

*Global Migration: What's Happening, Why, and a Just Response*, by Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain with Catholic Relief Services (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2017). Copyright © 2017 by Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain. All rights reserved. [www.anselmacademic.org](http://www.anselmacademic.org).

“Elizabeth Collier and Charles Strain’s *Global Migration: What’s Happening, Why, and a Just Response* brings together key resources to analyze the complex factors confronting people on the move today. The authors skillfully illuminate Christian witness from biblical texts through Catholic social teaching to lived responses. They also underscore the critical need to understand root causes and contexts of migration, not just its symptoms. The book’s ‘see-judge-act’ framework guides readers to a range of innovative responses. This book serves as an excellent resource for classrooms, immersion trips, parish-based discussion groups, or nonprofit organizations.”

—Kristin Heyer  
Boston College

“*Global Migration: What’s Happening, Why, and a Just Response*, by Elizabeth Collier and Charles Strain, is an invaluable resource for foundational information, human formation, and social transformation. The authors remind us that migration is not the central problem but rather the symptom of deeper imbalances that uproot people and cause them to move. The authors also challenge us to move beyond incendiary debates to the central moral issues, reminding us that the moral wealth of a country begins with how it treats its most vulnerable members. In bringing out the humanity of the immigrant, Collier and Strain call us to reflect on who we are before God, who we are in this journey of life, and who we are in response to our neighbor in need.”

—Daniel G. Groody, CSC  
University of Notre Dame

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Daniel G. Groody, CSC, *University of Notre Dame*

# Global Migration

WHAT'S HAPPENING, WHY, AND A JUST RESPONSE

Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain  
with Catholic Relief Services



## Dedication

To the staff at Catholic Relief Services, who tirelessly work with and on behalf of the most vulnerable people in the world, and to the educators who work to inspire students to create a more just and humane world.

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Created by the publishing team of Anselm Academic.

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## Introduction

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### Stories That Shape Our Lives

In the Abrahamic religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—faith is often described as the courage to move and, in moving, become someone new. The motif of migration appears throughout these traditions’ sacred texts. Abram is called by God to leave the city of Ur and migrate to a new home where he will become Abraham, our common father (Gen. 12:1–9). In the book of Exodus, the Israelites follow Moses out of Egypt and slavery and into the wilderness. They are not without fear and complaints, but they persist until they reach the Promised Land. As the account continues, Yahweh commands the Israelites, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:33–34).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph hearkens to the warning of an angel and flees into Egypt with Mary and Jesus to escape Herod’s sword. Like so many today who are forced to leave everything behind to escape persecution, the Holy Family seeks asylum. Paul, in the Letter to the Hebrews, raises hospitality toward the stranger to a sacred act, saying, “By doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2).

*Hijrah*, the migration of the Prophet Mohammed, is central to the Islamic faith. In May 622 CE, the Prophet Mohammed fled from Mecca to Yathrib (later renamed Medina), escaping an assassination plot. The welcome and protection that the people of Yathrib offered to the Prophet became a model for Muslims’ hospitality to the stranger.

Ancestors of many living in the United States today were forced to emigrate against their will: African slaves were chained together in the holds of sailing ships. Others fled to America to escape impossible living conditions in their country of origin: one million Irish men and women left their homeland during the famine of the mid-1840s,

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and many Jews fled pogroms in Russia. Fleeing poverty or persecution, more than twenty-seven million people migrated to the United States between 1880 and 1930.<sup>1</sup> All people living in the United States, including Native Americans, have a migration story—maybe recent, maybe many generations past. “When we forget our personal and collective migration stories,” Daniel Groody argues, “immigrants easily become the targets of social problems and are quickly typecast as a threat to the common good.” When people break bread together in the Eucharist, he adds, they remember both the centrality of migration in scriptural tradition and their own stories of migration.<sup>2</sup>

Migration continues to be a global phenomenon. At the latest count, 244 million people reside in a nation in which they were not born. While some are concerned about the level of migration to the United States, the reality is that while the United States is host to the largest number of foreign-born people (46.6 million), numerous other countries have welcomed a greater percentage of immigrants relative to their overall population (e.g., Canada’s 22 percent to the United States’ 15.2 percent).<sup>3</sup>

