



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# TEACHING ABOUT REFUGEES

**AGES**  
**15-18**

**ACTIVITY**  
**GUIDE**

Find more materials at: [unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees](https://unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees)

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# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A note about inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in lesson-planning.



Before undertaking any activities on the topic of refugees, asylum, nationality and migrants please take some time to think about the students in your class. Are some of them refugees, in the process of seeking asylum, or are they stateless? If so, think about talking to them and their parents depending on their age.

If possible include ideas and feedback from parents and the children in sessions and refer to them to answer questions if and only if they have expressly explained that they are interested in answering questions or speaking about these issues.

Stateless persons do not have the nationality of any country. Statelessness can occur in many different situations. For example, certain ethnic or religious groups may be not recognized under national laws as citizens of that country, some children are born outside of the country

of their parents' citizenship and are not able to obtain citizenship from their parents' country or the one they were born in. A number of countries globally have laws which do not allow mothers to pass their nationality to their children.

Stateless persons may have difficulty accessing basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, freedom of movement and others. Without these things, they often face obstacles and disappointment.

Be careful while using words such as "country" and "nationality" if you have any stateless children in your class. Instead you may use the words "your home" or "your culture".

# TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Here are some activities that you can undertake with your classes to move their learning about refugees into taking action.

## LEARNING OUTCOME

# 1

**Understanding how information can be presented in different ways and how misleading and wrong information is sometimes used in the media. Fostering critical thinking.**

Fact, fiction and somewhere in between?

**Step 1:** Put the students in small groups. Choose a conflict that has produced refugees, asylum seekers or stateless persons featured in newspapers at the moment. Ask the students to work in groups and take one media source or political source of news and have them research the conflict from that perspective.

**Step 2:** The groups should put together a folder with ideas, facts, numbers of refugees and other pieces of information from the perspective of their chosen source.

**Step 3:** Organize a debate by allowing each group three minutes to present their understanding of the conflict and allocate additional time for each group to ask the other groups questions.

**Step 4:** After the session, ask each group to go back and find out as much as they can about how their source found its information.

**Step 5:** In the next session, bring the whole group into a further discussion about the validity of their sources. Each group can write a reflection of what they learned about fact-finding, reading articles and understanding the world from this exercise.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** – should include whether there are sources that are more trustworthy than others and why. A reference to UNHCR Data website [data2.unhcr.org/en/situations](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations) and other UNHCR statistics could be useful with the understanding that UNHCR monitors situations all over the world and is involved in the registering of refugees.

## LEARNING OUTCOME

## 2 | Empathizing with the situation of persons who are stateless.

Plan a field trip day where students are in small groups of three to six with one teacher or staff member, or whatever ratio is safe for your area.

**Step 1:** The groups with teacher or staff member are dropped in a part of the city without any money or travel tickets, bank cards or identification. The teacher or staff member will hold on to all all of these documents.

**Step 2:** The aim is that the students have to try and get themselves back to school without using any identification, travel cards or documents at all. They must stay in a group and keep the staff member with them at all times. They must talk with people around them, ensuring a staff member is always present, and explain that they need to get back to their school.

**Step 3:** Ask the students to write down the different methods they use to engage with people, find information out, try and find out where they are etc.

**Step 4:** When the students are back at school, start a discussion around the different stumbling blocks and the strategies they used to overcome them. The students could write a reflection, as a group or individually, on the experience and how it made them feel to not have identity documents or money necessary to get back to the school. The reflections should be the basis of a wider discussion about being stateless and having no proof of who you are.

**Step 5:** During the discussion the teacher could introduce the concept of a migrant who has no legal status in the country they are in. What might be the differences in experience between a stateless person and a migrant with no legal status in that country? Who could they turn to for help if they found themselves in trouble? Could they ask help from the police? What about the embassy of their country?

**Suggested closing statement for discussion and reflection papers** - *should include reference to the fact that some people are forced to live their whole lives without belonging because they are stateless. Some may also live without a legal status in the country they are born or live in for most of their lives. You could leave the students with a final provocation asking them what they could do to change the situation of a stateless person.*

## LEARNING OUTCOME

## 3

**Understanding the situation of new children seeking asylum in my country.**

Some reception centres or reception networks have opportunities to learn about asylum in the country.

**Step 1:** Check on-line or contact a network or particular reception centre and see what options they have for understanding the reception center system and asylum process.

**Step 2:** Some centres may send a communications officer to visit your class or school and in some countries there may be an option to engage in exchange with other young people, for example by sending letters or having an open football match or games-time.

