Welcoming Our Newest Neighbors

K Kendall Martin 00:00

Thank you for joining us for today's episode, we will begin today's webinar with a prayer. Let us pray. Almighty and Merciful God, whose son became a refugee and had no place to call his own. Look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger, homeless and hungry. Bless those who work to bring them relief, inspire generosity and compassion in all of our hearts, and guide the nations of the world towards the day when all of our joys and your kingdom of justice and have peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. The agenda for today's webinar begins with a brief introduction of the webinar hosts which are Episcopal Migration Ministries and the Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations. We will then give you a brief overview of refugee resettlement in the United States. And then my colleague Chris Ramon will host a panel discussion followed by an opportunity for Q & A and then we will give you some follow up and next steps. Episcopal Migration Ministries is the The Episcopal Church's refugee and migration ministry and is part of Presiding Bishop Curry's staff. Our work at EMM includes welcoming refugees, ministering to those who are harmed by immigrant detention and supporting asylum seekers. Our work in the EMM engagement unit is to engage Episcopalians to learn, advocate and serve. To that end, we offer a number of resources, ministry opportunities and ways to connect and network with EMM and other Episcopalians engaged in this work. You will find all of these and more at our website www.episcopalmigrationministries.org and you can feel free to email us at amm at emm@episcopalchurch.org. We invite you during the month of June to join us to celebrate

World Refugee Day through education, dialogue, prayer and advocacy. You can learn more about these opportunities at www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/worldrefugeeday. I'll now invite my colleague Chris Ramon to give a brief overview of the work of The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations.

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Cris Ramon 03:48

Hi, my name is Cris Ramon and I am a consultant working on immigration issues with the Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations. OGR essentially functions as the advocacy arm for the Episcopal Church that advocates in a whole host of issues. In addition to immigration and refugee and asylum rights, OGR also advocates on other public policy areas. So we're active in ensuring that the perspectives and the views of the Episcopal Church are being acknowledged and incorporated into not only what the White House does, but also what Congress does as well. So we're here to represent the voice of the Episcopal Church and represent the policies that it feels is the best way to advance its mission of serving the most vulnerable people in the world.

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Kendall Martin 04:35

So before we start our panel discussion, we wanted to provide a bit of context about refugee resettlement in the United States, which will set up the conversation that we will have today. So if you attended our webinar on May 20 Reflecting on the Geneva Convention, you will recall that refugees are individuals who have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The United Nations Refugee Agency is charged with finding solutions for refugees. The first goal is always that refugees can voluntarily go home when it is safe to do so. The second durable solution is local integration into the country in which they first sought asylum. The third durable solution, which is only available for less than a half to 1% of refugees who are eligible, is resettlement to a third country. For refugees who are resettled to the United States there is a multi month and sometimes many year process of security screening, health screening and approvals before they travel to the US. Upon arrival in the US, they are greeted by a local office or local affiliate of one of the nine national refugee resettlement agencies like Episcopal Migration Ministries. We're grateful to have with us today on this webinar, Drocella Mugorowera, who is actually the director of EMM's affiliate in East Tennessee -Bridge Refugee Services. Now each of the nine resettlement agencies holds contracts with the US Department of State and the US Department of Health and Human Services to welcome refugees and provide services to refugees for their first month in the United States. Each agency's local affiliate carries out these programs with their local staff, as well as with

countless volunteers, community partners, local stakeholders, congregations and other supporters. The three primary federal programs that support refugees upon their arrival and first month in the US programs that EMM carries out with our federal funders and with our local affiliates are reception and placement, Matching Grant and Preferred Communities Program. Each of these programs goals is defined a bit differently, but all are focused on assisting the refugee family as they achieve self sufficiency. So the reception and placement provides for refugees needs during their first 30 to 90 days in the US, and it focuses on assisting refugees achieving economic self sufficiency through employment as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States. The Matching Grant program is an intensive employment case management program that focuses on helping the refugee family achieve economic self sufficiency. The Preferred Communities program focuses on especially vulnerable refugees in need of holistic and long term intensive case management, including for medical and mental health. And this program has a distinctive focus taking a holistic view of refugee self sufficiency and integration and supporting clients as they reach their own goals moving from at risk to stable to thriving. And now I'd like to turn it over to my colleague Cris Ramon for the panel discussion part of our presentation.

