

# Migrants are more than a number, they're human beings | Opinion

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*Rabbi Jennifer Schlosberg is the Rabbi of Glen Rock Jewish Center in New Jersey. She recently returned from a trip to the U.S. southern border organized by the immigration group HIAS and rabbinic human rights organization T'ruah. She says throughout human history, Jews have migrated in search of safety and still, the Torah teaches us no less than 36 times that we should welcome the stranger in our midst. Patrick T. Fallon / AFP via Getty*

**By Jennifer Schlosberg**

The political discourse around asylum seekers and refugees is often told with a number. This month, President [Biden announced](#) his plan to accept upwards of 30,000 Nicaraguans, Cubans and Venezuelans while expelling others seeking asylum.

Look at any news channel, article, or social media platform - almost every story is about the number of migrants arriving at the border seeking safety and refuge - a “surge,” an “uptick,” or an “influx.” But what about the humans behind these numbers?

When I joined with 15 other rabbis on a recent trip to El Paso and Ciudad Juárez hosted by [HIAS](#), an international refugee support organization, and [T’ruah](#), a rabbinic human rights organization, I met humans, not numbers.

One woman explained that coming to the United States was a last resort - that it would be difficult for her to transition to life in America. The daily experience of different food and a new language can make an impact. Another woman witnessed her husband and child drown in the Rio Grande.

Of course, some places insist on denying humanity. Detention centers, such as the one I visited, treat migrants like criminals and reduce them to numbers. Migrants are forced to surrender all their belongings and made to wear uniforms.

At the site I visited, the bathrooms and showers had no stalls and were in view of everyone who walked past. Detention center guards would walk past every dormitory to ensure the doors were locked. Guards also told us that married detainees are separated into gender-specific confinement and are only allowed to see their spouses once a week.

As a rabbi and a Jewish woman, I am highly familiar with the experience of being treated differently, and as a number; this is a large part of our personal and historical narrative. The parallels between the historical Jewish experience and what I witnessed at the border were striking.

Jewish people have been expelled from various countries and persecuted for our faith through the centuries. Even after our people escaped slavery in Egypt, we spent 40 years stateless, looking to return to our homeland.

Throughout human history, Jews have migrated in search of safety and a place to raise our families away from persecution, war and the Holocaust. And still, the Torah teaches us no less than 36 times that we should welcome the stranger in our midst.

At the border, I saw that not only are we turning away those who need our assistance, but we are harkening back to a scary time in our history when policies and systems denying people’s humanity proved to be dangerous and often deadly.

We must speak for the humans being expelled, detained and abused due to U.S. immigration policies. It is especially incumbent upon people of faith, nearly all of whom have experienced persecution at some point in their history, to highlight the humanity and human face of migrants rather than allow them to be reduced to numbers.

Organizations like the [Annunciation House](#), a faith-based shelter, need our financial support. I was so troubled by the situation of migrants on the streets in the cold that while I was still in El Paso, I quickly gathered funds from friends, family and colleagues to purchase supplies for the migrants.

With three other rabbis, we went to the same El Paso Walmart where 23 people were shot in 2019 for being Latino. We purchased clothing and winter gear and delivered them to The Annunciation House that night. The volunteers and residents of the shelter were moved to tears.

But you don't have to be in El Paso to support the work of faith organizations that care for migrants. You can support migrants wherever you are, with your family, friends and house of worship. Members of many churches, mosques and synagogues are rolling up their sleeves and helping migrants, living out their values of being welcoming communities.

My congregation is a part of the HIAS' [Welcome Campaign](#), an effort to raise awareness, and advocate for refugees in our local communities. We also participate in Refugee Shabbat to dedicate time to pray and learn about how we can support refugees and asylum seekers. Opportunities like these are available to all who want to help welcome refugees into our communities.

Our fellow humans looking for a better life are exactly that. Humans. Not criminals, not aliens, and certainly not numbers.

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