Another 65.3 million people currently live in forced displacement because of war, political repression, or religious persecution either as *refugees* or *asylum seekers* in a new country or as *internally displaced persons* within their native land. In 2016, one half of all refugees came from three nations: Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The Syrian refugee crisis is only the latest source of massive forced migration. The European Union and the United States have not borne a proportionate burden of this vast stream of migrants. Turkey has sheltered 2.5 million Syrian refugees; Lebanon, 1.1 million; and Jordan, 664,000. These countries have limited resources to address the needs of their own populations, let alone the masses in need of a place of refuge. Overall, 86 percent of refugees reside in developing nations.<sup>4</sup>

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1. “Immigration Timeline,” The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., [www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline](http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline).

2. Daniel Groody, “Fruit of the Vine and Work of Human Hands,” in *A Promised Land: A Perilous Journey*, ed. Daniel Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008): 302–3.

3. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Global Trends 2015: Forced Displacement Hits a Record High,” [www.unhcr.org/en-us/global-trends-2015](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/global-trends-2015); International Organization for Migration, “Global Migration Trends 2015 Fact Sheet,” <http://publications.iom.int/books/global-migration-trends-factsheet-2015>.

4. *Ibid.*

## Key Terms

**Refugee** A person who, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”<sup>5</sup>

**Asylum seeker** A person who has left his or her country of origin, in accordance with the definition of “refugee” and formally presented him or herself at or within the border of another country for asylum.

**Internally displaced person** A person who has been forced to leave his or her home because of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, or violations of human rights, but who has not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

**Economic migrant** A person who has moved to another country to find employment in the absence of opportunities in his or her homeland.

These figures do not include the average 22.5 million human beings who have migrated in each of the past eight years because of extreme weather events or natural disasters. Given climate change and an increase in extreme weather events, this figure will undoubtedly grow.<sup>6</sup>

If these immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and migrants fleeing natural disasters were gathered in one place, they would form the third largest nation on Earth (331.8 million), surpassing the entire population of the United States (322.8 million). While many people find a place in another country to begin a new life, there are still millions in desperate circumstances. Their suffering requires a better response from the worldwide community.

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5. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” 1951, [www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10).

6. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change UNFCCC-Paris COP-21,” [www.unhcr.org/en-us/565b21bd9.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/565b21bd9.pdf).

## Method: See, Judge, Act

This book employs the “see-judge-act” method for exploring global migration in its multiple shapes and forms. This method was first developed by French priests working with young workers seeking justice during the 1950s in a movement called Catholic Action. The method was further developed in Latin America in the late 1960s, as priests, nuns, and lay catechists convened small groups of peasants to grapple with unjust structures oppressing the vulnerable. It continues to be widely used to structure ethical reflection on social issues for the purpose of working for justice.

## See

The first step in the see-judge-act method is to “see” what is going on in a situation. Pope Francis calls us to see with the eyes of faith. “Globalization is a phenomenon that challenges us,” he argues, “especially in one of its principal manifestations, which is emigration. It is one of the ‘signs’ of this time that we live in and that brings us back to the words of Jesus, ‘Why do you not know how to interpret the present time?’”<sup>7</sup> The stories of how Jesus approached or received people in the Gospels provide an example of how he “saw” people. He saw and perceived in greater depth in people than what initially met the eyes of those in the biblical scene.

When looking upon good friends or close family members, most people see what those individuals are going through as part of the larger whole of their lives. This includes their aspirations, gifts and talents, potential, and the circumstances that have led them to a particular moment. The task in the “seeing” step in this text is to view the world through the eyes of migrants and their communities—examining both what one knows and does not know about the experience of migrants. “Seeing” requires asking many questions in order to understand why people uproot themselves and their families.<sup>8</sup>

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7. “Pope Calls for Protection of Unaccompanied Child Migrants,” Vatican Radio, July 16, 2014, [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/07/15/pope\\_calls\\_for\\_protection\\_of\\_unaccompanied\\_child\\_migrants\\_/1102879](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/07/15/pope_calls_for_protection_of_unaccompanied_child_migrants_/1102879).

8. Deacon Steve Swope, “Understanding Syrian Refugees, One Story at a Time,” Catholic Relief Services, February 11, 2016, [www.crs.org/media-center/understanding-syrian-refugees-one-story-time](http://www.crs.org/media-center/understanding-syrian-refugees-one-story-time).

