

# Reflections on Refugee Work

December 2018 – April 2019

- Why do asylum seekers or refugees come?
- How do they come?
- How are they treated when they arrive?
- What happens to the refugees after detention?
- Consequences of their journey
- Recent changes in treatment of asylum seekers
- What are we called to do?
- Addressing refugee crisis

Why do the refugees come?

Agusto 40 and Osbin 15

Huehuetenango, Guatemala

Coffee worker

Agusto said working in coffee is a “favorable” job where he is from, even though the pay is low. “50 Quetzales per day (\$6.50), working from six in the morning until four in the afternoon.”



Ana 30 and Alba 9

El Peten, Guatemala – Mayan speakers

“We came here because of the crime and poverty. There is no work there because we can’t grow corn and beans.”



Gresly 24 and Anthony 8

Esteli, Nicaragua

Fear of political persecution

Since the beginning of the political unrest it is estimated that over 200 people have been killed, and thousands wounded. Gresly and Anthony now have no way to return to Nicaragua, “While this government is still in existence, we cannot return.”



Adam 27 and Davis 8

Guatemala

Agricultural day laborer

Reason – extortionist threatened his son



Jose 30, Guadalupe 26, Christian 2,  
and Yahir 1

Guerrero, Mexico

“We came for safety. We aren’t free to work. Sometimes there are shootings, so we can’t leave the house. The truth is we can’t live there anymore. The schools have closed because of what is happening... the teachers don’t come.”





Pedro 51 and Carlos 15

Huehuetenango, Guatemala

Agricultural worker

Carlos's only wish is simply, "That we aren't poor." He only studied until the completion of the sixth grade, but like most other kids in Guatemala, he hasn't gone to school since.



Israel Domingo 32 and Armando 13

Huehuetenango, Guatemala

Israel, like others from his country, wouldn't have left if he could have made life work in Guatemala. "The people want to be safe, and move forward, but there is no means, no road, no support. We all want to prosper and be safe, but we are stuck in the road."



Pablo 48 and Wilma

El Quiche, Guatemala – Mayan speakers

Agricultural worker – little work.

Daughter speaks little Spanish since she's had no schooling



How do the refugees come?

Brenda 21, Alex 21, and Kevin 1

San Marcos, Guatemala

Teachers

The young family traveled 5 days with the help of Coyotes paying about 90,000 Quetzales (\$12,000). This money was taken as a loan using her father's house as collateral.



Aberlardo 34 and Baldwin 9

Guatemala, Alta Verapaz - Mayan

Travel – 20 days thru Mexico: hitching rides  
and asking for help

Baldwin, has only studied for one year. “What happens is that I don’t have any money,” his father said about his kids not being able to go to school. Baldwin only speaks Q’eqchi’, an indigenous language



- Some come on their own or with friends or neighbors
- Others come with a coyote
- They travel by bus, hitchhiking or walking
- Others come in “caravans” or on tops of trains

Dionel 48 and Darwin 13

Guatemala

Agricultural worker

\$4,000 coyote payment - he put his home up as collateral, and if he doesn't succeed in making the payments, he may lose it.





How are the refugees  
treated when they arrive?

- Usually forced to wait at the border – US border agents only process limited number daily.
- Their basic needs not met
- High risk of violence

# Detention by US Border Patrol

- “Hielera”
- Concrete floors
- Bright lights 24 hours
- Solitary confinement reports
- Children separated from parents
- Other maltreatment – “... like dogs...”

What happens to the  
refugees after their release?

# Hospitality Centers

- December 2018 – El Paso 15 and Las Cruces 5
- Annunciation House coordination
- April 2019 – El Paso warehouse
  - Albuquerque 5 and \$250,000
  - Las Cruces – city facility and \$75,000
    - 17,000 and 200 volunteers
- Welcome and short orientation
- Lunch or dinner – hungry and thirsty





- Contact sponsors – family or friends
- Shelter – bed or cot
- Clothing
- Address medical needs
- Conversation / sharing a meal
- Transport to bus station or airport



- Most challenging – Contacting sponsors to arrange travel
  - Listening to stories of separation and violence
- Most enjoyable - Taking folks to the bus station or airport
  - The children
  - Interaction with other volunteers





What are the consequences  
for the refugees?

