

# Learning about...

# Refugees

*'Hysteria and hypocrisy walk in the footsteps of refugees and migrants. The paranoia of wealthy countries is deeply ironic. Their carbon intensive lifestyles are driving global warming, which is likely to become the largest single factor forcing people to flee their homes around the world.'* Andrew Simms, Policy Director, New Economics Foundation.

## No place like home....

Every day people across the world make the difficult decision to leave their home, families, possessions and communities for uncertain and frightening futures elsewhere. Refugees leave their homes and countries because they have no choice. They are forced out by factors such as war, persecution, natural disasters, environmental crises and poverty. They may leave because their government will not or cannot protect them from serious human rights abuses or meet their needs. Whatever the reason, refugees leave home because they fear for their own life or safety, or that of their family. Many leave suddenly and are able to take very few, if any, possessions with them. Sometimes they face many days of travel, with little food and in fear of their lives. If they get to safety, they then rely on people living in the area they have fled to; these people often have few resources to share and may not welcome the new arrivals. Considering the complexity surrounding the issues to do with refugees, what are the implications for world development and social and global justice?

## Refugees: Facts and Figures

*'A refugee is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.'*

(Definition quoted from the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951)

Refugees, are much in the news, but not unique to the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Refugees have existed for thousands

of years, but the power and speed of modern mass media in the 24/7 news room means that their stories and lives are quickly publicised as headlines, and sadly quickly forgotten. The United Nations reports that there were 15.4m refugees worldwide at the end of 2012. In that year, conflict and persecution forced an average of 23,000 persons a day to leave home and seek protection elsewhere, either in their own countries (internal displacement) or in other countries. Up to 55% of refugees come from only five countries: Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Sudan. In direct contradiction to images in Western media, over 80% of the world's refugees are hosted in developing countries. In 2012, the country hosting the largest number was Pakistan, with 1.6 million people seeking refuge within their borders. Afghanistan has remained the most common source of refugees for 32 years, with 95% of Afghan refugees located in Pakistan or Iran. Recent conflict in Syria has led to over 1m refugees in Lebanon alone. In 2013, 46% of refugees were under 18. Women and girls account for almost half of refugees. These figures reflect individual suffering on a huge scale; people driven to extreme measures by war, conflict, violence, fear of persecution and a well founded fear of the loss of life itself.

## Refugees in the media

Discussion on refugees in media and in politics has become very emotive with extraneous issues such as jobs, housing and crime brought into play. The way the debate is conducted has implications for the well-being and safety of many refugees in the UK and elsewhere. Sections of the media and some politicians vilify refugees without going into underlying reason why people seek asylum. Debate on refugees is often conflated with immigration debates, incorrect synonymous use of terms like 'migrant, refugee and asylum seekers', and so-called 'bogus-refugees' linked to fears of global terrorism, and Middle East wars. This complex, controversial debate, and a tiny criminal minorities' misuse of international refugee law, have had a negative

impact on UK community relations, and caused untold misery for genuine asylum seekers.

### Refugees and Human Rights

Human Rights are central to the status of refugees. People become refugees because one or more of their basic human rights have been abused or denied. Many are victims of war, political, religious and other persecution. In the chaos and confusion of fleeing their homes to try to find safety in another country, most refugees lose virtually all their rights, along with their material possessions families and friends. Every refugee has the right to safe asylum. They should be granted the same rights and basic help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident, including freedom of thought and movement and economic and social rights e.g. access to medical care, education and work. Child refugees are often particularly vulnerable and have their rights denied. They often become separated from their family and are at risk of mistreatment. Some are recruited to fight, abused, or exploited and forced to work in dangerous environments. Article 22 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child grants special protection to refugee children. Those who are not being cared for by parents are entitled to further protection. Like all children, refugees are entitled to all rights granted under the Convention including the right to life, adequate food and medical care, education, and freedom from discrimination, exploitation and abuse.

### World Refugee Day: June 20

This commemorative day is designed to draw international attention to the increasingly desperate plight of displaced people across the globe and honour the determination of affected people and those working to help them. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR is the global refugee organisation with special responsibility for leading and coordinating international action to protect refugees and solve refugee problems. It exists to safeguard rights and well-being of refugees and ensure everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find a place of safety in another State.

### Environmental refugees

New types of refugees are those forced to leave home by environmental factors. Some reports predict rising sea levels, desertification, soil erosion and shrinking fresh water supplies, exacerbated by climate change, could create up to 50m environmental refugees within 10 years. The Red Cross say more are now displaced by environmental disasters than by war, yet environmental refugees are not recognised by the current UN Convention on Refugees or other international agreements. Some argue that people are being displaced by environmental and economic policies of Western governments that amount to environmental persecution, and therefore deserve legal protection. Environment related migration has been most notable in sub Saharan Africa, but also affects millions in Asia and S. America. Europe and the USA face increased pressure from refugees driven from Latin America and Africa by deteriorating soil and water conditions.

### A gentler refugee footprint....

Once a refugee reaches safety in another State they can lodge an application for protection and become an asylum seeker. There are many ways life for refugees and asylum seekers can be made better. Governments in rich and poor countries need to consider which policies and actions force people to leave their homes. Direct and indirect responsibility for some of the most serious armed conflicts and refugee movements are in part due to the actions of Western governments. The way those who seek safety in another country are treated needs to be improved. Thousands of asylum seekers in the UK are forced into poverty and misery because they are not allowed to work while they wait to see if they are granted refugee status. Richer countries should take a more equal share and care of the global refugee population. The poorest parts of the world, with the least resources to offer, actually host the greatest number of refugees: Africa and Asia have 60% of the world's refugees between them whilst the UK has just 3%.