Human beings generally do not leave family, culture, language, and “home” to start anew in a wholly different culture, unless they are under extreme duress.<sup>9</sup>

With social media and 24/7 cable news, people are flooded with information, faceless numbers, and images of refugees on rickety boats in rough seas or migrants crossing the Arizona desert to reunite with family or find jobs. But much of what is reported does not help people truly “see” what is happening. A Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, exiled in France because of political persecution, suggests that, despite all of the information available, “America is somehow a closed society.”<sup>10</sup> Americans live in what some social scientists call “lifestyle enclaves,” where people associate primarily with others of the same class, level of education, or race. Many do not have direct contact with refugees or migrants. Even with millions of people on the move around the world, most others do not really know the migrants’ stories.

Understanding the realities of migration is difficult. Every migration story is the result of a complex set of social, economic, political, and geographic forces, which we may barely comprehend. Often a tragic story lies behind the migrants’ decision to leave their place of origin. Though every migrant’s story is unique, when we “see” the situations of particular individuals we discover features of many migrants’ stories. Truly seeing what is behind the migration of peoples requires educating oneself, imagining oneself in similar situations,<sup>11</sup> and asking questions about particular migrants. Appropriate questions include the following:

- Why have these people uprooted themselves from the culture, language, and homeland of their family?
- What are the political, economic, environmental, and social forces that made living in their homeland untenable or dehumanizing?

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9. “First-ever Refugee Team Joins Summer Olympics,” Catholic Relief Services, [www.crs.org/stories/first-ever-refugee-team-joins-summer-olympics](http://www.crs.org/stories/first-ever-refugee-team-joins-summer-olympics).

10. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax, 1995), 181.

11. Kevin Hartigan, “5 Questions and Answers on 5-Year Anniversary of Syrian Civil War,” Catholic Relief Services, [www.crs.org/media-center/5-year-anniversary-syrian-civil-war-5-questions-answers](http://www.crs.org/media-center/5-year-anniversary-syrian-civil-war-5-questions-answers).

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- What, if any, living alternatives do these people have within their own country's borders?
- What stories do these people tell about their plight at home? About their migration? About their lives after relocating?

Through community-based learning courses, teachers provide students with opportunities to “see” some of the realities associated with migration and to answer some of these questions within the context of a course. Some students have served in organizations that help refugees resettle in the United States. They greet people at the airport when they arrive from a refugee camp, get them settled into an apartment, teach them the basics of apartment living in the United States, and then try to support them during the ninety days that the government allots for them to learn English and get jobs. Students have worked for organizations that advocate for immigration reform in the United States. Others have taken study trips to the United States-Mexico border, where they met with migrants and studied the forces behind migration from Mexico or Central America to the United States.

This book ties its analyses of global migration to actual people, many of them supported by the work of Catholic Relief Services (CRS). CRS is the international relief and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States. CRS carries out the commitment of the Catholic bishops in the United States to assist the poor and vulnerable overseas. It has projects in more than one hundred countries serving more than 107 million people in 2015.<sup>12</sup> This book offers numerous examples of the work CRS has done in the field.<sup>13</sup>

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12. CRS, “Where Two or Three Are Gathered in My Name . . . Annual Report 2015,” [http://annualreport.crs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CRS\\_AR\\_2015.pdf](http://annualreport.crs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CRS_AR_2015.pdf).

13. CRS offers options for students to break out of their enclaves by working with or creating campus organizations that deal with issues of global migration, such as the CRS Student Ambassador Program. On the work of CRS, see “Mission Statement,” [www.crs.org/about/mission-statement](http://www.crs.org/about/mission-statement), and “Our Work Overseas,” [www.crs.org/our-work-overseas](http://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas); on CRS student ambassadors, see “About Student Ambassadors,” [university.crs.org/students/about](http://university.crs.org/students/about).

