee camp, Damascus.

One day while driving with Lara and their two daughters her husband was shot by sniper fire. Her husband died, but Lara and her young children survived the car crash. Lara decided to leave Syria for the sake of her young daughters and managed to get safe passage for them, and her older son and daughter to Lebanon. To leave Yarmouk herself, Lara was forced to rely on the courage of a stranger, who agreed to smuggle her out of the camp in the boot of his car, at great risk to both of them. She then walked toward the border and crossed the anti-Lebanon mountain range to the Lebanese border in the freezing cold, spurred on by the hope of being reunited with her daughters.

In Lebanon despite having no family or personal connections, she found shelter amongst the large Palestinian community there and set about finding somewhere reasonably safe and affordable to live. She also had to seek help in dealing with the multiple traumas suffered by her young daughters. These young girls had witnessed the brutal murder of their father, narrowly escaped death themselves, and then experienced a violent relocation from their own homeland to Lebanon initially forced to leave their mother behind.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria 4 years ago, more than 55,000 Palestinians fled into Lebanon seeking shelter and support amongst host communities there. These communities in Lebanon were already amongst the most marginalised, and the additional burden has added immensely to the poverty, stress and tension. The situation and status of the Palestinian community in Syria was relatively speaking much better than in Lebanon, with better access to social services, jobs and property rights. This means the dislocation of that community into Lebanon and the dramatically reduced living conditions has been experienced by many as a double trauma. Lara is currently working with a local Syrian organisation seeking to provide support to the most vulnerable Syrians, and Palestinian communities now living in Lebanon.

**Names have been changed in both stories to protect individuals*

A Christian Response; Jesus the refugee:

We often fail to recognise that Jesus too was a refugee child. Born in a stable because there was no welcome for Mary and Joseph. Both having been forced to flee to Bethlehem under the threat of having their infant male child murdered by Herod. The issue of migration and the refugee crises facing the EU is something that Pope Francis has been speaking about since his election as Pope in 2013. Indeed, his first official visit outside the Vatican as Pope was to the island of Lampedusa in Italy where he met with thousands of displaced persons as they waited for their asylum applications to be processed. He is a model for Christians on how we should respond to those who are marginalised.



In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit those in prison. The words of Matthew 25:35-36 eerily map out what our Christian response to those people reaching Europe's shores today should be.

Bishop William Crean, Chairperson of Trócaire said, "It is one thing to take people from the water, but another to offer a life of dignity."

What can we do?

As Christians, our first response should be A: To Love and B: To welcome the stranger. "Anyone listening to their conscience now can't but feel challenged by what we are witnessing." These were the words recently spoken by Bishop Brendan Leahy from the Diocese of Limerick.

Pray –

1. Host a Prayer Vigil for the plight of refugees
2. Include the following Prayer of the Faithful in your liturgies this weekend
3. Display the Stations of the Cross with pictures drawn by child refugees affected by the war in Syria

Act –

1. Take Trócaire's action online now. Ask An Taoiseach to recall the Dáil to address Ireland's response to the refugee crisis
2. As a Parish, write a letter to your local politician to insist on an

- immediate and effective response from Ireland to this refugee crisis
3. Hold a solidarity event and invite local politicians to witness the support and solidarity of the Irish people for the plight of refugees
4. Raise awareness and show Solidarity: Mark World Refugee Day on Monday 20th June next year. It seem a long time away but keep it in the diary and invite others to join in solidarity with this event

Give –

1. You can donate to Trócaire by phone or online
1850 408 408 (ROI)
0800 912 1200 (N. Ireland)
<https://www.trocaire.org>
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For your Parish Newsletter:

"Trócaire is calling on the Dáil to be recalled early to establish an immediate and effective response from Ireland. The people of Ireland have made it clear that they want to help distraught refugees arriving in Europe and are looking for leadership on how we as a nation can act. "In the past year, 3,573 people have died attempting to reach Italy, Greece and Spain by sea, an average of ten people a day. This is both a humanitarian crisis and a crisis of humanity. The EU must apply humanitarian standards to save lives, protect those most vulnerable and reduce the scandalous suffering being met by refugees reaching European borders.

Trócaire is responding to the growing needs of extremely vulnerable refugees in partnership with Caritas Serbia and has allocated €50,000 so far to provide sleeping bags and raincoats, hygiene kits, health services and psychosocial support. Trócaire also works with partners in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and Somalia, which are burdened by protracted conflicts and in Jordan and Lebanon, countries which are hosting 1.75 million Syrian refugees.



Prayer of the Faithful:

1. Heavenly Father, bless and protect all who are displaced in our world. Those who pluck up the courage to flee war-torn areas, those who find the energy to walk the distance towards a better life, those who continue to hope for a better life. We pray that they may find their just rewards...**Lord in your Mercy**
2. Heavenly Father, we pray for all spiritual refugee's ..those of us who lack the comfort of knowing and acknowledging your loving embrace....**Lord in Your Mercy**
3. We pray for the intercession of Mary "Our Lady of the Way," that those who find themselves in need of refuge will soon find a welcome home....**Lord in your Mercy**
4. We pray for all God's people: May we be open and welcoming to our brothers and sisters from many other places and cultures across the world who have come to live among us... **Lord in your Mercy**
5. For all who have died. We pray especially for those who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea as they made the difficult journey in pursuit of freedom, justice and protection in foreign lands....**Lord in your Mercy**

Psalm 107:4-8

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS DRAWN BY CHILDREN AFFECTED BY THE WAR IN SYRIA ARE AVAILABLE AT WWW.TROCAIRE.ORG/PARISHES