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TIME TO FLEE

AGE 14-16

A human rights education resource on migration, refugees and asylum for use with young people aged 14-16

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



INTRODUCTION

In this session students will look at what the terms refugee, asylum seeker and migrant mean. They will explore reasons why people flee their homes and look at the experience of a refugee family's journey from war in Syria to safety in the UK, and identify refugee rights.

This is part of our set of Refugee Rights teaching resource materials.

Aims of the pack

- To gain an understanding of refugee rights and protections
- To consider why people flee their country and what it is like to arrive somewhere new, with a case study
- To identify rights taken away from refugees
- To look at ways to help refugees and people seeking asylum feel welcome in their school or local community

You will need

Access to the internet to watch a video clip: *When You Don't Exist* (2 minutes 10 seconds) on Amnesty International's **YouTube** channel (search title)

For the teacher: Key terms and definitions card sort sheet

Handouts: Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Summary

World map

Syria to the UK: Muhammad and Maha's journey

Guidance for teachers

You may have refugee students in your classroom or school, and this content will have an impact on them. In case of concerns, liaise with the school safeguarding or pastoral team. Before running this lesson, give students time to share any relevant information about their identities with you. It is important that students know they will be listened to respectfully, if they choose to tell their story, and that support is available (such as the school counsellor) if they need someone to talk to afterwards. Make it clear that this is a safe space to discuss issues, and opinions must be presented in a sensible and respectful manner.

INTRODUCTION

15 minutes

Terminology

Open the discussion by asking students for their definitions of:

- Refugee
- Asylum seeker
- Migrant
- Internally displaced person

TIME TO FLEE
AGE 14-16

Hand out the **Key words and definitions** match-up sheet and ask them to match the different terms to their meaning or definition.

Reflect on their answers and correct any misconceptions. Emphasise the crucial distinctions between the terms.

Remind students that everyone has more than one identity. Refugee, migrant and asylum seeker are only temporary terms. They do not reflect the whole identity of women, non-binary people, men and children who have left their homes behind to start to a new life in a different country.

Tell the class that when we use these labels, they only refer to one experience: that of leaving their country. But their identities are made up of so much more.

A world of refugees

Ask the class how many refugees they think there are around the world. What percentage of those refugees are in the UK?

Take a few responses.

Explain that as of October 2023, there were approximately 36.4 million refugees in the world. And that the UK currently hosts less than 1 per cent of the world's refugees. (Source: [unhcr.org/refugee-statistics](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics), look here for data updates).

Does this surprise them? Why or why not? Do they think that the UK should welcome more refugees? Discuss.

Why do people become refugees?

No one chooses to become a refugee. In pairs, ask students to discuss reasons why people would be forced to leave their home and become refugees. Take a few responses.

Film: When You Don't Exist

Play the clip *When You Don't Exist* on Amnesty International's YouTube channel (search title). Ask students to note down anything surprising.

Discussion questions

What is their reaction to the clip?
Why were people forced to flee London?
What conditions and treatment did they find?
How did watching it make them feel?

Explain that every refugee's situation can be different. Share other reasons why people are forced to leave their home countries, for instance: conflict, persecution, poverty, famine, human rights violations, being attacked or threatened because of religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs.

Task 1**FLEEING FROM AND FLEEING TO****15 minutes**

Hand out the world map sheet and ask students, in pairs, to identify:

- the top five countries where refugees come from
- the top five countries hosting them.

Ask them to share and discuss their responses – then share the answers. Write them up on the board if possible.

Top five countries of origin for refugees

Syria	6.5 Million
Afghanistan	6.1 Million
Ukraine	5.9 Million
Venezuela	5.6 Million
South Sudan	2.2 Million

Top five host countries of refugees

Iran	3.4 million
Turkey	3.4 million
Germany	2.5 million
Colombia	2.5 million
Pakistan	2.1 million

Ask the students if they are surprised about any countries on (or not on) the list. Do they notice any patterns?

Talk through the following statistics.

- 69 per cent of refugees and other people in need of international protection live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin.
- 75 per cent of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries.
- 20 per cent of refugees are hosted by the least developed countries.

(Source: [unhcr.org/refugee-statistics](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics), as of October 2023)

Discuss

What do they think about this?

Have they seen or heard anything different in the UK media and from UK politicians? Why do they think this is?