Hello everybody, my name is Cris Ramon. I'm excited to be able to do this with a great set of panelists to explore the issues around refugee resettlement in the United States. Our panels include Jessica Darrow, who is Assistant Instructional Professor at the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice at University of Chicago. Drocella Mugorewera, Executive Director for Bridge Refugee Services in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Rachel Peric, the Executive Director of Welcoming America. And so we're just gonna dive right into sort of the first half of this discussion is how does how the refugee resettlement integration process works. And Jessica, just to sort of begin the conversation, can you provide an overview of how the refugee resettlement process works in the United States and recent trends and resettlement kind of building on what we've already shared earlier?

Thanks. And let me start by thanking everyone at EMM for having this webinar and for all of those that are attending today, because it's your commitment to receiving and welcoming newcomers refugee newcomers that really makes the difference in their lives. And in the integration journey I'm about to talk about so Cris, thanks for teeing up the conversation this way. And Kendall Thanks for the opening. I want to underscore some of the words that Kendall included in her description of the basic services provided and the

route to resettlement. She talks about economic self sufficiency quite a bit. And this is important because the basic underpinning of the United States refugee resettlement policy is a focus on work first principles. The idea is that once newcomers arrive, once refugees arrive in United States, they will become a part of vibrant part of the communities that they're resettled into. Some of that will happen organically. Some of that will happen through school for children that are here. Some of it will happen in community. But the federal government is focusing its resources on connecting refugee newcomers through the labor market, and integrating them into their communities through their work life. And the idea here is that if people can fend for themselves, and have the means to make up there, and allow their family to thrive, that first of all, they can pay the bills and raise their children as they like, but also, you know, they can make their own economic decisions, but also that they'll experience the positive outcomes of being a part of a labor force community and being a part of what is a founding principle, the United States, which is sort of this individualistic, build yourself up and keep yourself and your family going - priority in principle, so with that, that's sort of the philosophy that underscores our integration processes. When refugees arrive, they're connected directly to organizations that help them get settled - organizations like the ones you'll be hearing about. And unlike really anyone else who arrives the United States and gets off an airplane, they're greeted at the airport. And they're given robust array of services that are focused on this early integration on getting their family settled. And it's an individual finding an apartment for that person. And if it's a family, finding a home for the family, getting kids into school. And again, most of those services are intently focused on getting people who are of working age and are able bodied into work. There are lots of other models of resettlement. And I think it's important just to remind our listeners of this, there are models of resettlement and other countries and other parts of the world where work is not their priority, where in fact, refugees don't enjoy the right to work that they do have in United States, and where language acquisition or education, or other components of integration are prioritized. So I want to underscore that as well.

J Jessica Darrow 12:13

Some of the trends that we've seen, for the last several years under the Trump administration are of a declining commitment to refugee resettlement we saw once President Trump took office, he followed through on his campaign assurances that he would diminish refugee resettlement, and right away succeeded in doing so. And in the years of that administration, we really saw that the more robust footprint of communities throughout the United States that were welcoming refugees shrink to a much smaller number. And that didn't happen because people in the country changed their attitudes towards refugees. For the most part, it happened because the infrastructure shrunk because the federal government starved the resources it needed to thrive. What we've

seen under the Biden administration already is a little hiccup at the start, and some some confusion about how to get started. I don't think the question of if this administration is committed to resettlement is at issue, but how to re engage with that commitment and how to rebuild the sector has been a question. But as we were just talking about before our webinar began, the trend is picking upward. Again, we're seeing resettlement again, we're seeing flights arrive. And we're seeing people coming into the country for the first time since what was colloquially called the Muslim ban. But where President Trump passed executive order limiting entry from many Muslim countries, we now finally seen Syrian refugees arriving again into the country, as well as many refugees from Central African region, specifically the Democratic Republic of Congo. I believe that the largest numbers arriving now, in terms of our integration processes, I'll say only one last thing for these trends. We don't as of now have different resettlement priorities, we are still focusing on getting those folks who are newly arrived, quickly situated and then into work opportunities. And given the shift in labor market, and what's happened under the covid 19 pandemic, it remains to be seen whether that is going to be an effective strategy as it has been in years past. I think that might be a good start to the conversation, Cris, if there's anything else you'd like me to flesh out? Of course, I'm happy to do so. But I'll defer to our next speaker.