## Young Refugees and Migrants

Fifty-one percent of refugees are children under the age of eighteen. Only half of these children have access to primary education in their current living situations and only one in four adolescents has access to secondary education.<sup>14</sup>

Sakeena Mteir is eleven years old. She loves to draw. She is also a refugee, one of 4.8 million Syrians who have fled violence in their homeland. For four years, she, her parents, and eight siblings have lived in a makeshift shelter in Lebanon. Not only has CRS supported more than one million Syrian refugees, but it has also sponsored a summer camp where children, including Sakeena, make puppets and put on puppet shows. The shows enable children to express the trauma of being uprooted from their homes and schools. “The puppets are very important for the children because children relate to puppets as if they were human beings,” a CRS fieldworker says. “We discovered that this method is very good because it helps them talk about feelings, which they usually can’t talk about easily.”<sup>15</sup>



© Nikki Gamer / CRS

Sakeena Mteir

*continued*

14. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR 2015 Global Child Protection, Education and SGBV Strategy Implementation Report,” [www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/fundraising/57612a017/2015-global-child-protection-education-sgbv-strategy-implementation-report.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/fundraising/57612a017/2015-global-child-protection-education-sgbv-strategy-implementation-report.html); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “No Lost Generation 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis Update: Moving to a New Phase in the NLG,” <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=10210>.

15. Nikki Gamer, “A CRS Summer Camp for Syrian Refugees Helps Kids Be Kids,” Catholic Relief Services, <http://crs.org/stories/crs-summer-camp-syrian-refugees-helps-kids-be-kids>; Barb Frazee, “When Puppets Meet Refugees, Healing Begins for Children,” Catholic News Service, [www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2014/when-puppets-meet-refugees-healing-begins-for-children.cfm](http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2014/when-puppets-meet-refugees-healing-begins-for-children.cfm).

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### Young Refugees and Migrants *continued*

Fermin Mendoza is an undocumented migrant. He is one of more than a million migrants brought to America as a child by his parents. He reflects upon his experience in ninth grade:

First day of geography class. Ninth grade. I know little about geography, but I am excited to learn. . . . I pick a front-row seat and study the large world map on the wall. . . . Mr. Giordana . . . gives our first assignment. One at a time, everyone will reveal their birthplaces. I stare off into the whiteboard, scared. No one in the room knows that I was born in Mexico. People start giving simple answers I wish I could use. Houston. San Antonio. . . . I think about the name of my birthplace: Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, Tamaulipas . . . Mexico. . . . I don't even know where my hometown is. It's my turn to share now. *Diaz Ordaz, Tamaulipas*, I tell Mr. Giordano. *Is that a big city?* he asks. *Yes, I lie. I've never heard of it*, he replies. The next student speaks. I wonder if the class knows I am illegal.<sup>16</sup>

### Judge

The second step in the see-judge-act process is evaluative. It involves taking the stories, data, research, and knowledge gained in step one and analyzing them through the most appropriate lenses, as well as through the theological and ethical lenses that Catholic social teaching (CST) provides. The chapters of part 1 provide some analysis, particularly when working through several arguments for and against migration to the United States. The sole chapter in part 2 discusses the main tenets of CST, their relationship to migration, and the five rights of migrants that CST puts forth. CST maintains that people should consult additional sources of wisdom in order to achieve a well-rounded understanding of the issues. These additional sources,

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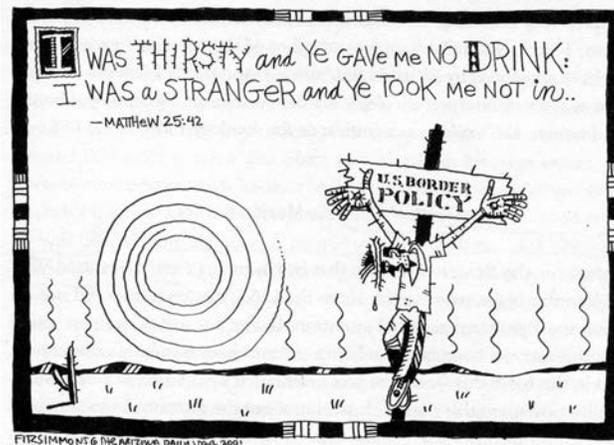
16. Ingrid Hernandez, Fermin Mendoza, Mario Lio, Jirayut Latthi, and Catherine Eusibio, "Things I'll Never Say: Stories of Growing Up Undocumented in the United States," *Harvard Educational Review* 81, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 502.