Task 2

REFUGEE RIGHTS AND LAW

20 minutes

Explain to students that just like anyone else, refugees have rights. Specific rights are protected under international law and human rights law including:

- The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, Article 14, which states that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution: they can ask for protection from another country if they are persecuted in their own.
- The 1951 **Refugee Convention** and its 1967 Protocol which protects refugees from being returned to a country where their life and freedom would be under threat.

Hand out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sheet (one per student). Explain that this is the first international agreement on human rights which governments across the world adopted in 1948 to protect the rights and freedoms that belong to all of us.

Ask students to highlight the rights affected if you are forced to seek asylum and become a refugee in another country. For example, the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries, the right to privacy, the right to safety.

As the government overhauls the asylum system in the UK, there has never been a more important time to listen to people who have experienced it first-hand.

Muhammad and Maha's journey

Share the story **Muhammad and Maha** who talk about their experience of leaving Syria amid war and becoming refugees in the UK. Read or hand out the case study sheet, or show on the white board.

Ask students to work in pairs and use the world map sheet to trace their journey. How many countries did they have to travel through before getting to safety?

Ask your students

- Why did they decide to leave their home?
- What challenges did they face on their journey?
- What human rights were denied to them on the way and what was the impact?
- What would have helped?
- How do you think they felt arriving in a new community?
- What human rights do they enjoy in London?
- Do you think all refugees feel welcomed when they resettle in the UK? Are they treated fairly and with dignity?
- If not, what needs to happen in the UK to change this and who would make those changes?
- How did the new community make them feel?
- What can you do to support and welcome refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK?

Finally...
TAKE ACTION
10 minutes

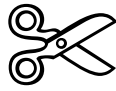
What small acts can students do to help people who are newly-arrived feel more welcome in your school or community? Ask them to:

- 1 Draw a picture of their favourite hobby, animal, school subject or place in the UK. In the centre of the picture, ask them to write a message of welcome, solidarity or support for refugees in their school or wider community. Display under a banner of welcome somewhere prominent in your school.
- 2 Think of any other ideas to show further solidarity or to create a culture of welcome for refugees and people seeking asylum. Ask them to choose one, explain to their partner or the class why this is a good idea and why they chose it.

Extension

Students can take Amnesty International's Rights of Refugees free online course on displacement, refugee protection, taking action and more: academy.amnesty.org

KEY WORDS AND DEFINITIONS CARD SORT



Cut up the key words and definitions and ask students to match them up

Refugee

A person forced to seek safety in another country because of persecution in their own. Persecution can be any serious human rights violation such as torture or arbitrary detention, including the impact of war, that is due to religion, political beliefs, race or such things as sexual orientation or gender identity. Refugees have a right to international protection.

Migrant

A person who has moved to another country intending to stay for a prolonged period. This may be to work, study or join family members. Many people who migrate have chosen to do so. But some feel compelled to move, for example because they need to find work to support themselves and their family.

Asylum seeker

A person who asks for asylum (protection) in another country. They may have to wait for the authorities in that country to recognise them as a refugee. The person's full rights as a refugee may be delayed while the authorities consider whether the person is a refugee.

Internally displaced person

A person who has fled their home, for example to escape conflict, violence or environmental and human-made disasters, but has not crossed an international border to find safety. Their protection is the responsibility of their government.

