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Journey   
#sharejourney

## The New Lives Behind the Refugee Admission Numbers

As we experience the largest global displacement crisis we've ever seen, we request an admissions ceiling of at least 75,000 refugees to the United States in fiscal year 2019. UNHCR provides annual analysis of the region-by-region need around the world for resettlement for a small percentage of the refugee population, including unaccompanied refugee minors. Below, Justice for Immigrants (JFI) and Share the Journey share with you the stories of those who have been able to find life-saving protection in our country through resettlement from various regions of the world. These individuals and families have built new lives here with the support of resettlement agencies and local U.S. communities. These accounts are all from local Catholic Charities agencies.<sup>i</sup>

**Unaccompanied Refugee Minors.** Eighteen-year-old Aman and sixteen-year-old Semere are both unaccompanied refugee minors who fled the oppressive military regime in Eritrea. Having had to leave their parents behind in Eritrea and with no relatives in the United States, a local Utah resettlement agency placed them together with a loving foster family in Utah. With the help of their foster family, Aman and Semere are learning to adjust to life in the U.S. Both boys love to learn and are currently taking English classes as well as working at summer jobs, allowing them to gain a host of new skills that can help them in their lives ahead. Despite the hardships they faced in Eritrea and throughout their journey to the U.S, both Aman and Semere are thriving with the love and support of their American family and local community.

**Africa.** After Melaney and her family fled from the instability and unrest in Somalia they ended up in a refugee camp. While in the camp Melaney got a job as one of the camp cooks, cooking is something that Melaney enjoys as well as being a way that she can help provide for her family despite not finishing her education. After seven years in the camp tragedy struck and Melaney's husband suddenly died, leaving her as the sole caretaker and provider for their seven children. However, her luck began to change, and she and her children soon got the opportunity to start again in the United States. Melaney and her children were resettled in Ohio and with the help of a local resettlement agency there, she was able to eventually open her own restaurant, serving Somali as well as East African and American cuisine. Today Melaney's business is thriving and attracts both refugees and non-refugees alike to come and sample her amazing cooking.

**East Asia.** Originally from Burma, Zeya was forced to flee her home after the military dictatorship there took over her community. She fled to Malaysia where she stayed until she got the chance to go to the United States at age 17. She was accepted by an unaccompanied minor program run by a resettlement agency in Arizona and was placed in a foster home until she was old enough to live on her own. For many newly arrived foreign born children, it is difficult for them to transition into the school system due to language and other cultural barriers. Yet Zeya was able to overcome these

challenges with the help of local community programs and excel in her studies. Upon graduating from high school, she won full scholarship to attend the Arizona State University School of Engineering. With her engineering degree now in sight, Zeya is well on her way to a very successful life.

**Europe and Central Asia.** When the Kazan family arrived in North Carolina in August of 2016 after two years of waiting to come to the U.S, they were greeted at the airport by relatives and staff from a local resettlement agency in Charlotte. The family of six had fled from their home country of Belarus due to religious persecution and were very happy to be reunited with mother Maryia's grandparents who they had not seen for 10 years. The Kazan's are currently living with Maryia's grandparents while they try and find housing of their own and father Aleksey, a carpenter by trade, looks for a job. Their family has received a lot of support and encouragement from both the local resettlement agency as well as the community, and all of them have begun to learn English and to adjust to life in the U.S.

**Latin America/Caribbean.** Elena fled to the United States from Cuba to have a chance at a better life and to escape the limited freedoms afforded to her in her home country. She was resettled by a local resettlement agency in Florida and was placed soon after in a housekeeping job at the Doubletree Guest Suites in Naples. Elena quickly excelled in her new job and was subsequently promoted to Assistant Housekeeping Manager and later Executive Housekeeping Manager. She also began to offer vocational English and citizenship classes on top of her regular staff training to her fellow refugee housekeepers to aid them in their transition into life in the U.S. Elena has been one of four finalists for Doubletree Employee of the Year from among 2,500 employees and has also represented refugees in Florida at the Refugee Congress convened by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Elena is currently thriving in the U.S. and has a very bright future ahead of her.

**Near East and South Asia.** Nadia lived in Iraq her whole life, and despite the conflict around her she managed to work her way up through IT administrative positions to become an executive assistant. But after she experienced a kidnapping attempt, she no longer felt safe in her home country and decided that she had to flee Iraq. In March 2016 Nadia arrived in San Diego County after a long and arduous journey, full of hope as well as uncertainty about what her future might hold. Initially, despite her English being good, Nadia experienced trouble in trying to adapt to a new culture and found it difficult to find a job comparable to the one she had left behind in Iraq. With the help of a local resettlement agency in San Diego, she secured a job and began to work at the Residence Inn by Marriott as a Guest Service Agent where she learned about US business practices and customer service. Now Nadia is thriving, as well as giving back to the community by partnering with the same local resettlement agency that first helped her to teach new refugees and asylees about customer service and the important role it plays in many industries.

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<sup>i</sup> This backgrounder was created in collaboration with Refugee Council USA.