drawn from economics, psychology, criminal justice, and sociology, help in the application of the CST tenets. Part 2 also explores some moral challenges and encourages the reader to sort through them and make judgments. Questions that are important to ask in this step include the following:

- How can claims made by people involved in global migration be researched in order to validate or discredit the arguments?
- Whose voices dominate in discussions about global migration? Why?
- Whose voices are missing? Why?
- What do migrants, refugees, and those who work closely with them recommend in order to improve the situation of migrants?
- In what ways does global migration enhance or diminish human dignity?
- What issues of justice are raised by the global economic order's impact on migration? What is the relationship between the global economy and patterns of migration? What issues of justice does this relationship raise?
- What is the responsibility of Christian communities for addressing the plight of refugees?
- What is your own evaluation of the core principles of CST? How do they fit with your own moral framework?

By answering these questions and others sparked by deep listening in the “see” step, we move through the judgment step in such a way that we can propose actions that individuals, organizations, and communities of people can take to address injustice or dehumanizing situations.

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What judgments does this cartoon convey? What images does it use to convey them? What analogies does it draw? How does the cartoonist view migration?

### Act

After completing the “see” and “judge” steps and carefully considering what has been learned, the next step is to determine how to act in response. Actions can be either individual or collective.

#### Collective Action

Collective actions can be carried out by small communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and nations. For example, American citizens may ask what the United States is morally obligated to do in the face of a refugee crisis like that created by the Syrian civil war or, closer to home, the crisis of refugees fleeing violence in Central America or of people being displaced by climate change. This book focuses on strategies and projects developed through collective action by CRS and its overseas partners.

#### Individual Action

The fact that the global refugee crisis and the current stalemate regarding comprehensive immigration reform in the United States both require collective action by governments and nongovernmental organizations does not relieve individuals of their responsibility to

act as moral agents. In the “act” step, individuals consider the following questions in light of the findings of the seeing and judging steps:

- Which needed actions am I capable of doing? Which actions match up with my gifts, talents, or resources?
- What is a realistic level of commitment for me?
- With whom will I work? Will I work alone or with my family or faith community, or as part of a local organization or larger nonprofit?
- If no formal structure exists within which I can work, with whom can I network in order to set something up?

## An Invitation

Action without ethical reflection is blind, but ethical reflection without action is sterile. This text invites readers to become aware of the complexities of global migration (“see”), to make judgments based upon ethical concepts and principles (“judge”), and to respond in some way, however small (“act”).

## Reflect and Discuss

1. Do any stories from religious traditions help you make sense of human migration? If you have a faith tradition, what does it say about how to greet and treat the stranger?
2. Interview someone who is a recent immigrant, perhaps a member of your family or a friend. What is their story? What led them to migrate and what kind of welcome did they receive when they came here? What is your own family’s migration story?
3. View the linked video on forced displacement: “Global Trends 2015 Video,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/videos/2016/6/5763b73c4/global-trends-2015-video](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/videos/2016/6/5763b73c4/global-trends-2015-video) (time: 0:05:00). How does hearing the stories and viewing the faces behind the statistics help you develop your own ethical evaluation of this human tragedy?



## PART 1

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# See—Understanding Global Migration

The most pressing ethical issues today involve a complex web of economic, social, historical, religious, and political realities that can be difficult to grasp. While many people have opinions about issues like immigration, few fully understand the factors that lead people to uproot themselves and their families, and the difficulties of relocating and settling in humanizing environments. Part 1 gives a general overview of the factors that result in migration, the barriers migrants face in resettling, and the inaccuracies in many arguments put forth in the public sphere by those who are not educated on such matters.

## CHAPTER 1

# Meeting the Challenges of the World's Refugees

**M**iriam is a sixteen-year-old Catholic girl from Iraq. She and her family fled Iraq when ISIS invaded their region in 2014. She is one of 65.3 million people forcibly displaced from their homes who are currently living as refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced peoples (IDP). This is a staggering figure—roughly the population of California and Texas. To say that the resources of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the hundreds of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work with the UNHCR are stretched to the breaking point is a grave understatement.

