



*episcopal*  
MIGRATION MINISTRIES

# TOOLKIT

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FOR CHURCHES *and* INDIVIDUALS  
RESPONDING *to* REFUGEES AND  
DISPLACED PERSONS *in* EUROPE

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*YOUR COMPASSION*

for and interest in assisting refugee families and individuals fleeing war and persecution are extraordinary steps toward helping them regain a sense of safety and well-being.

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**T**his toolkit, which is a work in progress, offers guidance on how you – as a church or an individual – can welcome refugees arriving in your community. Many of the principles herein are based on decades of service to refugees resettled in the United States through such agencies as the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society’s refugee resettlement service, Episcopal Migration Ministries, and fellow resettlement agencies. The experience of providing this service teaches everyone involved about basic needs, about the stresses and blessings for the sponsoring group and the family being resettled, and about building a relationship that allows the resettled family to live in dignity and move quickly toward independence.

The checklists below present a brief overview of some of the initial needs of displaced persons, as well as important reflections when working with displaced persons and other vulnerable groups. While local and national contexts may vary greatly, this document aims to address needs and considerations that are universally applicable. Links to other European refugee and migrant assistance associations also are included.

Whether you already are working with displaced persons or are interested in doing so, reaching out to organizations in your area that may be able to connect you with existing support networks is crucial. Applicable contacts may include nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations, international aid and emergency relief organizations, refugee councils, UN agencies, grassroots organizations, faith groups, and refugee and immigrant service providers. If you have the ability to assist with, provide, or financially contribute to the services mentioned below, please reach out to organizations operating in your area.

## INITIAL NEEDS CHECKLIST:

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- *Food and Clothing:* Individuals will need help with food supplies until government food assistance or the means to purchase food is available. Each member of the family may also need seasonally appropriate clothing.
- *Housing:* Individuals not provided with government or government-subsidized housing will require at least temporary housing. If individuals are eligible for government benefits, they may still require temporary housing while their application is processed. Providing families with their own place to live promotes stability and creates a foundation that they can build upon.
- *Health:* Immediate health needs must be addressed as soon as possible. Displaced persons need to be connected with doctors, nurses, and other health professionals who can provide medical care, as well as with individuals who can help them navigate the health care system. Displaced persons with disabilities, including learning, hearing, or seeing disabilities or mobility problems, may require additional resources or specific assistance to access essential services.
- *Child Well-Being:* Traumatized children typically feel overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness, and their actions may signal that they are having difficulty coping with the situation. Referrals to mental health professionals may be necessary. Children who have been separated from their parents or are not accompanied by family members will require assistance from organizations specializing in child services.
- *Emotional and Spiritual Needs:* Individuals who have suffered trauma as a result of violence, flight, or displacement will struggle with the

emotional impact of these experiences. They may require referrals to mental health services and may want to connect with appropriate places of worship and/or communities of faith.

- *Immigration Status and Identification:* Laws on applying for asylum, other protected statuses, and/or other types of legal status vary. Appropriate legal counsel is imperative to address this need. Additionally, displaced persons may have lost forms of identification during flight and need to acquire new identification documents. They also may require assistance applying for new identification documents through organizations that provide emergency response, such as UNHCR (the UN refugee agency) or through government agencies, where legal requirements permit.
- *Other Needs:* Cash assistance may be available through government or NGO programs for displaced persons, and they may require assistance navigating the application process. If other cash assistance is unavailable or insufficient, private resources may be necessary to assure that basic needs are met. Displaced persons may also need assistance enrolling children in schools in their new communities, and adults may benefit from language classes or other educational opportunities. Depending upon local laws and regulations, relatives who are caring for children may need to apply for guardianship in order to make important decisions on behalf of the child that are usually made by a parent, including decisions regarding medical treatment and schooling. Additionally, families will need to find employment and/or an ongoing means of financial support. Family members who will not be working should be connected with other ways to engage with their new community in order to prevent isolation.

## IMPORTANT REFLECTIONS WHEN WORKING WITH DISPLACED PERSONS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

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- *Using Your Gifts:* Think creatively about your own talents and abilities and those represented in your congregation or organization, and discern how you might best meet the needs of displaced persons in your area. Considerations for individual involvement include professional expertise, availability, community connections, advocacy skills, ownership of or familiarity with available housing, language skills, experience in social services, and experience with children.
- *Confidentiality:* Confidentiality is an important practice in health care and social services. Be sure you understand the confidentiality expectations of the organization or congregation you are volunteering through. Often, release of private information, including immigration status, must be authorized by the individual.
- *Expectations for Your Work:* It is important to maintain realistic expectations as to what you can accomplish and how much you will be able to do. Before you make a commitment to become involved, think through the amount of time and resources you have to contribute and the activities you are comfortable undertaking. One of the most important aspects of volunteering is self-care. Your work as a volunteer must be compatible with your personal life, schedules, and goals to ensure that you are giving your time and energy to displaced persons in healthy ways and remaining true to your expectations of involvement. If you are working with other organizations, make sure that you clearly understand their volunteer policies and are specific about the ways you would like to be involved and the amount of time you would like to commit. If you are volunteering as part of a team, your team should set clear boundaries for group involvement including points of contact and specified roles and responsibilities.
- *Emotional and Spiritual Considerations:* It is natural to share what is important to you, including your faith, with those in difficult situ-

ations. The purpose of involvement with displaced persons, however, is to offer caring support to individuals in need. This support should not be based on what they do or do not believe. In all that you do, make sure that those you assist understand that your help is not contingent upon their participation in your church.

- *Trauma and PTSD:* Displaced persons have likely experienced serious trauma due to the situation in their country of origin and the experience of being displaced. It is possible that they have witnessed and/or experienced torture, extreme violence, and/or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common consequence of such trauma. Both children and adults can have emotional and physical reactions to PTSD triggers. Displaced persons will likely require additional support to deal with trauma and may need to be referred to mental health services. Organizations that specialize in providing these services are typically best equipped to meet these needs.
- *Cultural Practices:* The cultural practices of the individuals you volunteer with may differ significantly from your own, and you should respect these differences. Remember that the cultural practices of individuals from the same country, ethnicity, or religion are not necessarily the same. It is important to understand the individual needs and expectations of each person.
- *Collaboration:* It is crucial to work collaboratively with organizations in your area that already are providing services to displaced people. Contributing to the efforts already underway is the most effective way to provide assistance to those most in need. If you are volunteering for another organization, it is important to rely on its members' expertise and to consult with them before taking any course of action. These practices help avoid both the duplication of services and the provision of conflicting or inaccurate advice to individuals. Once people in a vulnerable situation come to trust you, they may listen to your advice even if you are not an expert on issues such as medical care or legal guidance. Building collaborative partnerships and networks takes time and care but is tremendously beneficial to all involved.

## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

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### EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES:

<http://ecre.org/alliance/members/profiles.html>

### EUROPEAN RESETTLEMENT NETWORK:

<http://www.resettlement.eu/page/volunteering-refugee-resettlement-0>

<http://www.resettlement.eu/country>

<http://resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/CAL%2BBackground-er%2B08%2B-%2BSyrians%2BFINAL-3.pdf>