

Education unlocks support for refugees

Activity pack for ages 7–11



About this resource

These thought-provoking activities for ages 7-11 explore the impacts of being forced to flee home on the lives and education of young refugees.

Activity 1 – In the shoes of others

With strong links to English and literacy, this activity uses film diaries from Bassam and Rojin, two young Syrian refugees, to build learners' empathy and understanding of the difficulties that young refugees may face in their lives.

Activity 2 – What do you value the most about going to school?

In this activity, learners are asked to reflect on the importance of education in their own lives and what they would miss the most if they weren't able to go to school. They will then work in groups to identify possible ways in which schools and education can help young refugees to rebuild their lives.

Activity 3 – Everyone is welcome here

Learners will discuss the challenges that young refugees might face when starting a new school and consider possible actions they could take to make their own school and classroom more welcoming for newcomers.



Notes for educators

- These flexible activities are intended to support your teaching rather than direct it. The activities could be used as standalone sessions for informal learning, such as a drop down day, or to enrich the teaching of different subjects and topics. An overview of potential curriculum links is provided below.
- The approximate timings given for each activity are a guide only. We recommend completing all of the activities but educators may prefer to use a selection depending on their learners' needs and the time available. Some additional activity ideas are included at the end of the resource.
- Learning outcomes are provided at the start of each activity. No starters and plenaries are included as it is assumed that educators will want to plan these individually.
- All activity and resource sheets are included in this pack. An accompanying slideshow is provided as a separate download.
- We have tried to make these activities appropriate and relevant for the 7-11 age range but educators may find that some of the activities are more suitable for ages 9+. Where possible, the activities and resources are differentiated to help you meet the needs of different learners in your class. This guidance may also be useful in adapting some of the activities for younger and older learners. It may also be helpful to refer to the Education unlocks support for refugees activities for ages 11-16.
- This resource explores complex issues connected to refugees and migration. Some of the activities may need to be adapted if there are children and young people in the class with direct experience of these issues. If learners feel comfortable, it may be helpful to sensitively draw on these personal experiences to further develop the awareness and understanding of others in the group.
- We've also put together a list of useful links and resources to help support any additional teaching about issues connected with refugees and migration, and the importance of education in unlocking change.

Curriculum links

England: Citizenship; English; Geography; Personal, Social and Health Education

Northern Ireland: Language and Literacy; Personal Development and Mutual Understanding; The World Around Us

Scotland: Health and Well-being; Literacy and English; Social Studies

Wales: Health and Well-being; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and Communication

Background information

The coronavirus pandemic has prompted many people to reflect on the importance of our communities, of having somewhere to call home. But by the end of 2023, 117.3 million were forced to leave their home, communities and sometimes families – as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or other mistreatment. That's 1% of the global population; 40% of these displaced people are children. Other factors such as natural disasters, emergencies and poverty contribute to the movement of millions more.

Crisis and conflict disrupt education. Refugee children are five times more likely to be missing out on an education. 51% of all school age refugee children are out of school and girls are less likely to be enrolled than boys. More than one third of the 15,000 people in the refugee camps in the Greek Aegean Islands are children, and fewer than 15 per cent have any form of education. Only 7% of refugees have access to higher education.

Education is one of the keys to unlocking the potential of children everywhere. For refugee children, schools are an important safety net, making children less vulnerable to child labour, recruitment by armed groups, child marriage, or sexual exploitation. Schools can support children's well-being, providing them with hope for a better future and helping them to recover from the trauma of fleeing home, conflict and violence. They can connect refugees to their host community's culture and language, creating more tolerant, peaceful societies.

About Theirworld

Theirworld's campaigns and projects deliver resources to ensure that every child has a safe place to learn. For example, we have been working in Lebanon to expand access to education, tackling the impact of the conflict in Syria which has left hundreds of thousands of refugee children out of school. In Turkey (which is home to 3.6 million Syrian refugees), our projects are supporting Syrian refugees to overcome the economic, cultural and language barriers that prevent them from getting an education.

Activity 1 – In the shoes of others

45 min+



Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Identify reasons why people might move between or within countries and understand that people may or may not have choice in this movement
- Read a story from a young refugee to build empathy and concern for people who have been forced to leave home
- Consider the potential impacts of being forced to flee home on the lives of young people

What you need:

- Slideshow (slides 3-8)
- Copies of [Bassam's story](#)
- Online access to the film: [Bassam's Story: The Future Ahead of Me](#) (optional)

What to do:

1

Ask learners to close their eyes and think quietly for a couple of minutes about what it might be like and how it might feel to wake up one day and suddenly have to leave your home, community and school to move somewhere else. What would they miss? How might they feel?