Miriam missed a year of school while her family reestablished itself in Jordan. Like other children, she has aspirations. She wants



This Syrian family waits for a bus that will take them to Hungary. The family, seeking asylum in Germany, has been traveling for more than a month.

to become a pediatrician. “If you don’t study and get a degree,” she says, “you can’t have a life.” Thanks to Caritas Jordan, a partner of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Miriam is one of a lucky few who are back in school.<sup>1</sup>

Miriam’s story brings home another point: food, clothing, and shelter are not enough. Children—and one half of all refugees or IDPs are children—cannot lose four years or more of education without harming their development, their families, and their communities. How is this developmental need to be met?

## Evolution of International Law and the Rights of Refugees<sup>2</sup>

The story of the world community’s attempts to respond to the needs of refugees like Miriam begins with the end of World War II. The horrors of the Nazi Holocaust, visited upon Jews and other minorities, led to several developments in international law, as well as the creation of organizations like CRS that help migrants and refugees. The most notable development was creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ongoing sufferings of refugees from World War II who had not yet been integrated into a new country prompted the United Nations (UN) to create a Convention on the Status of Refugees and charged the UNHCR with carrying it out. Ratified in 1951, the Convention declares, as the most basic right of refugees, the right not to be returned to the country where they face threats to their lives and liberty, also known as non-refoulement.<sup>3</sup>

1. See “Miriam’s Story: Finding Hope in Education,” Catholic Relief Services, [www.crs.org/resource-center/miriams-story-finding-hope-education](http://www.crs.org/resource-center/miriams-story-finding-hope-education) (time: 0:04:27).

2. For the historical background on international law related to refugees and the evolution of the UNHCR’s mandate, see Susan F. Martin, “Rethinking the International Refugee Regime in Light of Human Rights and the Global” in *Driven from Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants*, ed. David Hollenbach, SJ (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 21–28; Astri Suhrke and Kathleen Newland, “UNHCR: Uphill into the Future,” *The International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (September 2001): 284–302.

3. For the legal definition of a refugee, see the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” 1951, article 1, [www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10). A protocol adopted in 1967 removed time constraints attached to the original convention. See the introduction of this book for the Convention’s definition of a refugee.

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The Convention did not obligate states to admit refugees as legal permanent residents or to grant refugees citizenship. The Convention did, however, obligate states to guarantee several additional rights:

- The right not to be punished for illegal entry (article 31)
- The right to freedom of movement (article 26)
- The right to work (articles 17–19)
- The right to education (article 22)

The host countries do not always honor these rights. For example, it is common for refugees to be restricted to camps. In the United States, asylum seekers are routinely detained for months in local jails and prisons, in clear violation of the rights established by the Convention, before their cases are resolved.<sup>4</sup>

The 1951 Convention had a limited focus on European refugees of World War II. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees broadened its mission when it responded to calls for helping refugees who fled after Soviet troops crushed uprisings in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). Two regional conventions covering Africa and the Americas broadened the definition of refugees to include those fleeing from foreign aggression, civil war, or “generalized violence.” In the case of large-scale, forced migration, it was difficult to distinguish between those fleeing from political persecution and those simply escaping violence; in practice, the UNHCR treated all as refugees. During the Cold War, the Western nations saw a propaganda advantage in liberally granting asylum to refugees from the Soviet bloc. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western countries became less interested in granting asylum. Refugees are now much more likely to remain for long periods of time without their status resolved because there is no one willing to accept them permanently.

Since the end of the Cold War, the nature of war has changed. Wars are more likely to involve internal conflicts between different ethnic groups, as in the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. These wars primarily target civilians. This has led to massive

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4. Sioban Albiol, “Immigrants and Refugees Held in Detention,” in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, ed. Elizabeth Collier and Charles R. Strain (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014): 307–26.

migrations, but more often within countries than across international borders. The only difference, then, between most IDPs and refugees is whether or not they have crossed a border. Increasingly, the UNHCR has worked with IDPs. So far, UN member states have not expanded the mandate of the UNHCR to aid those forced to move because of natural disasters or climate change.

