

“I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me”:
The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Immigration

Bailey Haraburda

Research Intern, Summer 2021

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this research are those of the author and do not reflect the official opinions or positions of the Rumi Forum, its members, or its inspiration. Any content provided in this research was not sponsored by any religious or ethnic group, organization, nation-state government, company, or individual. The prescriptions made in this publication and the facts presented therein are not meant to detract from the political neutrality of the Rumi Forum and are incorporated only insofar as the integrity of that political neutrality is not compromised. The reader is encouraged to arrive at his or her own conclusions and interact firsthand with sources and information presented in this research. The reader is also encouraged to understand that the views presented hereafter are those of the author and fellow collaborators and that the condition of facts presented is complex, dynamic, and ever-changing. Thank you for your assistance in acknowledging and helping to preserve the political neutrality of the Rumi Forum while allowing it to support the research of its interns.

“I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me”:
The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Immigration

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Background on U.S. Immigration	3
Assistance from Faith-Based Organizations at Southern Border	8
Assistance from Faith-Based Organizations within the United States	10
Conclusion	16
References	18
Appendix 1: Organizations and Representatives	21
Appendix 2: Questionnaire	22
Acknowledgements	23
About the Author	23

Abstract

This research extends a paper I wrote entitled “Barriers to Mental Health Care Utilization Among American Latinos and Partnership Opportunities with Faith-Based Organizations.” For my project with the Rumi Forum, I focused specifically on exploring the work of Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) in the Washington metropolitan area (DMV) with immigrants. Immigrants to the United States face cultural stress, social marginalization, and discrimination. Refugees and asylum-seekers also experience trauma stemming from violence and persecution in their home country, leaving their homes and the dangerous journey to the United States, and from the arduous process of seeking asylum. I contacted FBOs in Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Sikh faiths that assist immigrants with legal status, access to medical and mental health care, employment, and housing.

*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me. -Matthew 25:35*

Introduction

My father and his parents emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1965. After World War II, Poland was a communist state under the control of the Soviet Union. The Polish people faced repressions, economic difficulties, and a lack of freedoms, leading my family to emigrate to America. They settled in Camden, New Jersey, in a Polish neighborhood centered around a Catholic Church. Through their parish and family connections, they could find work, learn the language, and build a good life. The United States is more secularized, and fewer people participate in organized religion than in 1965. There has also been an increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States. My family's experience led me to research whether, in 2021, faith-based organizations (FBOs) continue to assist immigrants from various countries and faiths.

I began my research by reaching out to FBOs in the Washington, DC metropolitan area to learn more about the immigrants they serve. I contacted FBOs in Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Sikh faiths (Appendix 1). Representatives in the organizations completed a questionnaire about the services they provided to immigrants (Appendix 2). I was also able to conduct follow-up calls with some representatives to learn more about their work. Most of the organizations I contacted work with migrants and asylum seekers coming to the U.S. southern border. Some organizations work with people already in the United States, while others assist in detention centers or Mexico.

*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses
yearning to breathe free. -Emma Lazarus*

Background on U.S. Immigration

In my research, I was struck by the complexities of the immigration laws and policies and the various terms and requirements for people attempting to resettle in the United States. According to the *Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service*, "an immigrant is someone who makes a conscious decision to leave his or her home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there. Immigrants often go through a lengthy vetting process to immigrate to a new country. Many become lawful permanent residents and eventually citizens. Immigrants research their destinations, explore employment opportunities, and study the language of the country where they plan to live. Most importantly, they are free to return home whenever they choose."¹ This path is similar to my family's experience where they waited in Poland to receive permission to enter the United States. Once granted permission, they flew on a plane and settled in a community with fellow Polish people. While the process was lengthy, they were eligible to work legally, enroll my father in school, and safely return to Poland for visits.

The bulk of the migrants coming to the southern border are people seeking asylum in the United States. Asylum is a protection granted to someone who arrives at the U.S. border or is already in the United States and meets the international law definition of a "refugee."² The U.S. has a legal obligation to provide this protection under both U.S. and international laws and treaties. There is no process to apply for asylum protection while in your own country; you must present

¹ Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, "The Difference between Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants," Accessed on July 31, 2021, <https://www.lirs.org/refugees-asylum-seekers-migrants-whats-the-difference>.