TIME TO FLEE
AGE 14-16

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS – SUMMARY

FOR THE STUDENT

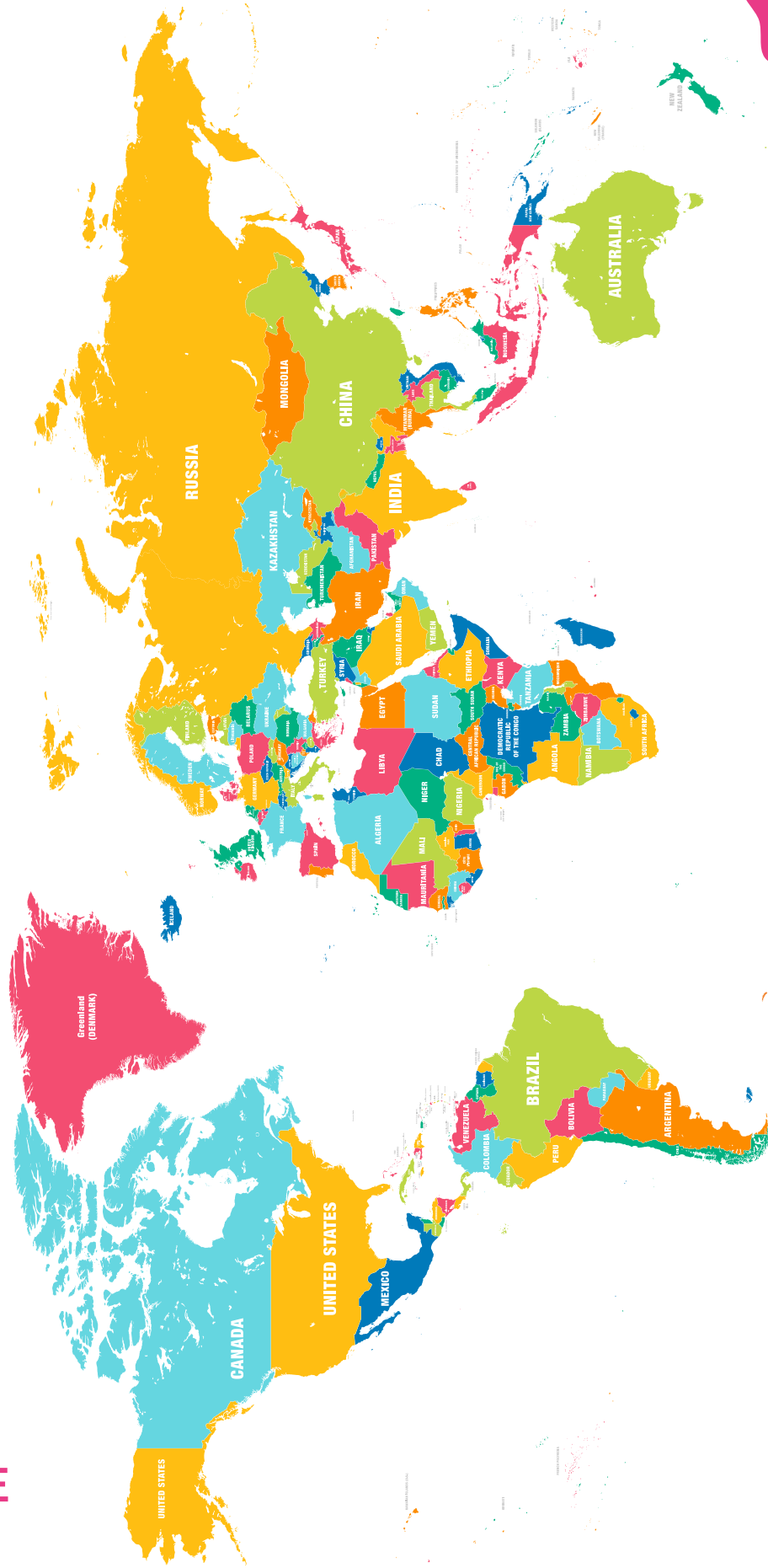
- 1 We are born free and equal, and should treat others in the same way.
- 2 We have all these rights in the Declaration, no matter who we are, where we're from or what we believe in.
- 3 We have the right to life, and to be free and feel safe.
- 4 Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone else our slave.
- 5 Nobody has any right to hurt, torture or humiliate us.
- 6 Everyone has the right to be protected by the law.
- 7 The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.
- 8 We can all ask for the law to help us when we are not treated fairly.
- 9 Nobody has the right to put us in prison, or to send us away from our country, without good reasons.
- 10 If we are accused of breaking the law, we have the right to a fair and public trial.
- 11 Nobody should be blamed for doing something until it has been proved that they did it.
- 12 Nobody has the right to enter our home, open our letters or bother us or our families without a good reason.
- 13 We all have the right to go where we want to in our own country and to travel abroad as we wish.
- 14 If someone hurts us, we have the right to go to another country and ask for protection.
- 15 We all have the right to belong to a country.
- 16 When we are legally old enough, we have the right to marry and have a family.
- 17 Everyone has the right to own things or share them.
- 18 We all have the right to our own thoughts and to believe in any religion.
- 19 We can all think what we like, say what we think and share ideas and information with other people.
- 20 We all have the right to meet our friends and work together in peace to defend our rights. It is wrong to force someone to belong to a group.
- 21 We all have the right to take part in the government of our country. Every grown up should be allowed to vote to choose their own leaders.
- 22 The place where we live should help us to develop and to make the most of all the advantages (culture, work, social welfare) on offer. Music, art, craft and sport are for everyone to enjoy.
- 23 Every grown up has the right to a job, to a fair wage and to join a trade union.
- 24 We all have the right to rest and free time.
- 25 We all have the right to a decent living standard, including enough food, clothing, housing and medical help if we are ill. Mothers and children and people who are old, out of work or disabled have the right to be cared for.
- 26 We all have the right to education.
- 27 We have the right to share in our community's arts and sciences, and any good they do.
- 28 There must be peace and order to protect these rights and freedoms, and we can enjoy them in our country and all over the world.
- 29 We have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.
- 30 Nobody can take away these rights and freedoms from us.

