

Ten Plagues Facing Refugees in the U.S. and Worldwide

Contributed by [HIAS](#)

Source: HIAS Seder Supplement



Remembering the ten plagues that God brought upon the Egyptians when Pharaoh refused to free the Israelites, we have the opportunity tonight to recognize that the world is not yet free of adversity and struggle. This is especially true for refugees.

After you pour out a drop of wine for each of the ten plagues that Egypt suffered, we invite you to then pour out drops of wine for ten modern plagues afflicting refugee communities worldwide and in the United States. After you have finished reciting the plagues, choose a few of the expanded descriptions to read aloud.

1. Violence 2. Dangerous journeys 3. Poverty 4. Food insecurity 5. Lack of access to education 6. Xenophobia 7. Anti-refugee legislation 8. Language barriers 9. Workforce discrimination 10. Loss of family

Violence

Most refugees initially flee home because of violence that may include sexual and gender-based violence, abduction, or torture. The violence grows as the conflicts escalate. Unfortunately, many refugees become victims once again in their countries of first asylum. A 2013 study found that close to 80% of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) living in Kampala, Uganda had experienced sexual and gender-based violence either in the DRC or in Uganda.

Dangerous Journeys

Forced to flee their home due to violence and persecution, refugees may make the dangerous journey to safety on foot, by boat, in the back of crowded vans, or riding on the top of train cars. Over the last two years, the United States has seen record numbers of unaccompanied minors fleeing violence in Central America. Many of these children have survived unimaginably arduous journeys, surviving abduction, abuse, and rape. Erminia, age 15, came to the United States from El Salvador two years ago. As she walked through the Texas

desert, her shoes fell apart and she spent three days and two nights walking in only her socks. "There were so many thorns," she recalls, "and I had to walk without shoes. The entire desert."

Lack of access to education

Though the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* affirms that the right to education applies to refugees, a recent education assessment found that 80% of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon were not in school.⁴ Research shows that refugee children face far greater language barriers and experience more discrimination in school settings than the rest of the population. Muna, 17, a Syrian refugee living in Jordan, who dropped out of school, said, "We can't get educated at the cost of our self-respect."

Loss of Family

It is not uncommon for refugees to lose multiple immediate family members in the violent conflicts that cause them to flee home. These losses, as well as the fact that they may become separated from their family members during flight, can have major consequences on the family structure. Paola⁷, a refugee living in Jaque, Panama⁸ explains, "Fifteen years ago, paramilitaries invaded my community in Jurado, Colombia. The group began to massacre the locals, forcing many of us to flee our lifelong homes. I escaped across the border to Panama. Before the massacre, I had five children. Two of them died in the violence, and I don't know anything about the remaining three, who all left the community many years ago. I am now 62 years old. I have two young grandchildren for whom I am the sole caretaker and provider."

Xenophobia

Just as a 1939 poll from the American Institute of Public Opinion found that more than 60% of Americans opposed bringing Jewish refugees to the United States in the wake of World War II, today we still see heightened xenophobia against refugees. This fear can manifest through workplace discrimination, bias attacks against Muslim refugees, and anti-refugee legislation. In recent months, there has been a frightening surge in anti-refugee sentiment here in the United States, a trend we expect will grow in the months to come.

from the HIAS Seder Supplement <http://www.hias.org/passover2016-supplement>