2

Allow time for learners to briefly discuss their ideas in pairs, groups or as a class. You might like to invite learners to share their own experiences of movement if they feel comfortable in doing so. This could be local movement within their community or on a wider scale.

3

Show slide 3 and ask learners to suggest reasons why someone might leave their home and move somewhere else – either in the same country or a different one.

4

Draw out through discussion that some people might choose to move somewhere else, for example to get a better job or to be nearer family and friends. We can call these pull factors. But some people might be forced to move, for example because of conflict or a disaster such as an earthquake or flooding. We can call these push factors. Some examples of pull and push factors are shown on slides 4 and 5.

5

Show slide 6 and say that about 72 million children each year have their education interrupted because of conflict, emergency and disaster. Say that many of these children are refugees. A definition of the term 'refugee' is provided on slide 7.

6

Say that most of us will never know what it is like to wake up one day and be forced to flee home - to leave behind family, friends, and everything that you are familiar with to move somewhere new. However we can try and empathise. This means trying to put ourselves in someone else's shoes – to try and understand what others might be experiencing; to imagine what they might be thinking and how they might be feeling.

7

Tell learners that they are now going to read a story from a young refugee called Bassam. Explain that each one of us is made up of lots of different stories and reading stories can help us to empathise with others.

8

Read Bassam's story with learners. Bassam is a fourteen-year-old refugee from Syria. He and his family now live in Vienna, the capital of Austria. He spent six months documenting his life on film to share his story with others. Learners could watch the film as well as reading the story.

9

Organise learners into groups of three and four. Give each group a copy a piece of paper and ask learners to divide it into two columns. They should write **Feelings** at the top of one column and **Challenges** at the top of the other. Slide 8 could be used as a visual aid for this.

10

Ask learners to think about and discuss Bassam's story in their group.

- What **challenges** has Bassam had to face?
- What **feelings** do you think Bassam has at different points during the story?

11

Learners should record their ideas in the two columns on their piece of paper. Encourage them to think of reasons for their ideas. Reasons might relate to direct evidence in the story or things that they have inferred from reading it.

12

Discuss their ideas as a whole group. Explain that many children and young people around the world are forced to leave home like Bassam each year. Many have fled conflict in their own countries and now face the challenges of moving somewhere new and unfamiliar.

Differentiation:

Make it easier:

Work as a class to first create a storyboard of the events in Bassam's story such as growing up in Syria during the conflict, his father leaving to travel to Europe by sea, the family's journey to Turkey across the mountains, living temporarily in Turkey and then moving to Austria to be reunited with his father and go back to school. Learners could then annotate this storyboard to show possible challenges and feelings that Bassam might have had at different times during the story.

Activity 2 – What do you value the most about going to school?

30min+



Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- creatively share their ideas about the importance of education and school
- reflect on what they would miss the most if they weren't able to go to school
- understand that schools and education can play a big part in helping refugees to rebuild their lives

What you need:

- Slideshow (slides 11-15)
- Additional resources will also be required for learners to creatively share their ideas about education and school

What to do:

- 1** Show slide 11 and ask learners to think about the following questions:
 - Why is education important to you?
 - What do you value the most about school?
- 2** Learners could first think on their own for a couple of minutes before sharing their ideas in a pair or group of three. Discuss their ideas as a class.
- 3** Say that one challenge that Bassam, and many other refugees, face is missing out on going to school and getting an education.
- 4** Share the fact on slide 12 that refugee children are five times more likely to be missing out on an education. Explain that there are different reasons for this. For example, young refugees may be living in camps or temporary accommodation and not have a school nearby to go to.
- 5** Show slide 13 and ask learners to think about what they would miss the most if they weren't able to go to school? If learners have experience of not being able to go to school as a result of Covid-19, they might like to reflect on what they missed the most during this time. Feedback their ideas as a class.
- 6** Say that schools and education can play a big part in helping young refugees to start a new life somewhere else. You may wish to share and discuss the case studies on slides 14 and 15 which provide details of some Theirworld education projects that are supporting young refugees to rebuild their lives. Information is provided in the slide notes.
- 7** Finish by asking learners to creatively share their ideas about the importance of education and school in some way. Perhaps they could write an acrostic poem, where the first letters in each line spell out 'SCHOOL IS'. Maybe they could paint a picture or create a collage.