Drocella, we're going to talk about your experience coming to the United States through the actual program. Can you tell us about the experience and what it was like actually dealing with this firsthand, and then just how you came into your own current career?

D Drocella Mugorewera 14:58

That's what I want. To thank God for His protection, US government for giving me again the chance to live for serve, and dream. And for EMM, not only for organizing this event, you have been always champion for welcoming refugees, but also bringing refugees voices around the table. My journey to come to US was very painful, stressful. I was scared, frustrated, and confused. Imagine to leave your country and leave behind your family, your career, and lose everything you invested in for more than 40 years. As a woman, you can imagine having your life handed to two strange men, I do not know where they are now. Just I pray for them. I was not crazy to leave behind my 12 years old daughter. As a parent, you can imagine how I felt. But when I go to you, as I remember, first time when I landed in New Jersey, and I find someone with a laptop and I say, Can you hand me your laptop so I can send a message back home to tell them that I am alive? When I talked to my sister, the only question that my children were asking, just tell us if our mother is alive. Thank God, I'm alive still today. The second moment, which was very touching is seeing

Bridge Refugee Services, case managers coming to welcome me at the airport with a delegation from Northside Christian Church. I remember, when we got to the apartment, the food was prepared. And the bed was made. And it was wonderful. We had good discussions. And then since I was disconnected from my church for almost nine months of hiding, my first ask was to be reconnected to my church. And then the following day, they detected my church. And I started to get connected, how to ride the bus to go to the church, how to even engage other community members to go to church. Then, when I started to work, I started my work within 45 days, and I was very grateful that I can make my own money to have an income. But on the other hand, as a former member of the government and parliament, starting with $6.55 an hour was disturbing and shocking. And then I started to just seek for other opportunities, because I felt like I was under utilized. And intellectually there I was freezing. And I was disconnected to the world. And when I was talking about having internet, some people were considering this as luxury. And then I started to find jobs in my neighborhood. I can tell you, I did work 14 hours a day so I can sustain my family when they come back. I still when used to, to go to community leadership training using my paid time off because my employer said that they couldn't support my training. I became a community leader. And then 2015. So I did arrive in America in 2009, and in 2015 when Bridge was looking for an Executive Director, they did ask me to come on the panel of interviewers, and they didn't find a director they wanted. And I said can I apply? I have managerial skills, I can mobilize resources. But some people were discouraging me to go to work in that organization because they were financially unstable. But I was telling them that I have confidence that I can build Bridge as vibrant organization. And before that time, I went to a seminar when somebody told me that Upward Global help refugees who are skilled to begin their career, but I was on the fifth edge, fifth year edge in becoming in being a new so I was almost disqualified. And they I say hey, I have this position. Can you help me? They helped me find a mentor. I did a presentation. I presented the vision, and then I became a director. And what I can tell you is that

refugee resettlement is not only a life saving solution, but we also as refugees, we add value to the community, we have skills we are bringing, we have social, cultural and economic values we are bringing, and this is what many people do not know. But I am here and I'm glad that Bridge situation was not very good financially well to us. Now, I can tell you that we are one of the vibrant organization. When I started, I think we had less than 11 employees. Now we are 20. So I wanted to show that I have managerial skills, I can connect to the community and I had a story to tell. So through storytelling, and connecting to the community, explaining the public and private partnership, Bridge rose

again, and we are sustainable and vibrant organization today, and I'm grateful and humbled to lead this organization.

Thank you for sharing that. It's always important to bring in those voices and the perspectives of people that go through that. You know, Rachel, so we've talked, we've got a perspective of somebody who went through the process, we've talked about sort of the the system that brings individuals through to be able to resettle in the United States and seek safety. We are kind of resetting the refugee program with this new administration. What's the role that everyday people can play? In order to ensure that this process is successful? It could be because you know, Welcoming America does a lot of this work and is able to sort of galvanize communities to become more welcoming. What's the role that folks who are listening to this can play?

