

### Activity 3: Who is a refugee?

#### Learning objectives

- To deepen an understanding of “refugee status” by applying international law in different scenarios.
- To use existing knowledge to suggest where the world’s largest refugee populations come from and where they move to.
- To use the results of these activities to question assumptions and improve understanding of the refugee crisis.

#### Resources

- Activity Sheet: Who is a refugee? cut up into cards (one set per group of three or four young people)

**Time required:** 25 mins

Modern international humanitarian law was introduced following the vast human rights abuses and humanitarian crises in the period of World War II and is overseen by the United Nations. Under international humanitarian law, countries are obliged to protect refugees who are on their territory. However, a person has to meet specific criteria to be formally recognised as a refugee. The excerpts below show how refugees are defined and catered for under international humanitarian law.

#### 1. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Article 14.

Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

#### 2. The United Nations Refugee Convention, 1951

defines a refugee as:

"Any person who ... owing to 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..."

#### 3. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR was set up to protect and support refugees. In 2012, the UNHCR had a budget of US \$4.3 billion.



Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Spain, 1949.

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- Ask the young people if they know what a refugee is. Read the definitions of a refugee given above to the young people and ask for some initial reactions.
- Divide the class into groups of three or four. Give each group a set of the “Who is a refugee” cards from the cut-up activity sheet. The cards are printed twice on the sheet, to help you save paper.
- Ask the young people, working in groups, to go through the cards one at a time and decide if the person described on the card would qualify for formal refugee status under international law or not.
- When they have finished sorting the cards, share the answers below.
- Discuss any surprising or controversial outcomes. Has the young people’s knowledge of international humanitarian law changed?

### Answers

A person who has been charged with a serious crime in their own country and has escaped from the police.	Not a refugee
A person who is persecuted because s/he is gay.	Possibly a refugee (the definition is vague)
A person whose place of worship is burnt down by religious extremists from the country’s majority religion.	A refugee
A person escaping extreme poverty.	Not a refugee
A person harassed by the police because of her/his ethnicity.	A refugee
A person whose home has been destroyed by an earthquake.	Not a refugee
A person sacked from their job and arrested because they campaigned for freedom of speech.	A refugee
A person forced to leave her or his home because of climate change making sea levels rise.	Not a refugee (despite the term “climate refugee”)

Note that in the UK “Refugee Status” is a legal status, the following definitions are taken from the [Right to Remain Toolkit](#) on 21 July 2017.

- Asylum seeker:

If you have claimed asylum in the UK, but have not yet had a decision on your case, you are an asylum-seeker. In legal terms, you are only a “refugee” once your asylum claim has received a positive decision.

- Refugee status:

If the Home Office decides you have a need for protection, and your claim falls under the grounds for protection in the Refugee Convention, you will be granted refugee status. Refugee status currently means five years leave to remain in the UK. You will have the right to work and claim benefits, access to mainstream housing, and the possibility of applying for family reunion and a travel document. After five years, you can apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR), known as settled status, and after a year of ILR you can apply for British citizenship.

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**Activity Sheet      Who is a refugee?**

A person who has been charged with a serious crime in their own country and has escaped from the police.	A person who is persecuted because s/he is gay.
A person whose place of worship is burnt down by religious extremists from the country's majority religion.	A person escaping extreme poverty.
A person harassed by the police because of her/his ethnicity.	A person whose home has been destroyed by an earthquake.
A person sacked from their job and arrested because they campaigned for freedom of speech.	A person forced to leave her or his home because of climate change making sea levels rise.

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