



# Global Ministries ADVOCACY CONTEXT

## Forced Migration

Julio<sup>1</sup> had people come to his job in El Salvador and say that if he didn't pay them a portion of his wages, they would kill him and his family. Julio knew that the police were connected to the people extorting him, so he couldn't go to them for protection or help. He decided to seek asylum in the US where he has family members who can help him start over. He and his wife have four children and it wasn't safe for all six of them to make the journey to the US, so he chose only one of his children to take with him, Manuel. While on their journey through Mexico, Julio decided to pay a trafficker to get them to the US border safely. For part of their journey, they were forced into the back of a truck that transports cargo with other asylum seekers. They were stacked up in the truck like pieces of wood with adults laying on the bottom, children on top of the adults, and things placed on top of the children so they couldn't be seen. The children could only see the top of the truck and could only hear the others crying and getting sick. They stayed in that closed truck for 2 hours. Julio and Manuel made it to a US border crossing post where they claimed asylum. They were then placed in a detention facility together while their asylum case is pending. Manuel has so much trauma from the journey that he starts crying when he's apart from his father.

Justin was born about 25 years ago in what is now the country of South Sudan. He is the fifth of 7 children in his family. His parents were killed in 2010 when the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacked his village in the state of Western Equatoria. He is now an orphan and is separated from his siblings. Two of his siblings are missing and his eldest sister and 3 youngest brothers are living in South Sudan. Justin has been living in Uganda as a refugee since 2013 when civil war broke out in South Sudan. He has been depending on the generosity of friends and strangers for assistance and has faced many challenges as the Ugandan government has been unable to provide much support. In 2017, he started organizing his community of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda to demand their rights under international law. He hopes that he will one day be able to return to his home country and live in safety.

Yasmin and her family are from Homs, Syria. In the first two years after the fighting in Syria began, Homs was leveled by bombing. During those two years, her friends and family all fled the city. She and her husband, Suleiman, resisted leaving until long after they were the only ones left in their neighborhood, saying, "We left only when it was not possible to live any longer where we were." Their journey to Lebanon by car was full of danger, but they eventually arrived in the city of Tripoli. There, Suleiman tried to find work repairing cellphones, but it was difficult to attract customers in a foreign country. Yasmin could find only a few students to take her English language lessons. However, within a few months of arriving in Lebanon, Falak, their daughter, was diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a rare form of eye cancer, and had to have one eye removed in a Beirut hospital. Yasmin's family got in touch with social workers

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed

from Mediterranean Hope, a Global Ministries partner in Italy carrying out the Humanitarian Corridors project. After repeated interviews, they were granted safe passage to Italy, largely because Falak's health situation had become critical and she was at risk of losing her other eye. They now live safely in Rome. Yasmin's mother, sisters, and brothers have been stuck for years in the Jarabulus refugee camp on the Syrian border with Turkey. The chances that the entire family will ever be together again are minimal.

Mariance left her home and children in Indonesia to migrate to Malaysia with the promise of a great job with a woman who needed help taking care of her 91-year-old mother. When she arrived, everything was going well until a month later when her employer completely changed. Her employer would verbally and physically abuse her. After 7 months of abuse, Marianne was able to send a note to a neighbor who called the police. After she healed physically, she was able to return home to her children. She was not paid for her work and she is uncertain of what will happen to her former employer. In many cases, if the "victim" is not at the trial, the charges will be dropped.

Tafue and his family live in the Pacific island nation of Tuvalu. Tuvalu is made up of three reef islands and six atolls comprising 10 square miles. Year after year, Tafue watches as the Pacific Ocean gradually rises to reclaim the land. As the water rises, the island aquifers gradually become contaminated with sea water and become undrinkable. Tafue fears that soon his home country will be uninhabitable. Already he has watched the younger generation leave for better opportunities in other countries. He has watched neighbors and friends lose their homes to the ocean. He worries about when his home will disappear. He wonders where he will go and if he will still be able to call himself Tuvaluan. How can you be from a country that has disappeared? What will happen to his language, culture, and people? He doesn't know and hopes he doesn't have to find out.

These stories come from each region of our world. Our human story is one of migration and has been since the beginning. Religious texts, including the Bible, are full of migration, displacement, and exile stories. Jesus teaches us that the two greatest commandments are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, as of June 2019, about 70.8 million people around the world had been forcibly displaced from their homes. Of these, 41.3 million people have been displaced from their homes, but remain within their country's borders, while 25.9 million people are refugees and 3.5 million people are seeking asylum outside their country. This massive displacement is the largest in recorded history and there is no sign of it coming to an end.

UNHCR states that war, violence, persecution, climate change, drought, famine, and impoverishment are among the factors that force people to migrate. The overwhelming majority of those who have been forcibly displaced outside their home countries reside in poorer developing countries that are barely able to provide services for their own people and are now expected to provide services to these new arrivals.

This is all in a time when countries are restricting the movement of people by building barriers along their borders and increasing the militarization and policing that happens near them. You can see this here in the United States with the drastic decrease in refugee resettlement, construction of more walls on our southern border, the increased use of immigrant detention facilities to house those who have come seeking asylum, and increased raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). European countries have responded in varying ways, but most have enacted more migration and border restrictions to keep people out, particularly since the influx of Syrians, Iraqis, and others seeking refuge in 2015.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are concerned for migrants, particularly those who are forced into cramped living conditions and can't keep appropriate physical distances. This includes migrants living in camps or settlements as well as those living in crowded slums or dense urban areas. Those who are in detention facilities face even more difficulties as their freedom of movement is restricted and they can't maintain appropriate distances from others. In the US we have seen COVID-19 outbreaks in immigrant detention facilities around the country.

During the pandemic, migrant workers have been returning to their homes as economies shut down and they lose their jobs. Some have been forced to make the journey by foot as public transportation was closed. Many have died from hunger or exhaustion along the way. Migrant workers around the world lack access to healthcare and other social safety systems and are vulnerable to abuses like trafficking or other illegal workplace practices.

## Discussion Questions

1. Where would you go if your family was forced to leave your home?
2. How would you feel if one of your parents or family members was forced to work far away in another country or city in order to make more money to provide a better life for your family?
3. Do you know anyone who is from another country or whose parents or family members are? What do you think their life is like?

## Learn

Use our [Refugee Journey: Syria](#) curriculum to walk in the footsteps of someone forced from their home. It can be easily adapted to an online, virtual journey. If you have questions about adapting this curriculum, email Rebekah Choate, [choater@ucc.org](mailto:choater@ucc.org).

Learn about Palestinian refugees from our [Advocacy Contexto](#).

## Pray

[Pray for migrants](#) around the world. Read and share stories from mission co-workers and partners working with migrants: [Welcoming the Stranger and Loving the Neighbor](#), [Imagine](#), [Welcoming the Refugee](#), [Zanzan's Secrets](#), [Sharing Stories](#), [To Embrace and Love](#), [Migrant Posada](#).

## Advocate

Tell Congress to support our migrant neighbors around the world by including non-citizens in any emergency support measure passed during the COVID-19 pandemic and take the actions that are outlined in the 2019 resolution on global forced migration passed by the [UCC General Synod](#) and [Disciples General Assembly](#). Become an [Immigrant Welcoming Congregation](#) that fights xenophobia and racism.

## Give

Support Global Ministries partners who are addressing forced migration around the world. The [Orthodox Initiative](#), a coalition of the Rum (Greek) Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, works with families uprooted by the wars and conflicts of the region, raises awareness of these human tragedies, and supports the next generation to be future advocates for the human rights of the most vulnerable. For a list of all partners working to address forced migration, [continue reading here](#).