Activity 3 – Everyone is welcome here

40min+



Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Identify challenges that young refugees might face when starting a new school
- Investigate ways in which they could make their school or classroom more welcoming

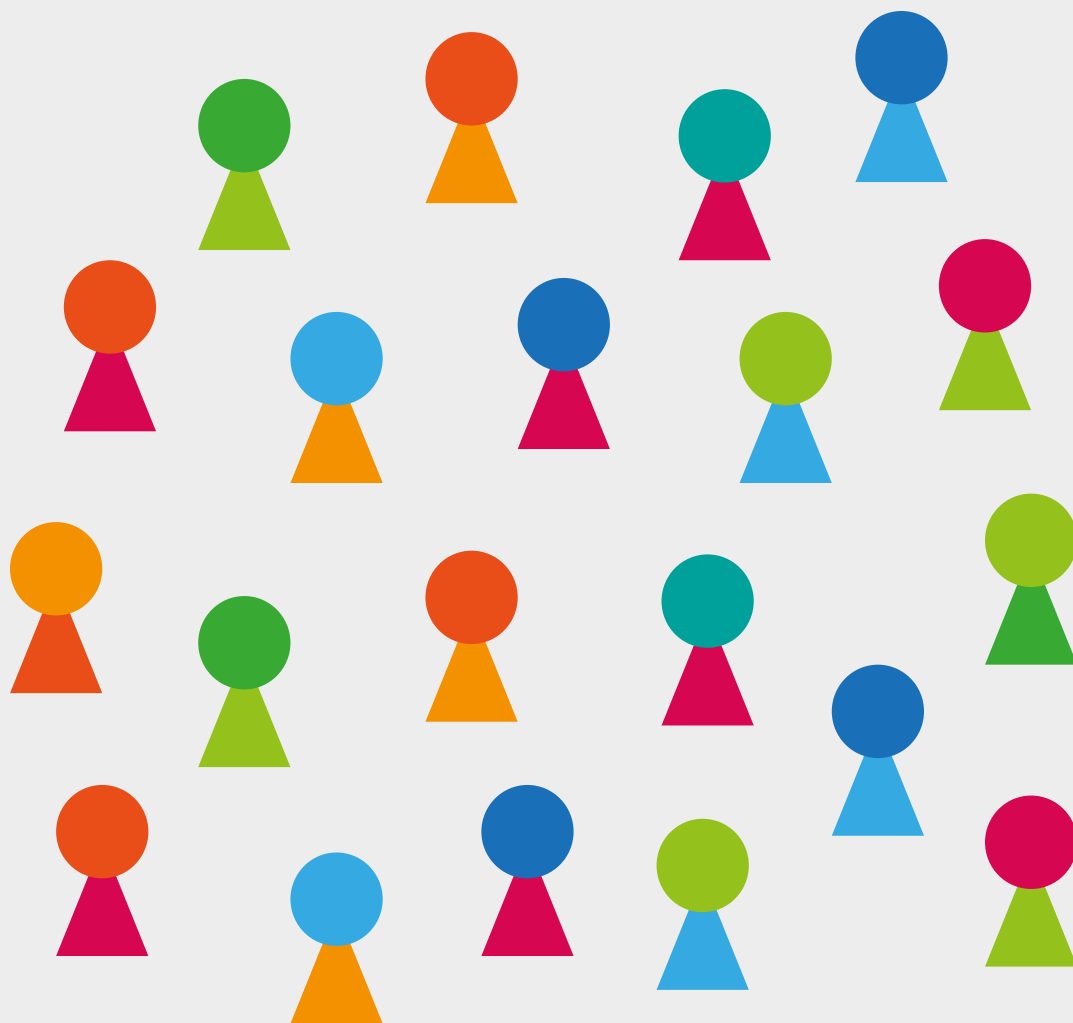
What you need:

- Slideshow (slides 19-21)
- Paper, pens and pencils (optional)
- Copies of the [Everyone is welcome here](#) resource sheet
- Additional resources may be required for learners to develop one of their ideas for creating a more welcoming school or classroom