R **Rachel Peric** 21:45

Well, first of all, a huge thanks for the opportunity to be part of this conversation. And Drocella, thank you for reminding us in such a poignant way of the power of refugee resettlement on so many levels. And I think, you know, as we're having this conversation, I'm just so grateful for the work that you do for the work that EMM does, and I thought I would just share a couple of stories, from our work and from my own life, that I think reflect what that power is, by way of getting to your question, Cris. And the first is also a deeply personal story. My own family came to this country as refugees at the end of World War Two, they were helped by what is now a resettlement agency. So I know how important this work is, and what it means. And the picture that is behind me is actually their arrival at Ellis Island. They were not greeted at an airport, but they were greeted by a cousin of my grandfather, who turned to my mother who was a baby in arms at that time, and said to her, this will be your America too. And I think you know, on our best day in the United States, on our best day in the refugee resettlement program, that is the the ideal that we can aspire to live up to that you can be from anywhere in the world of any race, religion, you can come to this country, and you can not only find a job here, you can not only find a community here, but this can be the country that you claim as your own too. And when we say creating a welcoming community, a place where everyone belongs, this is what we mean, it's not just about being a sort of perpetual guest or stranger in this country. It's, it's about coming into the home and really building up being a builder of that home, really helping up putting up its walls. And, you know, feeling that sense of investment and ownership of it, whether you are a refugee, whether you are new to this country, or whether you have lived here all your life, because the fact is there are many people who have lived their whole lives in this country, that also, you know, are not

welcome, don't belong, and are not full participants in our democracy and in our communities. And that is really what we're trying to get to at the end of the day, in the way that we define success. And I think one of the things that I'm so grateful to EMM for actually is my second story, which is the story of my going to one of your conferences, nearly a decade ago, and for the first time hearing the story of Boise, Idaho. Now, Boise, Idaho, had long been a site of refugee resettlement, and in general, things were going pretty well until there was an economic downturn. And that really became the fodder for some community backlash against refugees and questioning of you know, should we really be doing this can we afford to do this and and all sorts of zero sum narratives began to take hold in that and some community leaders got together and said, and this is a quote, how do we meet scarcity with an attitude of abundance - really this beautiful moral call to action, and they came together to create what was really one of the country's first strategic welcoming plans, strategic plan for building the community's capacity not only to make growth and have resettlement go well, but really to be an inclusive community overall, in a way that would express that value of being welcoming. And they were able to turn that around. Boise became a very successful place, and continues to this day to be very successful place. As a welcoming community, my organization Welcoming America certified it as one of the nation's first Welcoming Cities a few years ago. And that was really due to the community coming together through that process, and continuing to come together through an ongoing process, to invite people from all across the community to be a part of refugee resettlement, and to be a part of really creating a welcoming community, reducing the barriers in a systemic way, reducing the barriers that people face to participating civically, socially, economically, building bridges between neighbors, neighbors, United is the collaborative that continues that work along with the city of Boise and many, many partners. And this is really what it takes to make this go well, and to really live into that promise, a whole community approach. So when you ask the question, What can I do as an individual, there is a whole lot that you can do to be a voice, for that narrative of abundance, and to participate in your own communities process to make sure that refugee resettlement is a whole of community endeavor, and really about ensuring that everyone can belong. And I know we'll get more into the details of what that can look like in the conversation.

Yeah, so we're gonna pivot to round two before we go to the Q & A. So, you know, Jessica, you're talking about, you know, how the United States approaches its model, refugee admissions. And integration is very different from saying, like, the centralized European model of, you know, having a lot of grant funding, but maybe not access to labor markets. It's complete, different approach. But that being said, you know, obviously, we

are a leader in refugee admissions and integration. But how would you improve the reception integration of refugees into the United States, sort of what policy recommendations that you would make?

