

PRSG Newsletter

February 2021

Letter from the Board



Nura Elmagbari



Jenny Shareef



Eva Khan



Tahia Abdulrahman

Dear PRSG Family,

Can you believe the first month of 2021 is already over! COVID-19 is still a part of our daily lives but there is hope at the end of the tunnel. PRSG continues to provide up-to-date COVID-19 related news to our clients on a daily basis thanks to the Oregon Health Authority and our wonderful office manager, Yasser, who works hard to update our website as soon as new information is sent to us. We highly encourage all of our families and friends to visit our website regularly for the latest and greatest.

As for other PRSG news, for all of you amazing and generous donors, if you made a donation to us during 2020, you should have already received a tax receipt and thank you letter in the mail or via e-mail if you chose that route. If your donation was made through a third party, you will receive a receipt from them. Having said that, if you ever need proof of donation, please do not hesitate to contact our fantastic treasurer Eva Khan at eva@pdxrsg.org.

PRSG is dedicated to keep the refugee population we work with safe and informed. We know many of you are waiting for the opportunity to take the newly developed COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine rollout has begun and we hope that everyone who wants to take it will have the opportunity to do so in due time. Right now, due to the limited number of vaccines available, not all of us will be eligible to receive it yet. We know this can be frustrating for many, but we have been assured that our current administration is working on producing more vaccines and getting them out to the population. For more information about vaccine eligibility and where to access the vaccine, click on this [link](#).



Portland Refugee Support Group

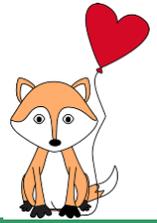
Our email list is a great way for you to stay up to date on important PRSG news. If you aren't receiving emails from us and would like to in the future, please visit the [subscribe](#) section of our website and fill out the information.

As always, thank you for your continued support!

February 2021

How you can help!

Thank you to all of our donors. Your generosity is what keeps us going. If you have fundraising ideas or would like to host a goods donation drive, we would love to hear from you. Send an email to donations@pdxrsg.org with your ideas. If you would like to make a monetary donation, please use [Donations - PORTLAND REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP \(pdxrsg.org\)](https://www.pdxrsg.org/donations).



Volunteers

As 2021 continues to move forward, please do not forget to visit our website for all up-to-date [resources](#) and important information to best help our clients. We hope to have regular meetings and trainings again soon. Please do not forget to check in regularly with your clients to make sure they have no emergency needs.



We Love Our Volunteers!

COVID-19 News

Vaccine: For more information regarding the timeline for vaccine availability and who is currently eligible to take the vaccine, click [here](#) for an infographic detailing phases and eligibility. For an FAQ about Oregon's vaccine sequencing plan, click [here](#).

COVID-19 Risk Levels: Multnomah County at Extreme Risk of COVID-19, extended through February 11. Governor Kate Brown announced updates to County Risk Levels. Effective January 29 through February 11, there will be 25 counties in the Extreme Risk level, two at High Risk, two at Moderate Risk, and seven at Lower Risk. A complete list of counties and their associated risk levels is available [here](#). Multnomah County remains in the Extreme Risk category.

Avoid Scams: The COVID-19 pandemic has created many opportunities for cheaters and scammers to trick people into giving up their money and personal information. Many of them will pretend they are calling from fake banking apps, the government, false unemployment claims, and more. If you think you or someone you know has been subject to COVID-19 health care fraud, report it immediately [online](#) or call 1-800-447-8477. Never give anyone your personal information without confirming the caller is legitimate. Most legitimate companies will never call you and ask for your personal information. For more information about COVID-19 related fraud, visit [OIG.HHS.GOV](https://www.oig.hhs.gov).

Driver License, Vehicle Tag Grace Period Extended into 2021. If your driver's license, permit or vehicle registration expires between Nov 1, 2020, and April 30, 2021, you have three months after the expiration date to renew without being cited. The Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles is allowing this grace period in order to catch up with the backlog caused by COVID-19. DMV offices are open by appointment only. Visit www.oregondmv.com for a list of services available by office. Some services are available online at dmv2u.oregon.gov.

Resources and Upcoming Events

School and Education: Different school districts have announced that they will open schools for kids who wish to return to in-person learning as early as this month, but no concrete dates have been shared. We understand that many people are frustrated with online learning, but the hope is that school may reopen as early as March. Check with your local school district for specific dates. For up-to-date state mandated school information visit the [Oregon Department of Education website](#).

PRSG is dedicated to making sure our clients have access to resources to help them learn the English language. This includes one-on-one homework help, tutoring, and other educational resources. COVID-19 has made learning English challenging for many families but thanks to our terrific Education Chair, Megan French, all programming has been transferred to an online format. If you have educational needs for yourself or your family, please contact Megan at education@pdrsg.org for more information.

Rent Moratorium: The new deadline to complete the eviction hardship form is June 30, 2021. A tenant must submit a written declaration of financial hardship to their landlord using this form: [Declaration of Financial Hardship for Eviction Protection](#).

COVID-19 Temp Paid Leave Program: This [program](#) is still accepting applications! It is available to people who are sick or symptomatic, but do not qualify for COVID-19-related paid sick leave or have COVID-19-related paid time off.

- Eligible employees must [fill out this online form](#).
- To apply over the phone, call 833-685-0850 (toll-free) or 503-947-0130.
- For help in another language, call 503-947-0131.
- Those that qualify can **get a \$120 per-day payment, up to 10 working days (\$1,200 total) for the time that they need to quarantine or isolate.**
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):**
- [SNAP Online Training Video and Resources](#).

