

## STAND AS ONE WITH REFUGEES - TOPIC GUIDE

# FAMILIES TOGETHER

### The Impact of War in Ukraine

In February 2022 the war in Ukraine suddenly created Europe's largest movement of refugees since World War 2. At the beginning of the war the UNHCR estimated that 4 million Ukrainians would flee the country. But by 10 April 2022 a total of [4,547,735 refugees](#), mainly women and children, had already sought safety in neighbouring countries. The numbers of refugees entering the EU in the first 12 days of the war exceeded the total numbers who arrived in Europe during all of 2015-2016, a period which saw a large spike in the numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. While fighting continues in Ukraine the numbers of people both displaced inside the country and seeking safety in nearby countries appears set to only increase, although the daily numbers crossing Ukraine's borders in late March and early April 2022 began to [decrease](#). However, there is no evidence yet that this is a longer-term trend. New outbreaks of fighting may trigger new population displacements at any time.



Refugees at the Ukraine/Poland border  
Photo: Bekki Frost/Oxfam, March 2022

The response of European governments and publics has been generous. The European Union promptly activated the previously unused [Temporary Protection Directive](#) which permits Ukrainian citizens to live, work and access social services in the EU for up to three years without a visa. However, this does not apply to non-Ukrainians fleeing Ukraine and people fleeing to Europe from other conflicts around the world. Reports that people of colour (primarily African and Asian students studying at Ukrainian universities) faced [life-threatening racism](#) at Ukraine's borders highlight that a new and informal [two track refugee system](#) may be opening in Europe.

At first the UK appeared slow off the mark by insisting that Ukrainians wishing to enter the UK should obtain a visa from an embassy. However, the Government soon announced two new initiatives. The first is the [Ukraine Family Scheme](#) whereby Ukrainians already resident in the UK may sponsor a wide range of immediate and extended family members to join them. The second is [Homes For Ukraine](#) where individuals and organisations may sponsor named Ukrainians without family links in the UK to live in their accommodation. Ukrainians entering the UK under these programmes must first obtain a visa and are permitted to work and access benefits and public services for three years. Within hours, almost [89,000 people signed up](#) to host Ukrainians in their homes and the [DEC appeal](#) to provide humanitarian support for Ukraine raised £300 million inside seven weeks. This is an unprecedented public response to a refugee emergency. The UK Government estimates [200,000 Ukrainians](#) may come to the UK and [100,000 Ukrainian children](#) may enrol in UK schools. The online Oak National Academy has been asked to translate all its 10,000 online school lessons into Ukrainian. However the UK's initiatives have been criticised for being slow and [difficult for refugees to access](#), and it remains to be seen how many Ukrainian refugees navigate the visa system and seek safety in the UK.

As in Europe, the numbers of Ukrainians expected to arrive in the UK greatly exceeds the numbers of people fleeing other conflicts who have applied for asylum. This number stood at 26,903 UK asylum seekers for the year up to March 2021. And as in Europe, the UK's response to Ukrainians appears generous alongside the 'hostile environment' for those fleeing conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. [The Nationality and Borders Bill](#), which is expected to complete its passage through Parliament during 2022, further restricts the right to claim asylum in the UK and undermines the 1951 Refugees Convention to which the UK is a signatory. The Bill exempts Ukrainian citizens who obtain visas.

The welcome given to Ukrainian refugees by ordinary people is evidence that the UK is an open, compassionate and generous society. However, many thousands of people fleeing other conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and further afield are still locked in a hostile asylum system and separated from all but their closest family members. This campaign calls for the Government to treat all refugees fleeing conflict and arriving in the UK with equal compassion, kindness and generosity. Refugees have a right to family life wherever they come from.

## **The Global Refugee Crisis**

The movement of refugees fleeing Ukraine is one part of a much greater global crisis. By the end of 2020, [82.4 million people](#) across the world had been forced to leave their homes because of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. The world's forcibly displaced population has never been larger. Adding the total number of people [displaced inside Ukraine](#) and who have crossed Ukraine's borders seeking safety will push this number to over 90 million people. This represents a global human catastrophe on a scale not seen before.

However, even including people fleeing Ukraine, only a minority of refugees arrive in Western Europe or North America. The great majority of refugees worldwide flee to lower and middle income countries which are closest to their countries of origin. The number of new refugees fleeing to Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea has significantly declined since 2015. Just under [60,000 refugees](#) made the dangerous journey between January and August 2021. But across all of Europe many hundreds of thousands of refugees are now stranded and in limbo, living in unacceptable conditions in different European countries with their families separated and futures, resettlement plans and legal status unclear.