Well, maybe I will begin to ask that question by centering some of what we've just heard. For the last decade or more, I've been doing research with refugee resettlement agencies. And over and over again, what I hear in that research, and what I learned is that the voices and the perspectives of those actually going through the refugee journey, the people who are impacted by the program, have lots to say, because it's their lived experience about how we might improve the program. And so rather than just telling you what I think we could do, I would like to say that my perspective on what I think we can do is informed by really attentive listening to over the years, people who have come through the program, and making sure that proposals feel like they would work for refugees. Now, we don't have a monolithic group refugees come from all over the world. They have different religious identities, they have different ethnic and racial and national backgrounds, and, and then different cultural norms that they bring with them. And so there won't be one policy that will work for all people, because again, none of us humans are all the same. And so I would say, first and foremost, what I think is really important is that the Refugee Act of 1980, and even the proposals to improve it through the Refugee Protection Act, which is legislation that our viewers can learn something about. It's proposed legislation in the Senate. These policies provide a standard package of services available to refugees, services and benefits. What I think would be really wonderful is if we thought in a more responsive way, not every refugee will be able to take up work as soon as they arrive. Some folks may be dealing with trauma, some folks might choose to pursue, as yourself, I said, changing and adapting their credentials to the US labor market. And that might take some further education or some time or some certificate work. There may be lots of reasons that work isn't the first priority for a newcomer. Another thing we contend with is, as I sort of briefly mentioned, people come with varying degrees of trauma. Not every refugee who comes has experienced trauma, we shouldn't assume that, but some have. And so the provision of mental health services in a robust way in the very beginning, like important for those folks. Some folks may prefer to stay home with their young children and make sure those children are thriving in school. So I think of a policy that is more responsive to the needs, the individual and different needs that newcomers have would be one of the best policy changes that we could see. In addition to that, I would say that the sort of work that welcoming communities is doing the sort of work that Welcoming America is doing and Upwardly Global is doing work where we really think about the communities in which people have landed, and how we draw on the assets of those communities. How we recognize that as Drocella said, refugees make their

communities even richer and more vibrant, because they bring themselves and their experiences to that place. So what is that two way conversation looking like? How do we raise and accentuate both parts of that conversation, both what the refugee brings and adds, and what the community can offer, I think some sort of community centered approach that others on this call probably have ideas about would be a second and really wonderful addition to bolstering the refugee resettlement program. The last thing I'll say, and again, happy to talk more about this in q&a, is that there are three pieces of legislation I think, are interesting. Two are very connected to each other. There's the Grace Act and the Lady Liberty Act, both of which try to raise the minimum number of refugees who come per year to 125,000 a year. In addition, is the legislation I've already mentioned was, which is the Refugee Protection Act, which would raise the minimum to 95,000, but also proposes a whole bunch of improvements to our asylum processes, and to how we think about unaccompanied minors who arrive at the border. So I encourage participants if they're interested to learn more about this legislation, but I myself find these three pieces of legislation hopeful, in that they show there is the political will to potentially change and improve the program in ways that benefit newcomers.

Great. And so thinking about your own personal experiences, and everything that you experienced when you're coming here, and then the work that you've been doing since then, through your organization, the same questions to you, how could the United States improve the reception and the integration and welcoming of refugees in the communities across the country?

I think that I, first of all, I'm grateful that myself and my children have been reunited. And I'm thankful that US gave me that opportunity to see my children again, and to see how they grow. And being separated from family and not be able to talk to them for one year was not an easy way. But I remained hopeful. And with the support of the welcoming community, we managed to make it happening. So I think that how people can support this program and be hopeful about other ways to go, I think, is just you think about human way of welcoming people. And how would you treat yourself when you are in this kind of environment, that very good for us that US has this program and they facilitate the family reunification. Not seeing my children for one year, don't think that was not an easy thing, and then to to be able to talk to them. But I'm thinking that when we are moving forward with refugee resettlement, I think we have to work collaboratively with the welcoming communities and running about refugee stories, because sometimes people do not

understand well, why people flee their countries, how they come here, and what are the social economic values they are bringing to our communities, and we work as a community and those values America has to be preserved. And refugees are also bringing a lot of value to our nations. So when you are separated from your family, it's not an easy thing. But when you have a chance to be reunited, you just thankful you're thankful. But refugees also are bringing a lot of social, economic and cultural values, enriching our communities. And I'm thinking that working hand in hand with local communities and families, we are enriching each other and I'm hopeful that COVID-19 will go away and we will be able to welcome more refugees, but it's beneficial also for citizens and residents because they are bringing cultural and economic values to our nation. There is a win win in terms of welcoming and resettling refugees. And I'm very grateful that America gave me a chance personally to serve and welcomed and facilitate the family reunification, because they are many programs, and then also asylum. Asylum seekers also have that chance to have protection. And this is something we are very thankful and the contribution are so people are bringing to this nation, a norm. And I think we'll be able to respond to the questions I have been people seeing in the church. But I wanted to tell you that as a parent, it was not an easy way to not see the children and not speak to them for one year. But I'm very grateful that America facilitated family reunification. And now, the children are giving back in different sectors of accounting supply chain. One is a nurse and and I can just be grateful. And also, I want to be grateful for people who participated in this resettlement program, and we are hopeful that it will thrive. And we can welcome more refugees, and they can live with citizens to make our economy in our communities more prosperous.