This version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been simplified by Amnesty International UK and is especially useful for younger people. Download a full version at [amnesty.org.uk/universal](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/universal)

TIME TO FLEE
AGE 14-16

WORLD MAP

FOR THE STUDENT



TIME TO FLEE
AGE 14-16

SYRIA TO THE UK: MUHAMMAD AND MAHA'S JOURNEY

FOR THE
STUDENT



Muhammad, Maha and their daughter Haneen

© Jonathan Cornejo

War in Syria

Muhammad was newly engaged to Maha, and had opened a carpentry workshop in his home town in Homs province when Syria's civil war broke out. 'We started building a house, a home for the future,' he says. 'I had so many dreams that came to an end when the war started.'

Initially the couple thought the war wouldn't last long, but the violence soon spread to Muhammad's town. 'Assad's army attacked and fighting broke out,' he says. 'There was an attack and a counterattack. We'd never seen arms or guns before, but suddenly they were everywhere. We got scared. Me and my family did not want to fight with either side, so we had to leave.'

With Maha in Damascus, Mohammad and his family fled to southwestern Syria. But the secret service arrested him, his father, two of his brothers, his brother-in-law and his brother-in-law's son after a tip-off from Muhammad's cousin. 'My father used to speak up against the regime and my younger brother participated in a peaceful protest,' says Muhammad. 'We were taken to Damascus, then to Homs prison. I spent eight and a half months in prison, my father six months. He was an old man and was severely tortured. He died a month after his release.'

TIME TO FLEE
AGE 14-16

Escape to Lebanon

The security forces continued to harass Muhammad and he realised he had to flee. A relative sneaked him across the border to Lebanon, and Maha joined him in Tripoli.

'People treated us terribly,' says Muhammad. 'The room we rented was in a very bad condition, not good even for animals. We had bad neighbours and were constantly attacked verbally by the locals. They kept telling us, "You are dirty refugees".' Maha was also targeted because she was a woman. 'I was insulted and abused verbally by many men,' she says. 'I started spending all my time in my room, hardly going out. I was clearly targeted as a woman, in addition to being Syrian. I felt completely unsafe.'

The couple moved several times but were badly treated wherever they went. 'There was daily verbal abuse,' says Muhammad. 'On many occasions, our employers refused to give us our wages, and we just had to accept it.'

The worst incident occurred just a week after the birth of their daughter, Haneen. 'We were living in a flat and were five days late in paying the rent,' says Muhammad. 'First the landlord cut off our water and electricity, then he gave me less than 10 hours to find another flat, then he threw us out on the street. It was the middle of winter and freezing cold. Maha had not even recovered from the birth. In the end, my sister sent me the rent from Turkey: when the landlord saw the money he immediately changed his mind and said, "Welcome, no problem".'

Home in London

Finally, after more than three years, Muhammad and Maha managed to claim asylum in the UK, and now live in a small flat in London.

Initially they were apprehensive. 'But when we saw people waiting for us at the airport we felt reassured and welcomed,' says Muhammad. 'Our neighbours always greet us and ask if we need anything or if they can help with anything. We live above a nursery and the manager came and talked to us and said she would have our daughter in their nursery. They found someone to teach us English, helped us to lay down carpet, and set up the internet for us. The most important thing now is to learn English, so we can mix properly with people and I can find a job.'

For Maha, meanwhile, the move to London means they can once again plan for the future. 'We want a better life than the one we lived in Syria and Lebanon,' she says. 'In this country, education is great and I think it's important that Haneen gets a brilliant education. Frankly, we feel safe here and we feel there is a good future for us as a family.'

■ *This text has been adapted from an Amnesty International interview, originally published in Amnesty Magazine 2018.*