



UN Refugee Day

19 June 2020



WHAT IS UN REFUGEE DAY?



United Nations

Image source: [United Nations](https://www.un.org/)

First marked in 2001, World Refugee Day is held every year on 20 June, to raise awareness of the plight of refugees across the world. Refugees usually have experienced significant loss, often of loved ones, war, loss of human rights, torture, and financial hardship.

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 after the Second World War by 51 countries committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights.

WHY IS WORLD REFUGEE DAY IMPORTANT?

This year's World Refugee Day is perhaps more important than most. Recent world-wide anti-racism protests, triggered by the death of George Floyd, have challenged all of us to reflect upon social injustice. The UN's stated aim of this year's World Refugee Day is to:

“Remind the world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society [...] in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world.”



At Highlands School, we do not shy away from addressing challenging topics about injustice and inequality. We aim to ensure that all our students leave school with a strong sense of what it means to be a good citizen and can use their voice, passion, and education to make the world a better place for everyone. Therefore, Highlands School wishes to use World Refugee Day as an opportunity to raise awareness about refugees.



WHAT IS A REFUGEE?

The word 'refugee' is used widely to refer to 'displaced people'; people who have been forced to leave their home country or region due to reasons such as war and persecution. Before we can engage with the issues raised as part of World Refugee Day, we must first be clear about the various categories of displaced persons.

REFUGEE

According to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who has fled his or her home and country owing to "a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." Many refugees are in exile to escape the effects of natural or human-made disasters. The term refugee also means that a person has been granted 'refugee' status in a country, which usually means they can remain there.

ASYLUM SEEKER

Most refugees will at first be asylum seekers. The word 'asylum' means protection or safety. So an asylum seeker is someone looking for safety, usually in another country because they have fled their homes, but their claim to refugee status has not been approved yet. On arrival in the new country, the person fleeing will have to declare their wish to seek asylum and the application process begins. This process can take several years.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are people who have not crossed an international border but have moved to a different region within their own country to the one they call home.

STATELESS PERSON

Stateless persons do not have a recognized nationality and do not belong to any country. Statelessness situations are usually caused by discrimination against certain groups. Their lack of identification - a citizenship certificate - can exclude them from access to important government services, including health care, education and employment.



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ILLEGAL ASYLUM SEEKER

There is no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker. Everybody has a right to seek asylum in another country. People who do not qualify for protection as refugees and do not receive refugee status may be deported. However, does not mean they are an 'illegal' asylum seeker.

RETURNEE

Returnees are former refugees who return to their own countries or regions of origin after time in exile. Returnees need continuous support and reintegration assistance to ensure that they can rebuild their lives at home.

MIGRANT

A person who moves from one place to another.

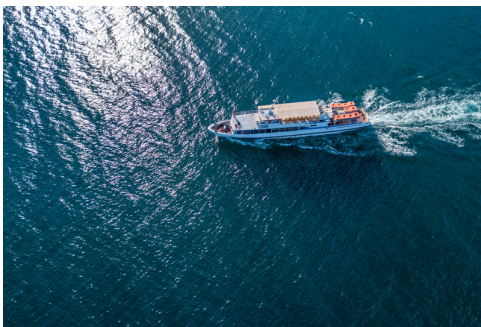
If we are to discuss thoughtfully the issues surrounding displaced people, specifically refugees, we must use the above stated terms with precision.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS OF 2015

The issue of people being forced to flee their homes and seek refugee status in other countries is a world-wide problem. However, it was the refugee crisis (which began in 2015) which thrust the issue into the headlines. War in Syria, violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as poverty in Kosovo, led to a sudden influx of migrants into Europe.

Migrants of all ages and genders used a range of routes to reach Europe. Many of these routes required migrants to travel thousands of miles across land, to cross open stretches of water, and to sleep without appropriate shelter. Migrants were forced to live without a guaranteed supply of food, clean water or medical equipment

Such terrible conditions have led to high mortality rates. In 2016, 5,143 people died attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea alone. Although fewer people are now attempting to enter Europe, the crisis, and the resultant deaths, continue. 2,297 people are known to have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2018.



By the end of 2015, more than a million migrants crossed into Europe. 1,321,560 claimed asylum. The number of arrivals in Europe has been falling steadily since 2016, though notably less so in the past two years. 144,282 people arrived in Europe in 2018; in 2017, that number was 186,788; in 2016, it was 390,456; and in 2015, there were more than a million arrivals.

Although the migrant crisis of 2015 is past its peak, we must not assume that the crisis is over. War, violence and poverty continue to drive people from their homes. So far this year, 347 people have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean, and 1,087 migrants have died world-wide.





ASYLUM SEEKERS

Asylum seekers have to go through a tough process to qualify for protection in the UK. Asylum seekers wait approximately 6 months to get an answer on their application but sometimes this can take longer. Due to being unable to work or receive benefits, most asylum seekers are living in poverty and hunger, many unable to provide for their families' needs. Below are some examples of asylum seekers who had to struggle to be settled within the UK. You can find the testimonials below (testimonial 1 and 2) and more on the Refugee Action website [HERE](#).

What's your story?

