

Hard on Illegal Migrants, Haven for Refugees

The New York Times

October 9, 2010 Saturday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2010 The New York Times Company

Section: Section A; Column 0; National Desk; Pg. 11

Length: 1198 words

Byline: By JASON DePARLE

Body

PHOENIX -- Here in Arizona, illegal immigrants get the boot. But refugees get the welcome mat.

Even as officials rage at what they have called the "invasion" of illegal immigrants, mostly Mexicans, Arizona has welcomed thousands of legal immigrants from such grief-torn lands as Somalia, Myanmar and Iraq, and is known for treating them unusually well.

Indeed, the scorched expanse of the Phoenix valley can seem like a giant resettlement lab. Bosnians trim the watered lawns of the Arizona Biltmore, and Karenni speakers have their own prenatal class at St. Joseph's hospital. A Sudanese goat farmer is thriving in a desert slaughterhouse built with a micro-enterprise loan. (He is glad to demonstrate his skill in turning goats to goat meat.)

Hai Doo, a laundry worker from Myanmar, got grants to buy his first home. Yasoda Bhattarai, a new mother from Bhutan, credits 10 weeks of free hospital care for saving her daughter, who was born with tuberculosis. "Whenever people ask me about Phoenix, I tell them it is the best place," she said.

Only three states accepted more refugees on a per capita basis over the past six years. Arizona took nearly twice as many refugees per capita as its liberal neighbor, California, and more than twice as many per capita as New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

"In the degree of welcome and receptivity we see, I would certainly put Arizona at the top," said Robert Carey, a vice president at the International Rescue Committee, which resettles refugees in a dozen states.

The work contrasts with the state's renown as the scourge of illegal immigrants, whom critics blame for driving up crime, stealing jobs and burdening hospitals and schools.

"We're not anti-immigrant -- never have been," said State Senator Russell Pearce, a Republican who is a leading critic of illegal immigration. "But we expect people to follow the law."

Mr. Pearce sponsored a new law that would give the police greater power to question people about their immigration status. The Obama administration has sued, arguing the law usurps federal power and encourages racial profiling.

Numerically, the groups do not compare; Arizona took in about 4,700 refugees last year, but is thought to have about 375,000 illegal immigrants. Refugees are not economic migrants but survivors of war and persecution whom the United States admits for humanitarian and foreign policy reasons. In fleeing violence, many refugees themselves illegally crossed borders overseas.

Hard on Illegal Migrants, Haven for Refugees

Refugee groups in Arizona sometimes feel caught in the political crossfire, wanting to emphasize that their clients are legal immigrants without taking sides in the larger war.

"We don't want to be in the position of saying one group is good and another is bad," said Robin Dunn Marcos, who runs the rescue group's Phoenix office.

Arizona first drew refugees because the cost of living is low, and until the recession the state had lots of entry-level jobs open to non-English speakers, like housekeeping and lawn care. Early success, with Bosnians and Kosovars in the late 1990s and later with war orphans from Sudan, helped build local support.

Efforts intensified after the hiring in 2002 of a new state coordinator, Charles Shipman, who is married to a former Cambodian refugee and known for his advocacy. In recent years, Arizona has taken more than three times as many refugees as it did when he arrived.

Mr. Shipman quickly spotted a shortage of interpreters for a population ever more ethnically diverse. He commissioned a study that found language barriers "quite troubling." The rescue group then used it to win a private grant to start an interpreting service. It now operates in 14 languages, including Kirundi (Burundi), Tigrinya (Ethiopia) and Hakka (China).

As the recession took hold, Mr. Shipman led a charge to prevent homelessness among newly arrived refugees. In part at his prompting, the federal government let Arizona shift some federal money into rent relief and urged other states to follow.

That benefited Harith Khalid Aziz, an Iraqi refugee with a master's degree, who was earning little as a part-time clerk in a grocery. With a wife and a young son, he said it was "a horrible feeling" to fear eviction.

A few months' aid sustained him until he found a better job. In Arizona, even "if you are not from the same race, they welcome you," he said. "The U.S. is built on this."

Last year, the federal government admitted about 75,000 refugees, out of 10.5 million worldwide, and it covers most resettlement costs. State officials administer the money and help decide how many refugees they can take; private agencies do the casework, helping find housing and jobs.

