The Great Migration of 2015

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In this issue of *Pediatric Annals*, Dr. Leslie Caldarelli, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Neonatology at the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, has gathered an interesting and informative set of articles that explore common symptoms in neonatology with rare diagnoses.

As I write this column, an unparalleled (in modern times) massive migration of Syrians, Libyans, Afghans, and Eritreans to Europe is occurring across treacherous waters and long distances over land. The route of this mass movement of more than 500,000 migrants (according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) over the past few months has been to Greece or Turkey, often by flimsy boat or raft, through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, and Hungary by foot, train, or other means, leading to remarkable scenes at the Budapest train station and at several international border crossings. From there it has been mainly on to Germany and France.

This has been termed “a truly biblical migration,” one which at the time of this writing has not yet seen a coherent global or even European response. The image of the drowned 3-year-old Syrian boy, Aylan, whose body washed up on a beach in Turkey, perhaps more than anything has riveted the world’s attention on the fate of the refugees and has highlighted the issue of responsibility. It has also emphasized the critical need for many countries (in Europe and elsewhere) to assist in creating solutions to the many problems related to such mass movement of men, women, and children. One attempt to limit the flow of migrants at their source is a pledge by the European Union to provide an additional 1 billion euros ($1.1 billion) to support Syrian refugees in camps to remain in the Middle East.

Remarkably, it has been Germany and its leader Angela Merkel that has assumed the most forthright stance to deal with this migrant crisis. Now expecting 800,000 new migrants this year, Germany will exceed its previous record of 440,000 asylum seekers after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1992, which triggered violent xenophobic riots in Germany at that time. Today ordinary Germans seem to have stepped up to welcome the latest migrants, and the government has committed $6.6 billion in aid and hired 3,000 additional federal police. France and Britain have also shown leadership. This has occurred despite the recent rise of right wing parties with strong anti-immigrant positions in many European countries. Interestingly, many European leaders view the large influx of migrants as an economic opportunity. In Germany the population is aging, deaths have outnumbered births, and the population had been expected to decline by at least 10% over the next 40 to 50 years. The German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere recently stated, “We are a country of immigration. We need young people. We need immigrants. All of you know that because we have too few children.”

Today’s response to this crisis stands in stark contrast to past crises when, for example, in May 1939, just prior to World War II, the United States, Cuba, and other countries refused to allow 930 Jewish refugees from Europe to disembark from the Hamburg America Line’s cruiser, The St. Louis, which then returned its passengers to Antwerp, Belgium, with many subsequently dying in the Holocaust.

Lacking in today’s crisis is any positive response from a number of countries that are implicated in directly contributing to the mass of refugees by feeding arms and money into the long conflict in Syria and more recent ones in Yemen, Libya, and elsewhere. Where continued on page 400
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are the wealthy Gulf States like Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia in helping to deal with this crisis? To date, the US only recently contributed significantly to assisting our allies in Western Europe to cope with the large number of immigrants.

How does all this affect us who are comfortable here in the US? The Ebola crisis in Africa recently reminded us that the world is indeed smaller than we may like to believe and that we are connected to those in other countries. After all, we are the very epitome of a nation of immigrants. The American pediatric com-

A stamp illustrating armed (gun) violence against children.
A stamp illustrating sexual violence against children.
A stamp illustrating child marriage.
A stamp illustrating child trafficking.
A stamp illustrating gender-based violence against children.
A stamp illustrating child labor.
munity has a long tradition of providing care to immigrant and internationally adopted children, and we can meet our responsibility to care for all children to the best of our abilities. Even though immigration, in the large sense, is now a highly contentious issue here politically, hopefully we will share in helping to resolve this crisis by offering aid and by agreeing to allow some families to find shelter here, because it would be a moral and humanitarian act—the right thing to do.

**THIS MONTH’S STAMPS**

I have chosen to accompany this column a set of six stamps issued on August 20, 2015 by the United Nations. Each stamp uses the figure of a wolf to illustrate 1 of 6 different forms of violence against children and adolescents: armed violence (gun), sexual violence against children, child marriage (handcuff), child trafficking (net), gender-based violence, and child labor (pickaxes). Because child violence, which occurs in and out of school settings, keeps millions from attending school worldwide (particularly girls), UNICEF launched a global initiative in July 2013 to end violence against children and adolescents and issued a report to raise awareness as a first step to modifying attitudes, behaviors, and policies.

**REFERENCES**