**Step 3:** See what options there are in your area to learn on a more hand-on basis about the experiences of asylum-seeking children and students.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** - *“Thank you to whoever has participated in a visit or activity.”*

## LEARNING OUTCOME

## 4

**Empathize with the situation of newly arrived refugee children.**

Write letters to newly arrived refugee adolescents about what life is like at school in this location. Letters could be dropped at a reception centres and shared with young asylum-seekers.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** – *“Thank you for offering these letters for these students who have newly arrived in the country. It is important to think about the situation of others when we can.”*

## LEARNING OUTCOME

5

**Learning how to work together to create something participative. Understanding that everyone's contribution is important.**

Undertake a collaborative creative activity with the theme of refugees or statelessness and share it with the community, by inviting parents or doing a show for the school or other classes.

If there is an opportunity to team up and work with an organization that helps refugees or stateless people and even refugees and stateless people themselves, this would be an advantage.

Finally, if they are unavailable to join in on the creative process, inviting them to the final recital, show or fair and offering them an opportunity to speak could be informative for the students.

**Example 1:** Creating and holding an exhibition

**Example 2:** Dance recital or play

**Example 3:** Holding a poetry recital

**Example 4:** Writing a story book

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** – *“This has been a wonderful activity and everyone has contributed. It is a valuable way for us to learn how important everyone's contribution is.”*

## LEARNING OUTCOME

6

**Providing an opportunity for children and families to learn how to be together in a community.**

Hold a welcoming evening or monthly breakfast for new arrivals in the school at the beginning of the school year with games providing opportunities for the whole community to interact with each other.

Students can cook dishes from their country and make a presentation of how the school functions.

## 7

## LEARNING OUTCOME

**Understanding the economics of seeking asylum.**

**Step 1:** Ask the class to split into groups and research how much money asylum seekers may access while they are waiting for their process.

**Step 2:** Take a field trip to a local grocery store to see how they would spend the money. Remember that many refugees use their mobile phones to keep in touch with their family and to keep track of events. Money for phones should be accounted for in the budget.

**Step 3:** Think about what additional material or financial support would help a family with school-aged children and see if it is available. Are there allowances for winter clothes and are they adequate?

**Step 4:** After learning this, ask the students how they feel and whether they have any ideas about projects or activities to impact this situation, like fundraising, donating mobile phone vouchers, writing to politicians, or offering service or help to groups.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** - *“This has been a productive and helpful activity to understand how we are supporting families who are seeking to be refugees live in our country when they arrive.”*

## 8

## LEARNING OUTCOME

**Understanding how we as individuals can impact society and the lives of others.**

Source some articles for students and ask them to do some research with local media, local community groups, reception centres and organizations that help refugees and stateless people. Are there any areas where refugees or stateless people could be helped more in legislation or in practice?

If students are interested and passionate about an issue, see if they can write letters to a local or national politician to ask for more action on whatever activity they feel should be undertaken.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** – *should include an opportunity for students to think about other ways they could impact their society. It should also include a recognition of what it might be like to live in a society where one might not be able to undertake such actions or what it might be like if one is not recognized as a member of that society and does not have the rights to engage in these activities at all (as is often the case for stateless persons).*

## 9

## LEARNING OUTCOME

**Understanding the reality of life as a stateless person or as a migrant who may not have legal status in that country.**

**Step 1:** Students will split up into groups and make phone calls or find information online about how to gain a membership, open an account or to take part in a variety of activities at different facilities.

**Step 2:** You could think of getting children to contact a local library to get a membership card, to contact a bank to open an account, to get a membership of a local swimming pool or a sports centre, to contact a different school to see what they need to do to enrol, how to get care at a health clinic, how to book at a travel centre, how to participate in municipal elections and other ideas. The students could even take part in a brain-storming session of such facilities beforehand.

**Step 3:** The students will then need to list the documents that are needed to gain access to, obtain a membership of or take part in the various activities or facilities. They will look up whether stateless people, or migrants who may not have a legal status in the country, would be able to do this.

Some questions to make children understand better may be:

**Q 1:** “Who would have a birth certificate?”

**Q 2:** “Who might have a passport?”

**Q 3:** “How could either of these documents help in accessing the services we are talking about?”

**Step 4:** Open a discussion and allow students to think of how they could potentially help stateless children or migrants without legal status gain access to these facilities.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion –** “*Not having the correct papers and being stateless is a complex situation that can affect many facets of one’s life, some of which we have talked about here.*”



## 10

## LEARNING OUTCOME

**Understanding the situation of refugees in my country.**

First check if there are any parents of children who are refugees in the class.

**Scenario 1:** If so, ask them if they would be willing to share their experiences of being a refugee or what their life was like back home.

**Scenario 2:** If not, contact a local community organization that helps refugees and ask if there is a refugee or staff member that would be able to visit the class.

Encourage the children to ask as many questions as they can.

Ask the students to ask about how they could help and then, as a class, design a project that incorporates the feedback from the refugees or from the community organization.

**Suggested closing statement for discussion** – *should include an opportunity for students to think about other ways they could impact their society. It should also include a recognition of what it might be like to live in a society where one might not be able to undertake such actions or what it might be like if one is not recognized as a member of that society and does not have the rights to engage in these activities at all (as is often the case for stateless persons).*

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