The Biltmore not only hired refugees but donated used furniture to them. The private Tesseract School (tuition: \$19,000 a year), established a scholarship just for refugees. When the rescue group encouraged clients to farm, Hickman's Eggs donated 60 tons of chicken manure.

Hai Doo, the laundry worker from the former Burma, thought the home ownership program was too good to be true. Matching grants converted his \$5,000 in savings into a \$24,000 down payment on a house. Most of the money came from the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco, which is required to spend some of its profits on housing aid.

"I never thought I would get help like this," he said.

The flip side of the Arizona story includes the Maricopa County sheriff, Joe Arpaio, who courts a national following by advertising his toughness toward illegal immigrants. ("The rumor is I could run for president," he said in a recent interview.)

Mr. Arpaio conducts frequent raids on immigrant neighborhoods, stopping people for minor infractions and reviewing their immigration status. He says these raids have netted hundreds of illegal immigrants. Critics say they spread fear and harass legal residents.

Victor Acevedo, an illegal immigrant from Mexico, said he was stopped in January after failing to use his turn signal and was found with a small amount of marijuana. He is now awaiting deportation in one of Mr. Arpaio's famed prison tents, dressed in the standard outfit: black stripes and pink underwear.

Hard on Illegal Migrants, Haven for Refugees

In a tent-side interview in 107-degree heat, Mr. Acevedo, 29, said he came nine years ago for a "better livelihood," found a landscaping job, married an American and had two American-born sons. He was deported in 2008 but returned a year later to be with his family.

"We're here illegally, but we're still human beings," he said.

Refugees seem slow to sympathize. The two groups often compete for jobs or housing, and some **refugees** say Latino gangs have preyed on them.

The United States "stands for law and order," said Wissam Salman, 35, a hotel housekeeper from Iraq. "If they don't look for these people it will be a disaster."

Ibrahim Swara-Dahab, the Sudanese goat farmer, agrees.

"I have some problems with the Mexican people; they stole my goats," he said. "If they don't have documents, they should go back to their country."

Mr. Swara-Dahab acknowledged that he, too, crossed a border illegally when he fled to Kenya but called that a matter of life and death. "Here, the situation is different," he said. "You need documents."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTOS: Victor Acevedo migrated illegally to Arizona and is now awaiting deportation back to Mexico. Through a new law that gained widespread attention this year, the state is known for being particularly tough on **illegal** immigrants.

Hai Doo, right, a **refugee** from Myanmar shown with his family, bought his house in Phoenix with the help of large grants. Arizona accepts more **refugees** per capita than almost any other state and treats them well.

Refugees learned how to commute on buses in Phoenix last month. Many programs help ease their adjustment. (A11)

State Senator Russell Pearce, being interviewed at right, is a leading critic of **illegal** immigration.

Ibrahim Swara-Dahab, a goat farmer from Sudan, arrived in Arizona as a **refugee** and is thriving in a slaughterhouse there. (PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSHUA LOTT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES) (A12) MAP: Finding Sanctuary in the Sun: Arizona has taken more **refugees** -- legal immigrants who have fled war and persecution and passed a federal review -- than all but three other states over the past six years. (Source: Department of State

Arizona Department of Economic Security

Census Bureau) (A12)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Hard on Illegal Migrants, Haven for Refugees

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); **ILLEGAL** IMMIGRANTS (90%); **REFUGEES** (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); RESETTLEMENT & REPATRIATION (78%); RACE & ETHNICITY (78%); RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); RACIAL PROFILING (77%); ANIMAL SHELTERS & RESCUES (76%); MAMMALS (75%); PREGNANCY & CHILDBIRTH (75%); SUITS & CLAIMS (73%); LITIGATION (73%); POLICE MISCONDUCT (70%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (66%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (66%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (65%); LEGISLATION (65%); FOREIGN POLICY (60%)

Organization: US CENSUS BUREAU (59%)

Industry: GOAT FARMING (75%); HOSPITALS (75%); SHEEP & GOAT FARMING (70%); ANIMAL SLAUGHTERING & PROCESSING (69%); MICROFINANCE (54%)

Person: BARACK OBAMA (50%)

Geographic: PHOENIX, AZ, USA (88%); ARIZONA, USA (96%); CONNECTICUT, USA (79%); NEW JERSEY, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); BHUTAN (79%); IRAQ (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: October 11, 2010

End of Document