² American Immigration Council, "Asylum in the United States," July 11, 2020, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states>.

yourself at a U.S. border.³ The method of applying for asylum is highly complicated, and there are not enough resources to ensure the protection of vulnerable people at the U.S. borders. In 2020, there were over 1.3 million pending immigration cases, including asylum hearings. The average wait time for an immigration hearing is more than 2.5 years.⁴ The lack of immigration judges, long wait times, and limited access to legal aid negatively impacts "one of the most vulnerable groups of non-citizens currently in the U.S. immigration system: women and their children."⁵

Since 2014, more than two million people have left the Northern Triangle, which comprises three countries in Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁶ According to the *Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)*, "many interrelated factors are driving people from the Northern Triangle, including lack of economic opportunity, environmental challenges, and chronic violence. The region is among the poorest in the Western Hemisphere."⁷ The homicide rate in the Northern Triangle is one of the highest in the world.⁸ Corrupt governments and transnational gangs have thrived after years of civil war and political instability. In the early 2000s, the Northern Triangle governments implemented anti-crime policies that expanded police powers and increased police violence against civilians. *CFR* reports that "women in the region are also fleeing gender-based violence. As of 2019, El Salvador and Honduras had Latin America's highest rates of femicide, or gender-based murders of women and girls over the age of fifteen."⁹

³ Ibid.

⁴ American Immigration Council, "The Perils of Expedited Removal," May 9, 2017, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/expedited-removal-asylum-seekers>.

⁵ American Immigration Council, "The Perils of Expedited Removal."

⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, "Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle," July 1, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/background/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

After migrants from Latin America, more Indians are detained at the U.S. southern border than citizens of any other country. In the last decade, the number of undocumented Indian nationals apprehended while crossing the southern border into the United States has significantly increased. In 2009, just over 200 Indian migrants were detained, and in 2019, nearly 10,000 Indian migrants were detained at the southern border.¹⁰ Many of these migrants are Punjabi Sikhs who fled India and arrived to plead asylum in the United States. According to a 2020 article in *The Guardian*, the rise of India's Hindu nationalist ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has inflamed sectarian violence. Minorities, including Muslims and Sikhs or low-caste individuals, have endured forced conversions, fatal beatings, and lynch mobs.¹¹ Fearing for their lives, they undertake the costly and dangerous journey to the United States. "Some Indian migrants fly from India to Europe before arriving in Mexico. Others fly into Central or South America and follow the well-trodden migrant trail into Mexico."¹²

Whether the migrants come from India, Central America, or Mexico, the journey to the United States border is costly and fraught with dangers. People pay thousands of dollars to "coyotes" to safely bring them and their families to the border. According to *Amnesty International*, "along the way, many of these men, women and children suffer assaults, robbery and abduction by criminal gangs. There are also reports of extortion and ill-treatment by police and immigration officials."¹³ As many as six in ten migrant women and girls are raped on the

¹⁰ Henna Kaur Kaushal, "Sikhs in America: Perpetually Foreign, Automatically Suspect, and Potentially Terrorist," *California Law Review*, July 2020, <https://www.californialawreview.org/sikhs-in-america>.

¹¹ Sundaram, Arya, "'Scared for my life': why more Indians are joining migrants on risky journey to reach the US," *The Guardian*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/03/india-migrants-mexico-us-border>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Salil Shetty, "Most Dangerous Journey: What Central American Migrants face when they try to cross the border," *Amnesty International*, Accessed on July 15, 2021, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/most-dangerous-journey-what-central-american-migrants-face-when-they-try-to-cross-the-border>.

journey, and abducted women and girls are vulnerable to human trafficking.¹⁴ There is no accurate estimate for the number of migrants who die attempting to seek asylum in the U.S. In 2019, a six-year-old Sikh girl died of heatstroke in an Arizona desert after her mother left her with other migrants to go in search of water.¹⁵

