



**SEEKING REFUGE:
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

Forced Passage: Smuggling, Trafficking, and Creating Humanitarian Corridors

Antti Pentikainen, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (Moderator)

Emilia Casella, World Food Programme

Ahed Festuk, Activist

Charlie Gardner, Community of Sant'Egidio

Julianna Wright Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

Ahed Festuk began, sharing her own personal story of living in Aleppo during the civil war. She lived a pretty normal life before the civil war: her father owned a restaurant, she had just finished her accounting degree. The revolution began, asking for freedom of speech and expression, and it progressed into a civil war. After her family's house was bombed in 2011, her family decided to leave Syria, but she stayed, working with Catholic Relief Services as a nurse. Turkey closed its borders so there was no way for her to see her family without smuggling. She tried to get her name on the list so that she could pass, but they would not do it. She had to beg the guards and eventually, she had to resort to taking a clandestine route. She concluded saying, "many civilians are smuggled, old people, children, civilians. It's really hard. It's real life. It's not a documentary."

Next, Emilia Casella spoke, providing much background information on forced migration as it relates to food insecurity. One point that she wanted to highlight was that migration and forced migration are not issues of wealthy countries at all. Most migrate to low and middle income countries, mostly not traveling to Europe or North America despite panic. 9 out of 10 African migrants stay in Africa, and 8 out of 10 Asian migrants stay in Asia.

She then described the results of a preliminary study that showed that poverty and food insecurity are linked. Their presence increases the likelihood of and intensity of armed conflict. Finally, countries with highest levels of food insecurity and conflict have the highest outward flow of migration.

While food insecurity is a push factor for migration, people who migrate are also at risk for food insecurity because the journey has a physical impact on health, migrants are forced to spend money on smuggling or transportation that they might otherwise use to pay for food, and they lose a source of income since they are often unable to work in their country of reception. Once a migrant's journey has begun, decision on where to settle is motivated by economic situation, ability to find safety, and ability to find work. People tend to displace more than once before going on a cross border journey. If a person displaces internally and finds economic stability, the person stays. Policy makers need to think about this.



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Finally, she concluded by saying the mobilization around the current refugee crisis is an unprecedented movement and we need to capitalize on this global concern moving forward.

Finally, Charlie Gardner of the Community of Sant’Egidio spoke about the humanitarian corridors project of the Community of Sant’Egidio. The program takes the most vulnerable families living in refugee camps in Lebanon, and gets them legal humanitarian visas to come to Italy. The community has resettled 700 people within the first year of the pilot program, and they are looking to expand to 1500 this coming year. The project is in collaboration with the Italian government, which they describe as a win-win. From the Italian perspective, this is great, because it is a very secure way of doing work, as all of the vetting process takes place in Lebanon, and the families get a safe, legally sanctioned voyage to Europe. While the program is small, they hope that they can expand to offer more visas, and inspire other EU countries to begin similar programs. Gardner emphasized the role of symbolic actions. The first person who came through this program was a girl with eye cancer, who needed life saving surgery. The newspapers loved it, and it brought a lot of positive attention upon the project. Similarly, Pope Francis brought 12 refugees from Lesbos back from his visit through the humanitarian corridors project. Using images to capture the narrative can help governments change and grow.

Moving to a more open discussion, the group also touched upon a bevy of topics that plague the humanitarian aid world. How do you handle the mismanagement of funds? How do you deal with corruption in the government that affects aid delivery? How does the World Food Program remain independent when it receives such large donations from governments?

The panel particularly focused on the difficulty of getting food and aid into the city, and the “lack of passages” so to speak. Gardner further emphasized that this problem disproportionately affects the most needy. Those who are the most poor do not have the resources to get out of the city. With that, the panel ended focusing on the dearth of support within the city of Aleppo. When asked who was there, helping the people living in Syria, Festuk gave the brutally honest answer:

“No one.”