

10 Plagues

Contributed by [HIAS](#)

Source: HIAS Haggadah 2019



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

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 of violence 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 several 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 was just 15 years old when she came to the United States from El Salvador in 2013. After her shoes fell apart while she walked through the Texas desert, 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."¹⁵

LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees affirms that the right to education applies to refugees. However, research shows that refugee children face far greater language barriers and experience more discrimination in school settings than the rest of the population.¹⁶ Muna, age 17 in 2016, a Syrian refugee living in Jordan, who dropped out of school, said, "We can't get educated at the cost of our self-respect."¹⁷

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, anti-refugee legislation such as the American SAFE Act of 2015 (H.R. 4038) which passed the House but was thankfully defeated in the Senate, and the various Executive Orders issued in 2017 and 2018 to limit refugees' ability to come to the United States.