Even if they survive the arduous journey to the southern U.S. border and surrender to border agents, the migrants are not guaranteed entry into the country. In 2018, the Trump administration enforced a "zero-tolerance" policy. Under this policy, adults who crossed the border without permission were detained and criminally charged. There were no exceptions to this policy, even for parents who were arriving with young children.¹⁶ The children were taken from them and sent to government custody or foster care. In the spring of 2018, nearly 45 children were being separated from their parents each day.¹⁷ The *Remain in Mexico* policy took effect in January 2019, which required particular asylum seekers who passed "a credible fear screening with a U.S. asylum officer (a first step in the process for requesting asylum) to return to Mexico to await their asylum hearing in the U.S."¹⁸ At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Center for Disease Control evoked *Title 42*, which permitted the rapid expulsion of unauthorized border crossers and asylum seekers. Under this public health order, migrants were returned to Mexico immediately. They were not allowed to make a case before an immigration judge to stay in the U.S.¹⁹ Despite

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Andrew Hay, "Indian migrant girl, 6, died in Arizona desert as mother sought water," *Reuters*, June 14, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-death/indian-migrant-girl-died-in-arizona-desert-as-mother-sought-water-idUSKCN1TG00B>.

¹⁶ American Immigration Council, "The Perils of Expedited Removal."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Questions and Answers: Credible Fear Screening," Accessed on August 5, 2021, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum/questions-and-answers-credible-fear-screening>.

¹⁹ American Immigration Council, "A Guide to Title 42 Expulsions at the Border," March 29, 2021, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/guide-title-42-expulsions-border>.

the legal and ethical challenges to *Title 42*, the Biden administration has not phased out the use of public health expulsions to Mexico.²⁰

²⁰ Nick Mirrof, “Along Mexico border, covid spike and more migrant families stall plans to end Title 42 expulsions,” *The Washington Post*, July 18, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/title-42-biden-border-covid/2021/07/28/aeeca526-efa7-11eb-ab6f-b41a066381df_story.html.

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. -Warsan Shire

Assistance from Faith-Based Organizations at Southern Border

These policies have resulted in tent cities filled with migrants in Mexico. At one point, a camp in Matamoros, Mexico, had over 1,000 migrants living there across the border from Brownsville, Texas.²¹ Conditions in the camps are dirty, and the migrants rely on charity for food, shelter, and clothing. There is also the threat of continued violence from gangs and "coyotes." I spoke with two organizations that were assisting the migrants in tent cities in Northern Mexico. The *Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF)* is actively helping the migrants with food, shelter, and medical care.²² Mr. Elket Rodríguez, an attorney and Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy and Missions Specialist, assists the migrants by explaining U.S. policies regarding asylum and immigration. He noted that "disinformation is one of the most harmful obstacles migrants face. Predators of various kinds seek to profit from migrants' suffering and lack of knowledge as they flee persecution and deprivation in their home countries."²³ By providing accurate information, Rodríguez seeks to provide them with "sound advice from someone who is not trying to take advantage from them"²⁴ which he hopes can make a difference in their lives. Many of the migrants that the *CBF* and local pastors and churches assist are women in their twenties and thirties who have young children. These women have suffered from sexual, physical, employment, and financial exploitation throughout their entire lives.²⁵ He noted that "migrants are in a disadvantaged

²¹ Alexa Liataud, "Thousands of migrants in tent city limbo after Supreme Court keeps 'Remain in Mexico' in place," *NBC News*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/thousands-migrants-tent-city-limbo-after-supreme-court-keeps-remain-n1155996>.

²² Mr. Elket Rodríguez, Personal Interview, [July 20, 2021].