What to do:

- 1** Show slide 19 and ask learners what challenges a refugee might face when starting a new school. Remind learners of Bassam's story and ask them to think about what his experience of starting a new school in Austria might have been like. Invite learners to share their own experiences of starting a new school if they feel comfortable in doing so.
- 2** Discuss learners' ideas. Some possible challenges that refugees might face are provided on slide 20. For example, refugees might have to:
 - catch up on learning if they have missed out on going to school
 - find their way around a new and unfamiliar place
 - learn a new language
 - make new friends
 - learn different subjects and topics
 - get used to a new culture and community
- 3** Explain that young refugees may also have experienced difficult things in their lives such as conflict in their home country or being separated from family and friends. These experiences might be making them feel sad, anxious or angry. Refugees might also have to cope with the difficulties of living in overcrowded camps or temporary accommodation. It might be noisy, cold, dark and wet and there might not be reliable electricity or internet access. It might be difficult to sleep at night or find a quiet place to do homework.
- 4** Ask learners to suggest possible actions that the teachers and other students at Bassam's new school might have done to help him overcome some of these challenges and feel welcome.
- 5** Organise learners into groups of three or four. Show slide 21 and explain that learners are now going to think about what action they could take to make their school welcoming for a newcomer such as Bassam.

- 6 Invite learners to share any personal experiences of starting a new school. What helped them to feel welcome?
- 7 Ask learners to work in their group to come up with a list of possible actions that could be taken. They could write a list on paper or digitally. Some ideas are provided in the [Everyone is welcome here](#) resource sheet.
- 8 Learners could then choose one or more of these actions (either individually or as a group or whole-class) to develop further. See the [useful links and resources](#) for support with this.



Additional activity ideas



Learners could:



Reflect on the meaning of home. Draw out through discussion that home isn't just about a building or a set of rooms. It can also be about our family and friends, our school, where we grew up or the community where we live. It could also be connected to things like daily or weekly routines, religious festivals and family celebrations. Ask learners to create some poetry or artwork to share their ideas with others.



Older or more able learners could go online to research facts and figures about the refugee crisis. Alternatively they could investigate other push and pull factors which might cause people to move between or within countries. See the [useful links and resources](#) for support with this.



Use hot seating to further explore the thoughts, feelings and experiences of Bassam. Learners could take turns at being interviewed in role as Bassam with other learners asking them questions about their experiences as a young refugee. Alternatively, learners could write diary entries that Bassam might have written at different points in the story.



Watch and discuss a film from another young Syrian refugee: [Rojin's Story: We Lost Everything](#). Rojin is 15 years old and lives on an informal settlement in Turkey. She dreams of becoming a lawyer but now works on a farm seven days a week.



Work in groups to create freeze frames or a short role play to depict a situation where someone was made to feel unwelcome. Encourage others in the class to suggest what different characters are thinking or feeling. Learners could then use drama to recreate the situation with an alternative ending where the same person was made to feel welcome.



Design a pack to welcome someone to their community. The contents might include: a map of the local area, ideas about places to go or things to do; and information about different services such as a supermarket, leisure centre, doctors, library or schools.



Invite a trained refugee speaker into the school to share their personal experience and help raise awareness. Alternatively, there are many animations and films online describing the personal stories of child refugees (see the [useful links and resources](#)).

Share your learning!

Theirworld would love to hear how any schools have used these activities in the classroom. Please also let us know any feedback so that we can try to improve our resources and support for schools in the future. Email schools@theirworld.org or find @theirworld on [X](#) and [Facebook](#).