## New Trends in Forced Migration

Besides the unprecedented numbers of migrants forced to flee and the growing proportion of children among them, several other trends have become evident:

- Protracted refugee situations are now the norm; their average duration is twenty-five years. Entire generations are born and raised to adulthood in some camps. Few of these refugees are able to return home or gain permanent asylum in a new country.
- A majority of refugees (60 percent) now live in cities. They see camps as dead ends.<sup>5</sup>
- An overwhelming percentage of refugees (86 percent) reside in developing countries. For example, most Syrian refugees live in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey. These countries have limited resources to assist such large numbers of people.
- In these protracted circumstances, only a few people will receive work permits, despite this being a right guaranteed to refugees by the Convention. Consequently, those in cities work in the underground economy and are frequently exploited.<sup>6</sup>
- Many advocates for the rights of migrants are contesting the dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration, implied by the Convention, which restricts the former to those fleeing war or political persecution. Advocates are asking how bad economic conditions or the impact of climate change need to be for migrants before they can be considered factors in “forced” migration.

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5. Elizabeth Whitman, “We Can’t Live in a Camp,” *The Nation* (May 13, 2013): 244–26.

6. Catholic Relief Services, “Meeting the Challenges of the World’s Refugee Crisis: Policy Brief,” 1, 3–4, [www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/meeting-challenges-worlds-refugee-crisis-policy-brief](http://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/meeting-challenges-worlds-refugee-crisis-policy-brief); Maryanne Loughry, “The Experience of Displacement by Conflict,” in *Driven from Home*, ed. Hollenbach, 170–75.

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In light of these trends, CRS, along with many other governmental and nongovernmental organizations, has been calling for an overhaul in how the world community addresses refugee crises. CRS offers the following guidelines to address the evolving needs of refugees:

- States should work through the UN to create new conventions that deal with types of forced migration that do not fit the current categories of international law.
- Humanitarian relief should be linked with development aid. Donors should shift from short-term, emergency aid to coupling such aid with longer-term projects (3–5 years) that enable refugees to become self-sufficient and contribute to their host communities.
- The UNHCR and NGOs that provide humanitarian aid should, where possible, work through local organizations. They should assess and build capacity for local, market-based solutions.
- Governments of wealthy nations must ease the burden placed on developing nations hosting refugees, and all aid groups should work to create positive linkages between host countries and refugee communities, including “non-camp solutions.”<sup>7</sup>

Above all, these guidelines reflect a critical shift from viewing and treating refugees as victims to viewing and treating them as *agents*. For our focus on the ethics of migration, this shift—now widely accepted by NGOs providing aid to refugees—is the most crucial point. Media bombard viewers with images of refugees appearing as victims in dire circumstances—crowded on small boats, wading to shore, standing in packed lines for food, and these images often move people to offer help. Depicting refugees only as victims, however, risks stripping them of their dignity as agents who are committed to shaping their lives every bit as much as others. In fact, refugees take decisive action in leaving home, at great personal cost, to find safety elsewhere. Forms of charity that view refugees as merely recipients of others’ generosity rather than as persons with the potential to contribute to the common good are inadequate from a

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7. Catholic Relief Services, “Meeting the Challenges of the World’s Refugee Crisis,” 2, 9–12.

Christian perspective, as they fail to respect the God-given dignity of all people.

M. Brinton Lykes offers the case of Guatemalan women who were internally displaced or became refugees in Mexican camps during the thirty-six-year civil war (1960–1996) in that country as an example of self-empowering agency. These indigenous women formed groups to learn how to read and write; they discussed women's rights and health issues; they organized themselves and provided input on the return process after the war's end. While they faced a patriarchal backlash when they returned home, many persisted in educating themselves and staying politically active. Lykes concludes that to enable refugees to actualize the power that they have as agents involves "a focus on three areas: human capacity (i.e., skills, knowledge, and capabilities), social ecology (i.e., social connectedness and networks), and culture and values."<sup>8</sup>

## An Unchecked Humanitarian Crisis

Huge flows of refugees from Syria, with additional refugees from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, precipitated a humanitarian crisis in 2015 and 2016 that revealed the weaknesses of the current refugee relief system. As the civil war in Syria grew worse, refugees became increasingly desperate. The pressure of refugees seeking asylum in European Union countries created global awareness of the crisis, but also a backlash by reactionary movements. The ambivalence of the West meant a lack of adequate response to the situation of the masses of refugees in the countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. When then prime minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron announced that England would offer asylum to 20,000 Syrians—twice the number pledged by the United States—he was told that Lebanon had provided protection to that many in only the past two weekends.<sup>9</sup> In Jordan and Lebanon there are signs of local populations suffering under the strain

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8. M. Brinton Lykes, "No Easy Road to Freedom: Engendering and Enculturating Forced Migration," in *Driven from Home*, ed. Hollenbach, 78–80.