²³ Carrie Harris, "Immigration attorney Elket Rodríguez to work with CBF, Fellowship Southwest on border," *Fellowship Southwest*, March 2, 2020, <https://cbfblog.com/2020/03/02/immigration-attorney-elket-rodriguez-to-work-with-cbf-fellowship-southwest-on-border>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Rodríguez, Elket.

position in society, and they arrive with many injuries. This, coupled with their mistrust of institutions, makes carrying the correct message more difficult."²⁶

The *Jesuit Refugee Service of the U.S.A. (JRS)* recently launched a bi-national border program serving asylum seekers in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. Mr. Joshua Utter, Outreach Officer, explained that *JRS'* mission is "to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees."²⁷ *JRS* identified El Paso as the location for this new program because it is an "area along the border where they (migrants) are in need of more psychosocial support."²⁸ The program "is new and growing but focusing on identifying areas where there are needs."²⁹ Team members include a Jesuit priest who assists by running "know your rights" training to educate migrants on navigating the complicated U.S. policies and laws. The program also works with other organizations to refer people to medical, psychological, and legal services. In addition, *JRS* runs chaplaincy programs in ICE Detention Centers to provide pastoral support. *JRS* is contracted by the Department of Homeland Security to provide services in five ICE Detention Centers. Utter noted that chaplains could either provide pastoral support to detainees or assist in connecting someone with a different faith (Islam, Sikh, etc.). Chaplains go through training to ensure that they can help detainees identify what they are experiencing mentally or emotionally and provide suggestions to aid the detainee with healing. Utter explained that although their services are on a limited basis at detention facilities, the *JRS Chaplaincy* program provides psychosocial assistance to detainees.

As the number of Indian migrants attempting to claim asylum at the southern U.S. border has increased, many Sikhs encounter language access issues at the border and in detention facilities. Eduardo Jacobo, a spokesman for the *El Centro Sector Border Patrol*, acknowledged

²⁶ Harris, Carrie, "Immigration attorney Elket Rodríguez to work with CBF, Fellowship Southwest on border."

²⁷ Mr. Joshua Utter, Personal Interview, [June 28, 2021].

²⁸ Utter, Joshua.

²⁹ Ibid.

that none of the local border patrol agents speak Punjabi or Hindi. Agents use hand signals to communicate with the migrants until an interpreter is available.³⁰ Mr. Graham West, Media and Communications Director for the *Sikh Coalition*, explained their organization focuses on language access issues. They ensure that communities who speak Punjabi rather than English have equal access to information on everything from voter registration to vaccine information.³¹ Although the *Sikh Coalition* doesn't provide direct legal services on asylum or immigration cases, they work in U.S. detention centers to respond to the civil rights infractions and human rights abuses that Sikhs face in these facilities. The *Sikh Coalition* works to address issues including inadequate or no access to interpreters, denial of religious accommodations including *turban* material, the opportunity to engage in group prayer, and difficulty obtaining food that complies with the detainees' religious-based diets.³²

*The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens;
you shall love them as yourself,
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. -Leviticus 19:34*

Assistance from Faith-Based Organizations within the United States

Migrants entering the United States, whether through legal or illegal channels, still need assistance to survive. One FBO's representative referred to the migrants' experience as "the trifecta of trauma."³³ They are experiencing trauma from violence and persecution in their home country. They also suffer from trauma from leaving their homes and the dangerous journey to the United States. And thirdly, they are coping with trauma from the arduous process of seeking asylum. Once

³⁰ Sundaram, Arya, "'Scared for my life': why more Indians are joining migrants on risky journey to reach the US."

³¹ Mr. Graham West, Questionnaire Response, [July 15, 2021].

³² Sikh Coalition, "Immigration and Detention Work," Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/our-work/preventing-hate-and-discrimination/immigration-and-detention-work>.

³³ Ms. Martha Piedrasanta, Personal Interview, [July 1, 2021].

in the U.S., asylum seekers cannot apply for permission to work in the U.S. at the same time that they apply for asylum. They have to wait a minimum of 365 calendar days after filing a complete asylum application before they can apply for employment authorization.³⁴ The steps necessary to file an asylum application are complicated and time-consuming. The *American Bar Association* notes that “an incomplete or incorrectly filed (asylum) application could delay the receipt of employment authorization and cause additional problems at the asylum interview or hearing.”³⁵ After that process, asylum seekers still have to wait at least a year before they can even apply for the legal right to work and provide for themselves and their families. Additionally, most asylum seekers or asylees are not eligible for federally funded programs such as food assistance and Medicaid.³⁶ The threat of deportation or detention always hangs over them, which increases their stress and trauma.