## Learning in a global context

Children are entitled to learn in a global context. They encounter world views from their families, cultures and communities. A school curriculum, set in a global context, deepens their understanding and engagement with the complexities of that world. Teaching about **Refugees** requires teachers to be familiar with global issues that affect all our lives and to impart knowledge, skills and values that will equip children to live and be active in an interdependent, globalised world.

## Real, relevant, current

Understanding of **Refugees** relates to pupils' past and present. It requires us all to develop new ways of thinking, acting and living for a sustainable, equitable future. It gives purpose to work across the curriculum with rich data and real-life scenarios around universal themes of consumerism and current issues. It opens debate around alternative ways to tackle extreme poverty and inequality and offers differing perspectives on poverty and wealth.

## Social justice, not charity

Fundraising campaigns that aim to evoke sympathy may instil feelings of guilt, with limited educational value. Encouraging children to research and question global issues helps them understand that there are more effective ways for governments and people to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world than charity.

## Broaden perceptions, counter stereotypes

No country is uniformly rich or poor: inequality exists within, as well as between countries, including the UK. There is much to be learnt from others. Media coverage of people and places may reinforce common stereotypes and imply dependency and uniformity poverty in southern countries. Refugees are often enterprising, well-educated, socially active citizens who fought for social and global justice in their own setting and bring talents and abilities to their host country: for example the painter Lucien Freud, Michael Marks, founder of Marks & Spencer, Sudanese supermodel Alek Wek, Carl Djerassi, inventor of the contraceptive pill and comedian Omid Djalili.

## Thinking critically about Refugees

There are over 15m refugees in the world today, almost all victims of wars and conflicts and most in countries of the Global South. The UK hosts a tiny fraction of the world's refugees. Sometimes a mass exodus of people flees a region or country at the same time. Lebanon today is faced with large numbers of people seeking refuge. In parts of Lebanon there are more Syrian children in schools than Lebanese. Inevitable tensions arise with Syrian refugees, traumatised and in need of emergency help, struggling to deal with the situation and their Lebanese hosts suddenly shouldering the full force of an international crisis. Many Lebanese people are themselves poor and The Lebanon is not a rich country, yet it has a track record of welcoming people in the region facing crisis. With this in mind, consider these questions:

### Self-reflective questions:

*Focus - what do I think about this?*

*Why do I think like that? To what extent am I open to changing my point of view?*

~ What does home mean to you?

~ If you left home in a crisis and could only take what you could carry, what would you take?

~ In this context, how do you understand the saying 'home is where the heart is'?

### Group Dialogue questions:

*Focus - what do other people think about this?*

*How can I find different perspectives?*

*Analyse assumptions, implications and contradictions? And how can I engage with complexity, conflict, uncertainty and difference?*

Discuss these questions with others:

~ Many refugees leave behind a life of pain and suffering and have to deal with bad memories of past experiences. What implications does this have for their capacity to make a new life?

~ What implications does it have for the host countries?

~ What responsibilities do those in comfortable circumstances have for those in crisis?

~ What push / pull factors must people consider when they contemplate becoming refugees?

~ What do host countries gain when providing refuge to asylum seekers and refugees?

### Curriculum planning

#### **Literacy, Language and Communication**

Through the study of texts such as *The Colour of Home* or *The Arrival*, children are able to empathise with the experiences of refugees;

Investigate media news stories discussing refugee and immigration issues from multiple perspectives;

Recognising the importance of all languages for personal and community identity of language and language learning, promoting its use and development.

#### **Physical**

Learning about rules, fairness and inequality in the context of sport, pupils negotiate and play by rules so that no one is left out or disadvantaged, and make the connections with what is fair and unfair at national and global levels;

Pupils investigate athletes who have fled their countries and overcome barriers to reach the top of their sports, eg Fabrice Muamba from the DCR.

#### **Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship and Economic Education**

Pupils identify the contributions of different cultures and communities to society and describe ways in which the UK is interconnected with the wider world;

They develop empathy and capacity to think and act as global citizens, they recognise and challenge stereotypes;

Pupils learn about wants and needs, rights and responsibilities, on an increasing local, national and global level, including the UN Rights of the Child.

#### **Knowledge and Understanding of the World**

Pupils learn about the lives of significant individuals past and present who have lived through the refugee experience;

Through history, pupils learn that world wars and all wars affected children in many ways, and that it continues to this day, making connections between the past and the present;

Pupils study the broader issue of Peace through RE;

Children learn that environmental change affects people and habitats that lead to the necessity of leaving your home.

#### **Creative**

Pupils use real life data and statistics to investigate the extent of human population movement and compare refugee numbers in hosting nations;

Pupils learn about the contributions of scientists and mathematicians from refugee backgrounds. Include the well-known (eg Albert Einstein) and those making contributions in your local area if possible.

#### **Mathematical, Scientific and Technical**

Be introduced to the visual, musical and creative arts of a variety of cultures represented by your communities and more widely, and use these as inspiration for pupils' own work using a variety of media; An in-depth study of the work of a creative artist from a refugee background, eg Mona Hatoum, Carlos Acosta.

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