Thank you. Rachel, so I've known you for almost 10 years. And we've always had this ongoing dialogue of integration, immigrant immigration metrics. And it seems like what success is, has evolved and become I think, the field has seen that become far more nuanced, there's more depth. And I think that the way you measure what success looks like for refugee welcoming, which is not necessarily integration, but welcoming. What does that look like? How does it sort of a shift from integration to welcoming? What is the success look like? And how can folks be involved in I know we were talking about that a little bit earlier? So if you can just kind of hit on those two themes of, I think, a more nuanced in depth view of welcoming as opposed to integration and how people can play a role in that?

Well, I think one of the reasons, first of all, thank you, Cris, and yes, spirited debate over many years, the quest continues. You know, I think one of the reasons why it feels so important to center this conversation about success in values, is because, you know, at the end of the day that the measure of our success really comes back to what are the things that we care about as, as a community as a country, I'm just reflecting on Drocella's comment about being separated from her family, I can't imagine the anguish of that. And yet we are having a conversation, you know, that started since the beginning of time, but particularly in the Trump administration, about whether what our immigration system should look like and the extent to which family staying together matters, and that, and I think it's extremely important that if we are people who believe that, you know, our success as human beings is rooted in having a network of support around us is rooted in having our families around us that we preserve that as a value, you know, in the way that we talk about immigration, the way we think about it, and then in the practice of it in our laws and norms. And so, you know, I just I, I would encourage any of you who are on this call, who are involved or thinking about being involved, you know, one of I think the most powerful roles that, that people who don't do this work professionally, every day, can add is really bringing your own communities back to this conversation about values, what matters to you, what is welcoming mean to you? What are the values that you want to hold on to and making sure that our, you know, that our refugee resettlement program, that immigration system reflects those, for us at Welcoming America, one of the ways that we have codified that into some things that can be measured, is through a document that we call the Welcoming Standard. And we spent a number of years going out to all kinds of people impacted communities professionals in the field and saying, what are the set of things that are within the scope of a community to do that would make it a welcoming place. And you're welcome to visit our website, WelcomingAmerica.org. But the welcoming standard really encompasses the answer to that question. We're updating it now. But it includes things like having some infrastructure within local government, the social contract of an immigrant nation should require some investment from government to support success in this at a national level at a local level to it, it's about looking at different systems in the community, whether it's schools or workforce system, public transportation to say how can we really reduce the barriers that people might face to being able to access those systems, whether it's language making things accessible. And people's language has been enormously life saving during, during COVID for all of us. And you know, and as soon as you begin to pick away at what some of those things might be for somebody that faces potentially a number of barriers, you start to see the barriers that everyone in a community might face. One of the things that happened in the process of Boise going through its action plan was identifying that a lot of refugee families who wanted to work couldn't get to their job because of the public transportation system. And so they looked at that, and they made it a more accessible one. And that benefited not just those particular individuals, but really the community as a whole trying to get to

work. We need to be sensitive to that. And then it also looks at things like intergroup relations, how are we really helping people in the community, again, come to know each other as neighbors, whether that's over a soccer pitch or a meal, in the organizations we work in, we can all play a role in that. And that is just a fraction of some of the components of, of what success looks like in terms of creating a welcoming community, again, not just a welcoming community, for newcomers, but really for people who have lived there all their lives as well.

Great. So now we're going to switch to Q & A. I'll try to get through these in the next 10 minutes. So we'll we'll try to get through as many of them as possible. Jessica, so here's a technical question for you. Eileen is asking about the current governor of Texas said he will not allow refugee resettlement in Texas. Now, if you remember, this happened in 2015. At the height of the year, well, it's still ongoing, but the height of the European migration crisis and concerns at that point that you'll start seeing similar steps. Do governors and legislatures have the final say as to where refugees can be resettled? Or is it just simply federal policy that takes precedence?

