

# The New York Times

23-11-15

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## Syrian Refugees Cling to a Longtime Haven in Michigan

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. — In late 2011, as killings, kidnappings and sectarian strife crept across its battle-scarred city of Homs, Syria, the family of four made a sorrowful decision: to flee.

Radwan Mughrbel; his wife, Sanaa Hammadeh; and their two young sons packed their bags with only a single change of clothes per person. They took a bus to Damascus and hired a taxi to spirit them across the border into Jordan. For years, they patched together a meager life, barely making enough money to eat and desperately seeking refugee status.

When the United Nations refugee agency asked where they wanted to go, the answer was obvious.

“America,” said Mr. Mughrbel, a short, wiry Muslim man of 52, his face lighting up in a smile as he sat in his bare-walled living room in this Detroit suburb last week. “They brought us here, and I feel safe, like nothing bad can happen to us. Now we have a beautiful life.”

Yet that beautiful life has been shaken. Since the terrorist attacks in Paris, a tide of anti-refugee, anti-Muslim sentiment has swept, angrily and inexorably, across the United States. Now Mr. Mughrbel and Ms. Hammadeh say Michigan is not as welcoming a place as it was before.

Gov. Rick Snyder, who in September publicly rhapsodized about the boon that refugees were to Michigan’s economy, was among the first of more than two dozen Republican governors to vow last week that they would try to keep displaced Syrians out of their states to preserve the safety of Americans from would-be terrorists.

Presidential candidates and elected officials around the country have suggested closing mosques, collecting Syrian refugees already in the country or creating a registry for Muslims.

Sentiments like those are especially jarring in Michigan, which has one of the largest and most vibrant Arab-American populations in the country and a vocal group of advocates for bringing more Syrian refugees to the United States. In the Detroit suburbs, refugees have traded a harrowing war in the Middle East for cold winters, strip malls and neatly arranged subdivisions, with houses as uniform as Monopoly pieces.

The United States has accepted more than 1,800 Syrian refugees since October 2014. Michigan has welcomed close to 200 — more than any other state except California and Texas. The Obama administration has said it wants to bring in at least 10,000 in the next year.

Those plans have been threatened by the sudden and contentious debate over whether these refugees, many of them young children, are security threats. On Thursday, the Republican-led House voted overwhelmingly to impose new screening procedures on refugees from Syria. After Gov. Mike Pence of Indiana, a Republican, said he did not want any more Syrian refugees in his state, one Syrian family destined for Indianapolis was rerouted to Connecticut.

In explaining Mr. Snyder's opposition to Syrians coming to Michigan, his spokesman, David Murray, said the state remained "unwavering" in its commitment to helping refugees.

"But our first priority is to keep Michiganders safe," Mr. Murray said. "After tragedies such as we've seen in France, Lebanon and in the skies above Egypt in recent weeks, it's proper to pause and review background and safety procedures with our partners in the federal government."

Regardless, advocates for refugees say they have no intention to stop helping them settle here. Many more Syrian families who have waited for refugee status for years are destined for Michigan in the coming months.

Mr. Mughrbel, who arrived with his family in July, bristled at the suggestion that refugees like him could be a threat.

"We didn't cross illegally," he said. He threw his hands in the air. "We went through hell to get here."

Escape From War

That hell started in Homs more than four years ago.

The government, under President Bashar al-Assad, had cracked down on the rebellious city, religious sects were at war with one another, and the deadly mix of bombings, snipers and random violence forced many residents indoors. Ms. Hammadeh was afraid to leave their home to shop for fresh food. On some days, the family resorted to eating moldy bread.

The couple's sons, Soubei and Ahmad, now 19 and 18, were then in their early teens, and their parents began to fear they would be kidnapped.

"We got scared," Ms. Hammadeh said. "The government would see kids on the street and take them, beat them. We didn't want them to kidnap our children."

In November 2011, they resolved to leave.

Everything had to be left behind: furniture, photos, nearly all of their clothes. The only exception was Ms. Hammadeh's gold wedding band and two bracelets that she slipped onto her wrist. Once the family arrived in Jordan, she sold them all for about \$230.

Life in their temporary country was expensive and difficult. Mr. Mughrbel's brother, who had also fled to Jordan, died of a heart attack. Mr. Mughrbel blamed stress.