Testimonial 1

£37 a week. I remember myself calculating our shopping's cost, so we don't have to feel embarrassed at the tills. We had already had that experience before...

£37 per week. I remember convincing my children that charity shops sell better quality toys than Debenhams.

£37 per week. I remember myself reassuring my daughter that on one beautiful day, a postman would drop off a life-changing letter that would change our world. She would have a real Barbie doll!

£37 per week. £5.39 a day.

After six years of waiting, we are refugees now. We have all the rights, including access to public benefits – but we are left with our difficult memories.

Testimonial 2

"There seems to be so much delay and confusion in the system," says Mansoor. "They told us at the airport that we will have a decision on our asylum claim within six months, but four months have passed and we still didn't even have an interview. We were also told we would get our asylum ID cards five days after the screening at the airport, but we got them three months later. Everything is delayed and the housing was also delayed."



The testimonials below have been sourced from Refugee Council website [HERE](#).

Testimonial 3

When I heard that we would come to the UK at first it was the feeling that you're having to leave your parents, your family, your brothers your friends and your place. But on the other hand there is the security for your kids, for yourself, the education and healthcare. And to know that where you're going is a peaceful country. A safe country.

I don't know what to say about my feelings, but it was really difficult at the beginning. After a little while, the people and the general atmosphere and the type of nature with the river is very similar to where I come from. The people were kind, similar to the people from where I come from. They were nice and welcoming, which helped. Where I come from, there is a river and the trees and it felt similar.



Testimonial 4



When I was four years old, my parents and grandparents fled Bhutan because of problems in our home country.

I grew up in the Refugee Camp in Nepal; I lived there for over 20 years before I was resettled to the UK with my mum and my wife.

It's a vast difference between life in the refugee camp and life in the UK. I had a life before but I did not exist as an actual human being. We weren't allowed to leave the camp and we were relying on different international agencies for food. The life was really miserable.

I'm so happy to be in the UK: by the luck of God we have this life now and we're really happy.

Testimonial 5

I'm originally from the Congo but my family fled to Rwanda, when I was seven, because of the war. We were there for 15 years.

In Rwanda, we lived outside of the refugee camps because living inside the camps was dangerous. We didn't feel safe. It was hard to get food, medicine, clothes and shoes. I had dreams of a different life, but I didn't have any hope.

When I arrived in the UK, I didn't speak a word of English. The language barrier made it really hard to fit in at the beginning and it was difficult to learn. But now everyone tells me I've got a Hull accent.

I was going to a drop in at a local youth club when I heard about the Princes Trust. Through them, I gained some certificates in sports coaching and an apprenticeship with the Tigers Trust. I'm also an Ambassador for the Princes Trust: I wanted to give back to them – through their work I've built my confidence, travelled and met lots of interesting people, including celebrities like Simon Cowell and Emeli Sandé. Being on the red carpet with them at the Princes Trust's awards ceremony, and having them congratulate me was one of the most humbling experiences of my life.



FACTS

REFUGEES IN THE UK: WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Q

Are there many refugees and asylum seekers in the UK?

A

No. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2018 there were 126,720 refugees, 45,244 pending asylum cases and 125 stateless persons in the UK. That is around one quarter of a percent (0.26%) of the UK's total population.

Q

Is the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK increasing?

A

The answer to this question depends on how you use the data. Asylum applications to the UK are relatively low. 35,566 people applied for asylum applications in 2019. This is significantly lower than the peak of 84,000 applications back in 2002.

Q

How many Syrian refugees are there and how many are the UK helping?

A

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, by the end of 2018 there were 6.7 million Syrian refugees worldwide. Around 4.6 million of these refugees are currently being hosted by just two countries – Turkey and Lebanon.

The UK has pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrians by 2020 through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. By June 2019, 17,051 Syrian refugees had come to the UK through this scheme.

Q

Which countries in Europe have the most asylum seekers?

A

In 2018, Germany received the highest number of asylum applications (161,900), and France the second highest (114,500).

Q

Can asylum seekers work or claim benefits?

A

Asylum seekers are not allowed to claim benefits or work in the UK. If they are destitute and have no other means of supporting themselves, they can apply to receive asylum support. This is set at around £5.39 per day. Media reports about asylum seekers claiming lots benefits are untrue.



Q

What happens to someone when they get refugee status?

A

When a person is given refugee status, they have just 28 days to find permanent accommodation and to apply for mainstream benefits before they are evicted from asylum accommodation. Many refugees become homeless at this stage.

Having read this information, reflect upon your own opinions regarding refugees. Has this information confirmed your opinions, or have you discovered any misconceptions?

HOW CAN I HELP?

As mentioned in the introduction, the UN's stated aim of this year's World Refugee Day is to:

“

Remind the world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society [...] in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world.

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Therefore, it is fitting to conclude this piece by stating three key actions that every member of Highlands School community can undertake, in order to create a more 'just, inclusive and equal world' for refugees.

- 🎯 In our community, challenge misconceptions about refugees.
- 🎯 Challenge your own misconceptions about refugees.
- 🎯 Welcome refugees into our community.
- 🎯 Show empathy and understanding.

To find out more, why not visit: www.refugee-action.org.uk.