Legal assistance is almost always necessary to successfully apply for asylum protections and visas to live and work legally in the United States. Language and financial costs pose significant barriers to obtaining legal aid. According to Ms. Jacqueline Rishty, Senior Director of Immigration Legal Services of the *Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington*, legal service needs are the most significant issue faced by the people her organization assists.³⁷ Ms. Laura Sonnenmark, Communications Manager for *National Justice for Our Neighbors*, also emphasized the difficulty in obtaining immigration legal services that are competent, trustworthy, and affordable.³⁸ Mr. Mark Hetfield, President, and CEO of *Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society*

³⁴ Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, “The Difference between Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants.”

³⁵ American Bar Association, “Asylum Application (Form I-589) Checklist,” Accessed August 20, 2021, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/immigration/trainings/notraining_asylumappchecklist.pdf

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ms. Jacqueline Rishty, Personal Interview, [June 16, 2021].

³⁸ Ms. Laura Sonnenmark, Questionnaire Response, [June 17, 2021].

(*HIAS*), noted that they provide legal representation to help navigate the asylum and immigration and refugee vetting systems. *HIAS* is a Jewish American FBO but supports refugees of all nationalities, religions, and ethnic origins. Hetfield indicated that the majority of people *HIAS* is assisting are from Latin America.³⁹

Ms. Elena Martinez Fernandez, a Bilingual Legal Advocate for the *Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLCM)*, explained that their organization serves undocumented immigrants who experience domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. The majority of their clients are women struggling with language access, jobs, child care, health care, and a lack of financial stability. *WLCM* focuses on assisting with two different immigration legal services. They help secure U-Visas (for those who experience domestic violence) or VAWA self-petitions (for those married to US. citizens). Once they have one of these documents, the women can legally obtain a work permit or legal status in the United States. The U-Visa is set aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse.⁴⁰ Martinez Fernandez indicated that those eligible to apply for a U-Visa "are in very bad situations and have kids and don't want to work illegally but they don't have any other choices. Women need to work so they provide for themselves and (their) children. (They) cannot wait years to be able to work legally."⁴¹

In addition to legal aid, FBOs work with individuals and families to assist with access to a range of other critical services. The *Pastoral Migratoria (PM)* began in the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago in 2008. It is an immigrant-led, lay leadership ministry that focuses on Catholic teaching on social justice, service, and accompaniment in the Latin American immigrant community. In January 2021, the Archdiocese of Baltimore began this program in five local

³⁹ Mr. Mark Hetfield, Questionnaire Response, [July 7, 2021].

⁴⁰ Ms. Elena Martinez Fernandez, Personal Interview, [June 28, 2021].

⁴¹ Ibid.

parishes. According to Ms. Lia Salinas, Director of Hispanic Ministry, Baltimore's *PM* will assist people with immigration status, finding better-paying jobs, and improving access to health care. Lay leaders respond to the specific needs of their parish communities and organize workshops and provide resources for topics including immigration, labor, domestic violence, and mental health. Additionally, working with *Catholic Charities*, immigrants are assisted with access to health care, mental health care, and legal assistance.⁴²

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington offers the *Strong Family Initiative (SFI)*. *SFI* "works closely with select parishes, schools, and community-based organizations to provide Latino youth (with) an outlet to discuss hardships they are facing."⁴³ Peer-to-peer support provides spaces where youth can safely and comfortably discuss complex issues. Group circles for parents allow them to focus on building a "community that nourishes healing, growth, and learning."⁴⁴ *Catholic Charities* also offers *The Newcomer Network* with three components, including an Immigration Legal Services team, case managers to assist people with accessing social services, and partnerships with parishes to help access worship and other social-service providers.⁴⁵

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area facilitates a program called *CARE for Newcomers*. According to Ms. Martha Piedrasanta, Director, the *CARE for Newcomers* Program offers Counseling (mental health), Access & Referrals (to community resources), and Education (on trafficking and the asylum process).⁴⁶ Piedrasanta explained that *CARE* assists clients who have been referred by Alternative to Detention programs. The clients are people who

⁴² Ms. Lia Salinas, Personal Interview, [July 1, 2021].

