

The World Refugee Crisis

Overview

Over the last decade, the number of refugees across the world has doubled to nearly 80 million. In this activity, families will explore the story behind the numbers by taking a deeper look at causes for displacement as well as the regions and people most impacted. During this activity family members will learn more about the world's refugee crisis by reflecting on visual testimony, engaging in discussions from text, and developing ways your family can take informed action.

Did You Know?

Over the last decade, over 100 million people have been forced to flee their homes as they seek refuge either within or outside the borders of their own country. The United Nations Refugee Agency calculates that over 40% of refugees are children and that roughly only 3.5 million refugees eventually return to their country of origin¹. While this crisis can seem distant, it is important to help your family stay engaged and informed. The activities below can be a starting point for unpacking the complexity of displacement and helping your family build empathy and understanding.

Starting the Conversation at Home

Watch

While the statistics on refugees can be overwhelming to comprehend, one way to help your child and family make connections between statistics and individual experience is through the use of testimony. To help your child(ren) connect their understanding of refugee crises around the world and strengthen a sense of empathy, begin by watching the following clip from Jamela Khatun, a Rohingya refugee. In this clip of testimony, Jamela explains her multiple displacements and how events have impacted her and her family.

After watching and listening to Jamela Khatun discuss her experience, consider the following questions as a family:

- What hardships has Jamela and her family endured while living in Myanmar and fleeing to Bangladesh?
- After watching and listening to Jamela's testimony, how have she and her family persevered in the face of adversity?
- In the clip of testimony, Jamela uses the words "rights" and "justice". Discuss as a family the freedoms that Jamela outlines in her testimony and the importance of securing rights and justice for refugees around the world.
- How does Jamela's experience connect to ones that you have heard about in the news or have learned about in the classroom?

Note: For more support and strategies for using clips of testimony with your family, please visit teachingwithtestimony.com. For more information on the Rohingya refugee crisis, you can visit unhcr.org.

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/>

Discuss

In the classroom, your child may have learned about other refugee crises happening around the world or studied specific historical examples. Another important step you can take to connect understanding and build empathy for your family is by adding context around an event. To help understand the current refugee crisis, your family can participate in a group read of the short *New York Times* article, "Number of Refugees Worldwide Has Doubled in a Decade, U.N. Report Says" that is located at the end of this activity. Additionally, to help facilitate the discussion, please refer to the *Family Conversation Starter* handout.

After reading the short article, consider the following questions to help your family discuss what was read:

- The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, highlights that the refugee crisis effects poorer countries more than richer ones. Why do you think this is important to mention?
- How do you think the response to the COVID-19 pandemic around the world has positively and negatively impacted refugees?
- Knowing that so many people are experiencing displacement, why is it important to understand the policies the U.S. has created pertaining to refugees and asylum seekers?

Note: For more information on current trends in the global refugee crisis, you can download the United Nation's Report on Displacement here: [Global Trends in Forced Displacement](#).

Act

Knowing that the global refugee crisis can seem distant, it is important to remind yourself and your family that there are meaningful ways that you can take informed action to create awareness on causes of displacement, conditions of refugees, and movements or organizations to support displaced people. Outlined below are next steps that you and your family may consider taking, or you can work as a family to create your own!

- **Continue to Investigate:** Select one of the countries mentioned in the article and research more information on the causes for displacement and other important information.
- **Contact a Representative:** Research who your state and federal representatives are and write to them about your state and governments policies on refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Use Your Platform:** As a family, create an informative, family-friendly post on social media about an issue facing refugees and where others can go to support.

Number of Refugees Worldwide Has Doubled in a Decade, U.N. Report Says

Nearly 80 million people, or 1 percent of humanity, now qualify as refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced.

By Reuters

June 18, 2020

GENEVA—Nearly 80 million people worldwide were uprooted at the end of 2019 after fleeing wars or persecution, a record figure capping a “tumultuous” decade of displacement, the United Nations said on Thursday.

The figure rose by some 9 million from a year earlier and is close to double the 41 million recorded in 2010, despite Covid-19 restrictions slowing down movement, the U.N. refugee agency, U.N.H.C.R., said.

Syrians, Venezuelans, Afghans, South Sudanese, and stateless Rohingya from Myanmar top the list of 79.5 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally-displaced, it said in its annual flagship report, Global Trends.

“This almost 80 million figure—the highest that U.N.H.C.R. has recorded since these statistics have been systematically collected—is of course a reason for great concern,” said Filippo Grandi, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

“This is, by the way, approximately 1 percent of the world population,” he told a news briefing.

Some 73 percent of refugees seek asylum in a neighboring country, defying the populist notion that they flood to the West, Mr. Grandi said.

“This continues to be a global issue, an issue for all states but an issue that challenges most directly the poorer countries, not the rich countries—in spite of the rhetoric,” he said of the displacement.

The exodus includes 5 million Venezuelans who have fled their country’s economic and political crisis. Some 3.6 million of them were not counted in its previous statistics, but are now deemed in need of international protection, the U.N.H.C.R. said.

Most Venezuelans have gone to Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and Chile. An estimated 30,000 to 50,000 have returned to their homeland since April, Mr. Grandi said.

“In most of the countries Venezuelans live off of the informal economy and many even qualified people unfortunately have had to live a life of subsistence, basically, selling vegetables in markets, doing menial work, it’s been really very precarious,” he said. “And with lockdowns, a lot of these jobs have disappeared almost overnight.”

But restrictions imposed because of the pandemic have slowed displacement generally, Mr. Grandi said.

“For the time being, most likely it has actually put brakes on movements because of the difficulties in moving. There has been basically no international travel; there has been very little ability to cross borders,” he added.

Some 107,000 refugees were resettled in third countries last year, the U.N.H.C.R. said.

“This is a declining figure, unfortunately. The resettlement to the U.S., as you know, has declined dramatically. The biggest resettlement country today is Canada,” Mr. Grandi said.

Canada admitted 31,100 refugees for resettlement, the United States 27,500 and Australia 18,200, U.N.H.C.R. figures show.

Family Conversation Starter Handout

Some helpful supports for getting your child and family engaged and connected include:

- Discover what your child already knows. Use the summary information to connect to their prior knowledge. Ask what else your child wants to know and read or research together to learn more.
 - Be sure to investigate unfamiliar words to build vocabulary. Depending on the age of your child, he or she may need extra support to understand words with context and meaning. This is great practice to model in and out of school.
 - Take a moment to ensure your family knows where the crisis is happening. Using hard copy or digital maps to create a shared understanding of geography can help build context when discussing refugees and specific regions from around the world.
 - When discussing the topic, ask open ended questions that deepen the conversation. Be careful not to judge responses and be sure to listen thoughtfully.
 - Think together about your opinions, thoughts as a family, and worldview. Discuss next steps, which can be something done individually or something you do together as a family. See the 'Act' section of this activity for meaningful ways to take action.
-

Family Reflection Space