

## **Life in a refugee camp.** Home and overseas paper: April 2025

As we know, many families left Moravia in the 1720s to escape religious persecution. As refugees they travelled through fields and forests, depending upon the kindness of others and yet stalked by danger and haunted by fear. Looking back, sadness at what they had left: looking forward into an unknown future. Count Zinzendorf offered them land and today we can celebrate Herrnhut and all it stands for. In the very recent past, Herrnhut once more opened its arms to refugees. This time it was families from Ukraine.

Fitzpatrick (1996)<sup>1</sup> defines refugees as people who have fled their homes because of persecution and crossed international borders and are unable to return because of fear of retribution. They all come from a place of fear, violence and have left their homes and all that is familiar.

Today over 117 million<sup>2</sup> are displaced from their homes around the world, about half of them being women and girls. Of these, too many are in refugee camps and despite UN Security Council resolutions, they are often denied basic rights of safety, food and water. Concern Worldwide<sup>3</sup> states that 1 in 5 women refugees experience sexual violence.

It is important to recognise the hardship and the extreme conditions and yet too often this can be at the expense of the positives. Women for Women International<sup>4</sup> estimates that refugee women could generate and contribute over £1 trillion to annual global gross domestic produce (GDP). Not sure I understand this but what I can say is, it's a lot!

Many refugees are educated and highly skilled, yet they face barriers to inclusion in a local economy. There are also the horrors of modern slavery. Such people are kept in terrible conditions, made to work long hours and not paid. This is a problem throughout the world. Think nail bars, car washes and domestic servants: all these can sadly be found in our country. It is estimated that at present there are over 120 thousand modern slaves in the UK today. That probably means that within a few miles of your Circle meeting there are people living in slavery.

The issue of refugees and migrants will continue to be a challenge worldwide, driven by war, poverty and climate change. Thus we need to think, talk and pray for guidance. Only then can we hope to remember that each refugee is a person, not a statistic, and find a way of supporting displaced people with the kindness we would wish for were it ourselves.

Sr Mary Holmes

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Fitzpatrick was an academic who wrote widely on refugees.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR figure 2024

<sup>3</sup> Concern Worldwide: international humanitarian and development organisation

<sup>4</sup> Women for Women International: set up in Bosnia in 1993.