⁴³ Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Washington, "Immigration and Refugee Services," Accessed on August 5, 2021, <https://www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/gethelp/our-services/immigrantsandrefugees>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Washington, "Immigration and Refugee Services."

⁴⁶ Piedrasanta, Martha.

have come across the border hoping to seek asylum. They have either turned themselves at the border or been apprehended by ICE. They are now in an Alternative to Detention program as they go through the asylum process. Piedrasanta indicated that *CARE's* mental health counseling focuses on "the trauma they have experienced either in their past that motivated them to come to the United States. (It also focuses on) the trauma they suffered on their way here. And (it focuses on) some of the trauma that they experience adapting to a new culture, a different language, and a different way of functioning. This is a sort of trifecta of trauma from before, during, and post-migration to the United States."⁴⁷ She also emphasized that the policies do not permit asylum seekers to obtain work permits while going through the asylum application process. This leads to the question 'how is one supposed to live when you cannot work?' Some asylum seekers are afraid to work illegally since this could affect their asylum case if they are caught. Piedrasanta identified the ability for a person to legally work providing for themselves and any family members as the most significant challenge and source of stress.

The *Immigration Outreach Service Center (IOSC)* in Baltimore, MD, offers numerous educational services to asylum seekers and resettled refugees. Ms. Pat Jones, *IOSC's* Director, explained that they encounter people with coping issues to trauma, including drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence. One of the educational opportunities they offer is the *Beyond the Borders Tutoring Program* which provides tutoring and homework help to immigrant students and the children of immigrants. She noted that the relationship that develops between the tutor, child, and the family allows the *IOSC* to help identify poor coping styles or other issues. Jones explained that if a tutor sees a child who may be failing to engage or is struggling, they will attempt to speak to the family to get permission to work with the school and counselors.⁴⁸ *IOSC* offers adult

⁴⁷ Piedrasanta, Martha.

⁴⁸ Ms. Pat Jones, Personal Interview, [July 12, 2021].

computer literacy, financial literacy, and English as a Second Language instruction. They also assist with referrals to legal services, housing, and healthcare for the families.⁴⁹

Islamic Relief USA does not administer specific refugee services, but they provide grants to “agencies embedded directly within communities in the US.”⁵⁰ *Islamic Relief USA* works with voluntary agencies (VOLAGs), non-governmental organizations funded by the Department of State to resettle refugees.⁵¹ The clients are generally from Muslim countries, including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan. *Islamic Relief USA* sponsors the “breadwinner in the family”⁵² and focuses on employment and networking. They also assist immigrants with language needs and access to healthcare. As the situation in Afghanistan unfolds, *Islamic Relief USA* is working to aid displaced people with food, water, emergency tents, and hygiene kits.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ms. Pat Jones.

⁵⁰ Mr. Wasif Qureshi, Questionnaire Response, [July 15, 2021].

⁵¹ Nayla Rush, “‘Private’ Refugee Resettlement Agencies Mostly Funded by the Government,” Center for Immigration Studies, August 10, 2018, <https://cis.org/Rush/Private-Refugee-Resettlement-Agencies-Mostly-Funded-Government>.

⁵² Mr. Wasif Qureshi.

⁵³ Islamic Relief USA, “Focus on Afghanistan: UN Warns of ‘Human Catastrophe,’” Accessed August 20, 2021, <https://irusa.org/asia/afghanistan>.