February 4th, 2:00-3:00 PM: COVID-19 Listening Session (Breakout rooms available in English and Spanish). These are recurring sessions that allow the community to ask questions and learn more about the current state of our community with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic and the latest news about the vaccine. We highly recommend attending and staying informed. [Click here to register for the COVID-19 Listening Session \(Zoom\)](#).

Arabic Language and Middle Eastern Information Session: IRCO's Greater Middle East Center will be offering a learning session regarding the COVID-19 vaccine in March. As more details become available, they will be shared.

Volunteer Spotlight

Meet Xavier!

PRSG has been blessed with amazing volunteers over the years and all have been able to contribute something to help PRSG and its families grow and evolve. One such volunteer is Xavier who learned about PRSG during a City of Portland-sponsored Walk with Refugees and Immigrants event. Since graduating from college, Xavier has been working for international nonprofit organizations around the world. His experiences have taken him to many parts of our planet including the Middle East (Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey), West Africa, and finally Portland, which he now calls home.



In 2017, when he finally came back to Portland from Turkey, where he spent 3 years supporting refugee families in Turkey and displaced families in Syria, he could not just forget about the tragic suffering and struggle of the Syrian people and all the displaced families around the world. This is why he decided to continue supporting refugee families in Portland and dedicates as much time as possible to volunteer work. Through a resettlement agency, he started assisting a refugee family who had just arrived in the US, and soon after connected with PRSG. Xavier was formally introduced to the work of PRSG by PRSG Office Manager Yasser: “I still remember my first meeting with him, when we were dreaming about changing the world!”

So, what does Xavier do for PRSG? Although he is not directly supporting refugee families within our organization, he contributes to the organizational development and strengthening of PRSG. His main role has been to co-lead the development of a database to help PRSG collect and analyze information about the refugee families we serve, with the goal to better assist them. He will be joining the financial wellness team that aims to help our clients improve their understanding of their finances and overall wellbeing. He also states that he is proud to contribute to PRSG by eating (delicious!) food from the bake sales.

When asked about what he has learned about himself and our world volunteering with PRSG, Xavier responded, “I have learned how privileged I am. Meeting and listening to people that have faced so many challenges in life is humbling. Their resilience and perseverance are extraordinary; I have much to learn from them and I hope to help them as much as they help me. What I found inspirational with PRSG is the sense of community, the sense of being part of one big community helping each other. I kept wondering if amongst all the refugee families that PRSG serve, I might have met or assisted some of them when I was working for Mercy Corps in Turkey, near the Syrian border.” In his free time, Xavier loves cooking, eating, and discovering new dishes from around the world and says it’s a great cultural experience! Xavier has been with PRSG for over two years now and says he hopes to continue volunteering with us for as long as he has something to offer. PRSG is proud and honored to have Xavier on our team and we look forward to working with him for many years to come.



Our World

Syria – Population 17,500,658

When you think about ancient civilizations that were revolutionary in all aspects of life, Syria is not usually at the top of the list, but it should be. As far ago as 10,000 BC, Syria was at the center of Neolithic culture boasting beautiful pottery, textiles, music, literature, and other art. In addition, it was a valuable trade route and one of the first known regions in the world to encourage husbandry, particularly, cattle breeding. Many archaeologists agree that Syria is one of the most ancient civilizations on earth with only Mesopotamia being older. We can only imagine the rich life one led during this time and the stories shared through literature, art and music. There is so much important history in Syria that six geographical sites within Syria have been declared as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Sadly, all are in danger due to the current and ongoing civil war. Many sites, such as Aleppo, have already been severely damaged or have disappeared altogether.



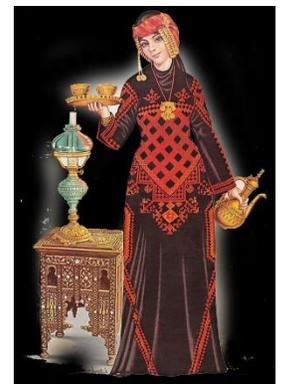
Fast forward to today and Syria is a shell of its former glory. Regrettably, Syria has been embroiled in a civil war that started during the Arab Spring in 2011. Protestors calling for the removal of Syria's Ba'athist president Bashar Al Assad were violently suppressed resulting in the loss of nearly one hundred thousand lives and an unprecedented refugee crisis, not seen since the Iraq Gulf War. Currently, there are more than seven million internally displaced Syrians and more than five million Syrians have become refugees, mainly settling in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. Of the five million, nearly two million of them are school-aged children. The flag pictured above is one version of the Syrian flag that has changed many times over the years. To learn why, click on the flag for more information.

Beyond the war, Syria is a beautiful country located in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon, the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan. Syria is rich in heritage, culture and history with a remarkably diverse population made up of Syrian Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, Armenians, Circassians, Mandeans, and Greeks. Religious groups include Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians, and other sects. Arabs make up the largest ethnic group, and Sunni Muslims are the largest religious group.



Syria's culture is rich with art, music, education and of course delicious food and beautiful clothing. Syrian cuisine contains modern cooking customs and practices, combining the habits of people who throughout their history have settled in Syria. These styles can be seen across the Middle East region known as El Sham. Fresh vegetables including eggplant, tomato, chickpeas and so many more are used in Syrian cuisine. Selections of appetizers known as 'meze' are usually served along with Arabic bread before the main course, which is accompanied by coffee and a dessert or fruit. Several recipes still used today in Syria date from the 13th century. Here in Portland, there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy Syrian food including [Habibi Restaurant](#) and [Aladdin's Cafe](#). If you are interested in trying some great Syrian recipes at home, click [here](#).

In modern day Syria, women are usually seen in long black dresses called abayas, covering them from the shoulders to the ankles while other women favor modern Western clothes. Traditional Syrian clothing is bright and filled with color and patterns. One such dress is known as a thobe. To learn more about Syrian clothing, click [here](#).



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