

## Snapshot: Refugees - a Christian response

As of June 2016, the total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people around the world has topped 65 million. What is the Bible's view on refugees and asylum seekers?

### *The Bible records events which create refugees.*

In a sinful world where natural disasters occur and people oppress each other, we should not be surprised that refugees exist. The bible is full of examples of this.

In fact, God's people have always been a community of refugees. Old Testament Israel fled persecution in Egypt. Jesus was despised and rejected by his own people. In Leviticus, God commanded the Israelites to treat foreigners "as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt" (Lev 19:33-34).

### *As Christians, our love for the displaced is motivated by empathy and should reflect God's character.*

We can't forgive people's sins - only Jesus can. But we can reflect God's character by being hospitable, sharing our resources as the early church did in Acts and being compassionate.

As we do this, we, in a small way, show the world what our God is like - we are a "light to the world" (Matt 5:14), drawing people to praise our Father in heaven. This sort of compassion will cost us. Whilst compassion is not naivety, Jesus warns of the cost of following him.

### *Getting practical*

- Welcome refugees not only into your church community but into your local community. Invite them into your homes
- Encourage your children to make friends with refugees and stand up for them when they are marginalised.
- Get involved in refugee support projects (e.g. "Welcome to my place" or "Simple Love")
- Pray for our governments as they make decisions.
- Visit detention centres. Teach refugees English. Read the bible and pray with them.

### **FAQ: Refugees or asylum seekers?**

A refugee is a person who has left his or her country because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted if they remain and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return.

An Asylum seeker is someone whose request for refugee status has not been granted yet. Every refugee is initially an asylum seeker but not every asylum seeker is recognised as a refugee.

### **FAQ: Are asylum seekers "illegal immigrants"?**

Under international law, seeking refugee status is not in and of itself illegal. However an asylum seeker may have to breach national immigration laws to seek protection of that country.

As Christians, we should ensure our language is helpful and fair and not misleading. A better term may be "irregular immigrants" rather than "illegal immigrants".



### **FAQ: Is it wrong to detain asylum seekers whilst their application is processed?**

Under international law, seeking refugee status is not in and of itself illegal. However an asylum seeker may have to breach national immigration laws to seek protection of that country.

Even if mandatory detention is not a technical breach of our obligations under the Refugee Convention, our treatment of asylum seekers should be compassionate, fair and just.



Source: UNHCR, image in public domain