*It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room
to open the door when someone in danger knocks. -Dina Nayeri*

Conclusion

Each FBO that I contacted aims to welcome and help refugees and asylum seekers to the United States. While each FBO was founded as part of a specific faith, all of the FBOs assisted people who needed help regardless of their religion or country of origin. When I asked about the role of faith in their programs, Ms. Rishty of *Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington* explained that being a faith-based organization can help facilitate a sense of trust.⁵⁴ Mr. Utter of *JRS* emphasized that their role is one of *accompaniment*. Accompaniment means that the members of the FBOs are walking with the refugees and forcibly displaced persons. The organizations are not just providing food, clothing, or services. The relationship and assistance are "really guided by the refugees and their journey to healing and hope in a better future. It isn't just us (FBOs) dictating what that is for them, it is their own decisions and we are just there to be with and accompany them."⁵⁵

The complexity of the United States' immigration and asylum laws make it nearly impossible to navigate without legal assistance. With this complexity combined with language access issues, legitimate asylum seekers may be denied protections and entry into the United States. The family separations in the summer of 2018 have left an indelible mark on a generation of children and parents. These policies have disproportionately affected women and children because of the violence and persecution they have already suffered. FBOs fill the gaps to assure the survival of the refugees and asylum seekers because of the lack of access to federal assistance

⁵⁴ Rishty, Jacqueline.

⁵⁵ Utter, Joshua.

programs for food and housing. The FBO's representative advocated for straightforward and more humane immigration laws and policies. They also supported an increase in financial support for housing, medical and mental health care. Along with new regulations and policies, there needs to be better coordination between government agencies, FBOs, and nonprofits to streamline the process and reduce trauma on individuals and families.

References

- American Bar Association. “Asylum Application (Form I-589) Checklist.” Accessed August 20, 2021.
https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/immigration/trainings/nottraining_asylumappchecklist.pdf.
- American Immigration Council. “A Guide to Title 42 Expulsions at the Border.” March 29, 2021.
<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/guide-title-42-expulsions-border>.
- American Immigration Council. “Asylum in the United States.” June 11, 2020.
<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states>.
- American Immigration Council. “The Perils of Expedited Removal.” May 9, 2017.
<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/expedited-removal-asylum-seekers>.
- Catholic Charities. Archdiocese of Washington. “Immigration and Refugee Services.” Accessed on August 5, 2021.
<https://www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/gethelp/our-services/immigrantsandrefugees>.
- Council on Foreign Relations. “Central America’s Turbulent Northern Triangle.” July 1, 2021.
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle>.
- Fernandez, Elena Martinez. Personal Interview. [June 28. 2021].
- Harris, Carrie. “Immigration attorney Elket Rodríguez to work with CBF. Fellowship Southwest on the border.” *Fellowship Southwest*. March 2, 2020.
<https://cbfblog.com/2020/03/02/immigration-attorney-elket-rodriguez-to-work-with-cbf-fellowship-southwest-on-border>.
- Hay, Andrew. “Indian migrant girl, 6, died in Arizona desert as mother sought water.” *Reuters*. June 14, 2019.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-death/indian-migrant-girl-died-in-arizona-desert-as-mother-sought-water-idUSKCN1TG00B>.
- Hetfield, Mark. Questionnaire Response. [July 7. 2021].
- Islamic Relief USA. “Focus on Afghanistan: UN Warns of ‘Human Catastrophe.’” Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://irusa.org/asia/afghanistan>.
- Jones, Pat. Personal Interview. [July 12. 2021].
- Kaushal, Henna Kaur. “Sikhs in America: Perpetually Foreign. Automatically Suspect, and Potentially Terrorist.” *California Law Review*. July 2020.
<https://www.californialawreview.org/sikhs-in-america>.

Liautaud, Alexa. “Thousands of migrants in tent city limbo after Supreme Court keeps 'Remain in Mexico' in place.” *NBC News*. March 12, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/thousands-migrants-tent-city-limbo-after-supreme-court-keeps-remain-n1155996>.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. “The Difference between Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants.” Accessed on July 31, 2021. <https://www.lirs.org/refugees-asylum-seekers-migrants-whats-the-difference>.

Mirrof, Nick. “Along Mexico border, covid spike and more migrant families stall plans to end Title 42 expulsions.” *The Washington Post*. July 18, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/title-42-biden-border-covid/2021/07/28/aeeca526-efa7-11eb-ab6f-b41a066381df_story.html.

Piedrasanta, Martha. Personal Interview. [July 1, 2021].

Qureshi, Wasif. Questionnaire Response. [July 15, 2021].

Rishty, Jacqueline. Personal Interview. [June 16, 2021].