Useful links and resources

- Browse [Theirworld's other teaching resources](#) and investigate the importance of education in unlocking big change.
- [The Key](#) is a comprehensive information toolkit created by Theirworld with all the talking points, pitch decks, facts and infographics you need to make the case for education.
- [Global Trends](#) is published by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) every year. It tracks changes in the numbers of refugees, internally displaced people, asylum seekers and other populations of concern to the UNHCR. This data is very important in raising public awareness and helping organisations and states to set policies and plan humanitarian responses.
- [This section of the UNHCR \(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees\) website](#) provides useful resources for teaching about refugees, asylum, migration and statelessness. This includes a helpful glossary, facts and figures about refugees and professional development and guidance for teachers on how to include refugee children in the classroom. There are also some useful [animations](#) which explain the terms: migrant, refugee, asylum seeker and internally displaced person.
- [Reboot Education](#) is an online platform which lists hundreds of resources to support teachers in developing a global dimension in the classroom and across the school community.
- [Refugee Week](#) is a festival held every year around World Refugee Day on 20th June. It celebrates the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. Through a programme of activities it helps to connect people of different backgrounds and encourage better understanding between communities. Their website includes [useful resources and links](#) for schools to get involved including classroom activities, [external school speakers](#), a [book list](#) and a suggested collection of [educational videos](#).
- These [animated stories from the BBC](#) provide an insight into the lives and experiences of some young people who have sought refuge in the UK.
- [Schools of Sanctuary](#) is a growing network of primary and secondary schools across the UK who are committing to creating a culture of welcome in their school communities as well as raising awareness of issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers.

The links and resources [provided above] include and will take you to materials and sites that have been produced by third parties. We do not maintain or control these links, materials or sites and have no responsibility for the content or your use of the same. Please be aware that there may be separate terms and conditions applicable to your use of these materials and sites.

Bassam's story – The future ahead of me

Film transcript

Bassam is fourteen years old and comes from Syria. He and his family now live in Vienna, the capital of Austria. This is his story.

I was 12 years old when my father travelled. He went to Europe by the sea. When he left, my mother, my sister and I cried. I was very scared for him. But he crossed the sea safely.

The rest of us decided to go to Turkey by smuggling. We had to cross over a very steep and dangerous mountain. We were slipping on every step and felt like we would die. Once we crossed over the mountain, the police didn't see us so we were able to enter Turkey.

Life was difficult. My mother started working. She went through a lot to be able to take care of us and buy us food. I stayed and looked after my brother and sister. We were waiting for my father to get residency papers for us.

We lived in Turkey for about two and a half years. I made new friends there. Some of my friends had lost their parents in the war. I felt very bad for them as they couldn't go to school as they didn't have money for it. I also wanted to go to school. I was very upset that I couldn't. When I would see children going to school with their bags I wished I could go to school in Turkey too.

Then my father phoned and told us that we had residency. We were very relieved as we would be able to go to Europe. However, my friends were upset as they didn't have any parents to take care of them and take them to Europe. They were also upset that I would leave them.

When we were about to board the aeroplane I was very happy that I was going to see my father and we would be one family again. I had missed my father so much.

When I saw the ground below, the ground of Austria and Europe, I felt the future ahead of me. I saw the people, the greenery, and I felt my future was going to be very good. When the plane landed, I felt like my father was getting closer, next to me. I entered Vienna airport then got out of the gate where our father was waiting for us. Then I felt great joy. When I saw my dad, I hugged and kissed him. It was an indescribable joy.

I love Vienna loads. The buildings are beautiful here, old and historic. It's true that Syria has beautiful streets but there were all destroyed. Syria was all destroyed.

When I went back to school, I was very happy as I hadn't been to school in three years. The environment was strange to me as everyone spoke German and I couldn't speak German. I met new friends there. I was shy at first as they would talk to me but I wouldn't understand. So they talked to me in signs and I got by.

I want to learn German. Sometimes it is easy and sometimes it is difficult. I want to become a famous artist as I love drawing. I don't want to waste my chance here.

Everyone is welcome here

Resource sheet

Design a welcome banner for the school entrance

Organise welcome activities for newcomers and their families

Produce a welcome pack with information about the school

Make the effort to be friendly and talk to anyone who is new

Give newcomers a plan of the school to help them find their way around

Make multilingual signs to display around the school

Learn to say hello in different languages

Have welcome ambassadors to show newcomers around the school and answer any questions or concerns they might have

Provide books in the library in different languages

Invite a trainer refugee speaker into the school to share their personal experience

Create a leaflet or poster to raise awareness of the refugee crisis

Give a tour (virtual or face-to-face) of the school and classroom

Provide opportunities to learn about different cultures and languages

Review the school's anti-bullying policy

Create a welcome box for new students with objects, activities and advice to help them feel at home

Set up conversation clubs for young people who don't speak English and native speakers

Deliver an assembly to raise awareness about what it means to be welcome

Go online to learn more about the refugee crisis



Theirworld

Theirworld is a global children's charity committed to ending the global education crisis and unleashing the potential of the next generation.

Registered Charity 1092312

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