# Consequences

- Leaving family behind – long separation

Miguel 44 and Anayeli 17

Guatemala – Mayans

7 years away from family to support them



Gaspar 53 and Gaspar Laynez 17

Guatemala – El Quiche - Mayan speakers

Agricultural worker

“It’s hard leaving your home, maybe even sad,  
the family cries, but there is no other way  
because we don’t have money”



# Consequences

- Leaving family behind – long separations
- Financial Expense – coyote \$4-12,000



# Consequences

- Leaving family behind – long separations
- Financial Expense
- Hardships – long journey, detention, cruelty, ankle monitors
  - Hardest part of their journey

- Leaving family behind – long separations
- Financial Expense
- Hardships – long journey, detention, cruelty, ankle monitors
- Fear of kidnapping and extortion
  - reading

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# Consequences

- Leaving family behind – long separations
- Financial Expense
- Hardships – long journey, detention, cruelty, ankle monitors
- Fear of kidnapping and extortion
- Actual violence – injury and death
- Prison time
  - Reading

More recent developments

# Migrant Protection Protocols

- Also called "Remain in Mexico" (RIM)
- Implemented in January 2019.
- U.S. immigration policy forcing asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry, on the U.S. southern border, to be returned to Mexico to wait for the duration of their U.S. immigration proceedings.

# Impacts of “Return to Mexico”

- At least 4,780 children have been returned to Mexico
- 20,000+ migrants – as of July 12, 2019
- Vulnerable Populations Returned: LGBTQT, Pregnant Women, Children and Disabled
- 46.8% to Ciudad Juarez = 9,314 individuals

- 60,000 refugees expected to be returned to Mexico  
by end of August 2019

\* 42,000 waiting across from Texas ( 9-12-19 DN )

Asylum seekers in Juarez outnumber the spaces in humanitarian shelters 11 to 1



# Iglesia Metodista “El Buen Pastor” Shelter



# Human Rights Violations Faced by Returned Migrants

- Family Separation
- Extortion
- Due Process Violations
- Physical and Verbal Abuse
- Sexual and Gender Based Violence
- Kidnapping
- Death

# Asylum Hearings

- DECIDED RIM CASES – 1.2% were represented in court
- PENDING CASES – 163 of 12,997 have representation in court

What are we called to do?

“Once there is seeing, there must be acting.  
Otherwise what is the use of seeing.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

- Annunciation House – El Paso, Texas – donations, volunteers
  - Website – updates, stories, press releases
- IRC – International Rescue Committee
- Local non-profit organizations
- Advocacy - Discuss with family, friends, neighbors, coworkers.
  - Letters to the Editor
  - Contact elected officials – federal, state and local – regarding immigration reform and refugee treatment.

- Paul Ratje's "Faces of Immigration" photo essays
  - possible venues for exhibit
- Books
  - \* The Line Becomes A River: Dispatches from the Border – Francisco Cantu ( 2018 )
  - \* Enrique's Journey - Sonia Nazario ( 2006 )

# Thoughts on Addressing Current Refugee Crisis

- Marshal-like Plan for Central America and Mexico
- Worker Program
- Advocacy – more people and more effective advocacy
  - make this part of our stories
- Empower Affected Communities
  - Border Network for Human Rights



# Ruben Garcia - Annunciation House



# Ruben Garcia – recommendations

- 1 - fix your own house or community of its fear of immigrants.
- 2 - our current immigration system including asylum is utterly broken and politicized, but a new administration can make incremental progress if they pick low hanging fruit--pass the DREAM Act, provide a pathway to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants currently living in this country, increase temporary work visas, and prevent mass migration through foreign investment in initiatives that combat corruption and spur local economies.
- 3 - remember the values and vision of our country and put immigration into perspective. We are a country of immigrants. New immigrants will continue to come and in so doing will help sustain and improve our happiness, well-being and economy.