Rodríguez, Elket. Personal Interview. [July 20, 2021].

Rush, Nayla. “'Private' Refugee Resettlement Agencies Mostly Funded by the Government.” *Center for Immigration Studies*. August 10, 2018. <https://cis.org/Rush/Private-Refugee-Resettlement-Agencies-Mostly-Funded-Government>.

Salinas, Lia. Personal Interview. [July 1, 2021].

Shetty, Shalil. “Most Dangerous Journey: What Central American Migrants face when they try to cross the border.” *Amnesty International*. Accessed on July 15, 2021. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/most-dangerous-journey-what-central-american-migrants-face-when-they-try-to-cross-the-border>.

Sikh Coalition. “Immigration and Detention Work.” Accessed July 16, 2021. <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/our-work/preventing-hate-and-discrimination/immigration-and-detention-work>.

Sonnenmark, Laura. Questionnaire Response. [June 17, 2021].

Sundaram, Arya. “‘Scared for my life’: why more Indians are joining migrants on risky journey to reach the US.” *The Guardian*. February 3, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/03/india-migrants-mexico-us-border>.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Questions and Answers: Credible Fear Screening.” Accessed on August 5, 2021. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum/questions-and-answers-credible-fear-screening>.

Utter, Joshua. Personal Interview. [June 28. 2021].

West, Graham. Questionnaire Response. [July 15. 2021].

Appendix 1: Organizations and Representatives

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

Mr. Rothangliani Chhange, Sr. Associate & Grants, Partnerships and Strategy Alignment

Archdiocese of Baltimore

Ms. Lia Salinas, Director of Hispanic Ministry*

Briggs Center for Faith and Action

Mr. Ferew Haile, Director of Legal Services

Catholic Charities of Baltimore

Mr. Matthew Dolamore, Director, Esperanza Center

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington

Ms. Jacqueline Rishty, Senior Director, Immigration Legal Services*

Fellowship Southwest

Mr. Elket Rodríguez, Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy and Missions Specialist*

Hebrew International Aid Society

Mr. Mark Hetfield, President and CEO

Immigration Outreach Service Center

Ms. Pat Jones, Director*

Irish Apostolate USA

Sr. Marie Prefontaine, Administrator

Islamic Relief USA

Mr. Wasif Qureshi, Lead Information Systems Specialist

Jesuit Refugee Services/USA

Mr. Joshua Utter, Outreach Officer*

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area

Ms. Martha Piedrasanta, Director, CARE for Newcomers Program*

National Justice for Our Neighbors

Ms. Laura Sonnenmark, Communications Manager

Sikh Coalition

Mr. Graham West, Media and Communications Director

Women's Law Center of Maryland

Ms. Elena Martinez Fernandez, Bilingual Legal Advocate*

* Completed follow-up phone call in addition to online questionnaire.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Is your organization associated with a specific faith? If so, what faith?

What countries/areas do the majority of immigrants your organization serves come from?

How would you describe the immigrants your organization serves? (Age, gender, family structure)

What are the most significant issues faced by the immigrants your organization serves? (Ex: language, jobs, health care, child care, discrimination)

What specific programs does your organization have to assist immigrants?

What resources would help your organization better meet the needs of the immigrant community you serve?

Any additional comments or information you would like to share?

Would you be willing to take part in a follow-up call?

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all the representatives of the FBOs that took the time to complete my questionnaire and speak to me for follow-up calls. I learned a lot about both the immigration system as well as the extraordinary work of each organization. The stories of the struggles, pain, and trauma that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers endure will stay with me forever. Each one of these organizations treats every individual attempting to come to the U.S. with dignity and respect. I am also grateful to the Rumi Forum for supporting my research project.

About the Author

Bailey Haraburda is pursuing a B.A. in Sociology with a Global Comparative Processes concentration at *The Catholic University of America* in Washington, DC. She is a research assistant in the Sociology Department. Bailey attended the *Academy of Notre Dame de Namur* outside of Philadelphia, PA. She is also the Technical Director and Resident Stage Manager for *CenterStage* which is a student-run theatre company.