It's actually a very good question. And the answer isn't completely straightforward. I can start by saying refugee resettlement is both a very, very local and federal initiative. The State Department is responsible for bringing refugees over to the United States from wherever they are departing from and local communities. Ultimately, as we've heard from Rachel, the newcomers you resettle in a neighborhood, you don't resettle in a state. Governor Abbott isn't resettling anybody. But yes, we have had both Texas and also several other governors in 2015 said that they would not want to resettle anymore and threatened to end resettlement. And in fact, there was quite a bit of legislation and action in the courts around that governors don't have the right to say who can and can't enter their state. The fact is, is that we have freedom of movement in this country, we can cross borders from state to state. And again, the federal government is responsible for bringing refugees to United States. What governors can do, on the other hand, is decide not to implement state run programming, in which case, we rely on the nine national resettlement organizations and their network of local community offices throughout the country to implement the federal policy. And that is a doable, workable, and in fact, sometimes quite smooth system, bypassing the functionality of the state. However, in short, the governor is blustering. And speaking to the base, I believe, and really having I think more of a discussion about the border. And what's happening with asylum seekers at

the border, and instead is trying to reframe that conversation about all immigration, hopefully, unsuccessfully, I don't know if that completely answers the question, because as I say, I think it's quite complex.

Yeah. And it's kind of unclear. You had the Trump era policy that required states and localities to sign off on resettlement and that was held up by litigation. So it's an unclear unfilled area of law. Certainly, one quick technical question from David on this. So do refugees choose communities where they go? Or are they assigned, if assigned by whom and how much the individual contacts within various communities? How does that influence assignments? Just a quick add on to that?

I'll try and be very brief as I actually teach an entire class on this because it's also complicated, but as was suggested earlier, when people have relatives in the United States who have come through the refugee resettlement program, they can resettle where their relatives are, and most likely will. The State Department and the Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration manages a resettlement program on the ground and really does try to get relatives to relatives because they understand that if refugees arrive and go to Maine and their relatives are in Washington State, they're going to end up needing to move to Washington State. And they'll have to transfer for themselves all the way across the country. So they try to get relatives to the same places if someone arrives after the first principal arrival. But if a refugee arrives that doesn't have a relative, that person could end up in any number of the states and localities that we serve refugees. And the answer is the State Department manages that process with the nine national resettlement agencies. And that term is called allocation. They distribute those refugee newcomers out to the management of those nine national agencies. And in turn, those national agencies will ask their local community offices throughout the country. Do you have the capacity and resources to really resettle and welcome these new arrivals in a holistic and robust way? And when the answer is yes, that's where they'll be settled and welcomed.

Okay, great. And so another question that we have here. Drocella I want to bring you into this. Thomas is asking, what are the biggest barriers, misunderstandings or miscommunications that can emerge between resettled refugees and churches that try to

assist with them? How can you serve and reduce the barriers to welcoming them in their parishes? What about your own personal experience, you think and speak to this?

The refugee resettlement is a public and private partnership. So the government cannot do it by itself. We have some churches who are working to help to resettle refugees. And when you come underground, we are trying to find more sponsors as soon as possible because it's a public and private partnership, the resettlement here in the US. And when you before you arrive, for example, now, when we are preparing for refugees to come, we explain to the communities who are the nationalities that are coming, what are the specificities donated to the cultures, what is the food, they will drink, what really, we want to make them feel at home when they get here. And then we will go to welcome them. We provide interpretation services, that we want to treat them the way we want to treat ourselves. And the goal is normally to find like if you have a family, and we provide interpretation services, there is no question that if you come in and speak the language, we provide interpretation services, we prepare the cultural appropriate meal. So the first welcoming meal is very important. So we want you to feel that you have people who care and who know the culture. And we provide interpretation services or so and we'll try to find a way to integrate them in their community as soon as possible. So the language that we use interpretation services, when you go to a doctor's office, you have to find people who welcome you and who will speak your language. And the good thing is that, like the refugees themselves after integration, now they become workers, and they can help others or so to welcome and then to prepare like cultural appropriate. Now, we know that the first meal the first night, in any country, where you get is very important. So we make sure that the case managers, the interpreters, or the team in the welcoming communities, they work together to make sure that when you come, do you feel like home and you have that night of welcoming, and they got to welcome you at the airport with interpreters. And we try to provide our input on the teams together. So just not for the first week, but they accompany you on your way to recenter in a new country. It does take time. Even if I spoke English, I can tell you that it took me probably seven years to feel like I was really fully integrated and oriented to know what I can do. So I am glad that the welcoming communities, the case managers and other people, and then it will teach them how to learn English how to navigate the transportation system. So the program is scale is built in a way that its integration. So you can do the health, the community, the personal development of things done together. And I'm very grateful that the public and private partnership works well to make people feel welcomed and integrate in their new communities. And also, they just don't take, they give back. They have languages, they have food, they have culture. So when they come, you really feel like you just start to contribute the first date when you come. You can be scared, maybe or just disoriented

because of timezone. But the case managers, the welcoming communities, the churches and other groups are there to help you to welcome you and to feel home.