9. David Hollenbach, SJ, "The Rights of Refugees," *America* (January 4, 2016): 14–17.

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of the influx, such as rising rents forcing out local populations, unskilled local labor losing jobs to refugees, and a rise in consumer prices.<sup>10</sup> The affluent countries of the West have yet to significantly ease the burden imposed on these countries that neighbor Iraq and Syria.

Refugees are witnesses to humanity's common complicity in the world's suffering. Some of the forces that displace peoples are not separate from the economic and political structures that have created today's global society. "What displaced populations reveal to us all," argues Clement Mijawa, "are the profound shifts and stresses underlying our socioeconomic systems. . . . Refugee movements are like earthquakes. . . . They are the warning signs of the deep tensions within our global community."<sup>11</sup> It is incumbent upon each person and upon communities to acknowledge their complicity in the economic and climate forces that result in migration. These are issues of "commission." What are people *doing* in their daily lives that contributes to or exacerbates those issues that result in people needing to migrate? What trade policies, consumption trends, and business practices contribute to the problems that require people to move?

While much of the rhetoric in the Christian tradition on sin tends to focus on what people have done, the complicity involved in *failing to help* is as serious as committing a sinful act. While the New Testament story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) is often interpreted as a parable about the Samaritan helping the beaten traveler, the story also draws attention to those who *failed* to help. Refugees and migrants are in situations where they are very much dependent upon the responses of others. The Good Samaritan story challenges everyone to ask, "How have I responded? How can I respond?"

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10. Cathrine Thorleifsson, "The Limits of Hospitality: Coping Strategies among Displaced Syrians in Lebanon," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 6 (February 2016): 1071–82; Roger Zetter and Heloise Ruaudel, "Development and Protection Challenges of the Syrian Refugee Crisis," *Revista Migraciones Forzadas* 47 (September, 2014): 6–10.

11. As cited in Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Justice for the Displaced: The Challenge of a Christian Understanding," in *Driven from Home*, ed. Hollenbach, 42–43, 45. See also M. Brinton Lykes, "No Easy Road to Freedom: Engendering and Enculturating Forced Migration," in *Driven from Home*, ed. Hollenbach, 81.

Despite the challenges associated with migration, there are bright spots. Miriam is in school in Jordan pursuing her dream. In Egypt, a CRS project that provides business and legal training, allocates start-up capital, and increases technical skills is helping one Syrian woman to open a perfume shop, and another a beauty salon, and a Syrian man to reestablish his engine repair shop. “The goal is to go beyond short-term help and give refugees the tools and resources they need to become productive, self-reliant members of Egyptian society,” says Yumiko Texidor, the CRS project director.<sup>12</sup> Given the immensity of the task, these changes may seem pitifully small. But they transform whole worlds, one person at a time.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What do Miriam’s story and the stories of refugees in Egypt tell us about how refugees should be treated?
2. View the CRS video “Emergency Response and Recovery,” [www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/program-areas/shelter-and-settlements](http://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/program-areas/shelter-and-settlements) (time: 0:06:41), and then do the following:
  - a. Explain the five principles that guide CRS’s response to the immediate needs of those driven from their homes.
  - b. Assess these principles in light of the CRS guidelines for responding to the migrants’ needs as presented in this chapter.
  - c. Identify the values reflected in the five principles.
3. What has changed in the global situation regarding forced migration between March 2017 (the publication date of this book) and the time you read this chapter? Is war still the major driver or are other forces like climate change creating greater pressures to migrate? What moral obligations do people face in light of new developments in forced migration? Do the principles advocated by CRS still apply?

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12. Nikki Gamer, “Syrian Refugees: Starting Up and Starting Over,” Catholic Relief Services, May 2, 2016, [www.crs.org/stories/syrian-refugees-starting-up-starting-over](http://www.crs.org/stories/syrian-refugees-starting-up-starting-over).