Yeah, and I believe, I think, New American economy, which is another organization that does some good research on this has put out some research on the contributions of refugees to local economies they can make. They've done some good work on that. Rachel, I'm gonna ask you the last question, before we wrap up with from Katherine, what are some practical ways we can counter that mentality of scarcity versus abundance conversation? I think you're touching on that little bit. You know, how can you do that? At the local level? And even thinking about federal policy? How you can, you know, think about this, because you always try to see, some folks tried to say that we just don't have enough resources to support refugees in comparison to other populations in the country. And of course, the thing is that we, you know, we can walk and chew gum at the same time. So I want to give you that last question. With that framing.

Yeah, well, I think first of all, one thing we can do is, is be a little bit more discerning about where some of those narratives are coming from. And in many cases, I think Jessica alluded to some of their origins and being used for political fodder. And you know, and there have been countless reports around how messages for example, in the last big anti refugee push, a real concerted effort to portray Muslim refugees as as dangerous to communities. So you know, dangerous narratives taking root I think is something that we can all just be more aware of, and forceful and countering, and at the same time, also recognize that it is human and natural, especially if you are under duress, and experiencing scarcity. To ask the question, you know, but what about me? That is a very natural question for many Americans to be asking right now. And I think refugee resettlement hasn't always had a good answer for that, and often is left trying to answer questions about well, you know, what, why did these refugees get public benefits and all of this support and case management, and I don't, and I think, you know, at the end of the day, part of the answer to that can be, you know, the challenges that refugees are facing are really structural barriers that many Americans are facing, and particularly facing, you know, because of structural racism, because of barriers on the basis of other, you know, factors of identity. And so when we really work to create communities that are equitable, that are places where everyone can participate, and we work systematically to reduce those barriers, they can be places where everyone can thrive inclusive of refugees. And I think there is much more that we can do to, to make that the case for really, for all

Americans and inclusive of refugees. There are also many, many toolkits on Welcoming America's website around communication strategies to deal very specifically with some of those narratives. And also intergroup relations work, really, again, creating opportunities for people to get to know one another, understand that they share the same values work on projects on equal footing where they can, you know, see for themselves, you know, that that, that there is so much to be gained, to be gained from their new neighbors. So, just a few ideas, and I recognize that this is all very difficult work and many questions in the chat that I would be happy to help answer after this webinar, if that would be useful. Thank you all for your great questions. Obviously, we'll

try to get to them if we have some time to email them out. And, but just thank you all for listening to us, bringing this your attention on this really important issue. And I'm just going to turn it back to our hostess.

K Kendall Martin 54:31

Thank you so much, Cris. So real quickly, I just wanted to go over what you can do after this webinar. So first and foremost is to continue learning and sharing. Both EMM and OGR offer many educational resources and opportunities for you. We also invite you to advocate through the Episcopal Public Policy Network and you can find out all about that and sign up to participate in those action alerts at www.episcopachurch.org/ogr. We also invite you to serve. There are many ways that you can get involved in this ministry. We would love to hear from you and help you make those connections. And lastly, one of the most tangible ways that you can help this ministry is by making an encouraging financial gift in support of our work. And real quickly, there are a number of ways to contribute to EMM's ministry - online, text, or call. You can also help spread the word and fundraise on our behalf using peer to peer online fundraising platform, which I'm sure many of you are familiar with, and also encouraging leadership to designate a special offering for EMM. And we really appreciate this extra step of your faithful support of our work. And I want to thank you all for joining us today, especially our wonderful panelists. We invite you to be in touch with both EMM and the Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations. We will include all of this contact information in the follow up email, as well as a link to the recording. And we will also include the website that Rachel shared with us of the Welcoming Standard. So thank you all so much for joining us and we look forward to seeing you next time

A Allison Duvall 56:05