Wherever they are from, being forced to flee tears families apart and makes family reunion an urgent humanitarian priority. In 2020 [children made up 42%](#) of the world's displaced people but only 30% of the world's population and [69,010 children](#) made new asylum claims in Europe during the first six months of 2020 alone. All children have their right to family life guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, yet this is far from being universally respected. The UK's Ukraine Family Scheme could form a successful template for family reunion for all people fleeing conflict and seeking safety in the UK. It applies to family members such as [grandparent-in-law, fiancé or proposed civil partner and children over 18](#). For refugees settling in the UK through the asylum process, the only family members who may be sponsored for settlement are husband, wife or civil law partner and children under 18. Unaccompanied child refugees may not sponsor their parents to join them and instead are placed in care.

The number of people claiming asylum in the UK is low compared with other countries and is declining. The [UK had 26,903 asylum claims](#) in the year up to March 2021 compared with just over [76,000 in Germany](#), a number which is also declining. Around two thirds of the people claiming asylum in the UK will finally be granted refugee status. The arrival of large numbers of Ukrainian citizens fleeing war and granted visas only emphasises the UK's broader humanitarian responsibilities towards people fleeing other conflicts around the world.

During 2021 it is estimated that more than [23,000 people](#) made the dangerous journey to the UK across the English Channel in small boats following more than [8,000](#) arriving by this route during 2020. The increasing use made of the highly dangerous English Channel sea route is a direct consequence of other routes, for example the Channel Tunnel, being made much more difficult to access and the legal requirement for asylum to be claimed on UK soil. The absence of safe routes to the UK forces refugees to make even more highly dangerous journeys. However, the overall number of people claiming asylum in the UK is decreasing. What is changing is how people wishing to claim asylum travel to the UK.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 led to [new resettlement programmes and movements of refugees by air, land and sea](#). However, the numbers resettled in the UK remains relatively low with 17,000 former Afghan interpreters and other eligible staff evacuated by air between 1 April and 1 September 2021. Most Afghan refugees have remained in the region, with 2.2 million in Pakistan and Iran alone. Many who served the UK Government and are eligible for resettlement have been unable to flee Afghanistan or have fled within the region. Some may attempt to reach the UK overland.



Conditions at the overcrowded and in sanitary Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece. In September 2020 the camp was destroyed by fire, leaving almost 13,000 residents without shelter.

*Photo: Giorgos Moutafis/Oxfam, November 2018*

## The UK

The UK sees a relatively small number of asylum applications compared with other European countries and countries in the Global South. In 2021 Britain hosted fewer than 1% of the world's refugees – a figure which was declining and was dwarfed by the numbers of refugees hosted in developing countries such as Uganda and Lebanon.

However, despite being a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the UK government places severe restrictions upon people who wish to claim asylum other than the small numbers admitted under UN resettlement schemes. These restrictions are challenged by a vibrant grassroots campaign movement. This movement and the issues it prioritises are summarised below.

**People may only claim asylum once on British soil:** This forces people, including children, seeking asylum to undertake dangerous journeys to reach the UK, eg: hidden on lorries or on small boats crossing the English Channel. See <https://www.safeassage.org.uk/>

**People who claim asylum in the UK are prohibited from working while their claims are processed.** This takes many months or even longer. People seeking asylum are required to live in allocated accommodation and are given a weekly asylum support grant of £40.85 per week to cover all their expenses other than shelter, a totally inadequate sum for dignified life. See <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/lift-the-ban/>

**People in the asylum system may be arbitrarily detained in 'prison-like' conditions without a trial or time limit for their release.** See <https://detention.org.uk/>

**People finally granted refugee status to settle in the UK are limited in their right to sponsor family members to join them.** For example, unaccompanied children may not be reunited with their parents. This is one factor which forces families to make the dangerous Channel crossing together. See <https://famiestogether.uk/>

**PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON  
DO WHAT'S RIGHT**

**UK law is keeping vulnerable child refugees away from their parents.  
You have the power to change this. Fix the rules and bring families together.**

Petition signed by Adrian Lester Adwoa Aboah Alan Cumming Alex Lawther Anish Kapoor Anita Asante  
Anita Rani Anoushka Shankar Asma Khan Axel Scheffler Catherine Johnson Chiwetel Ejiofor Chris Riddell  
Chris Martin - Coldplay Colin Firth David Morrissey Deborah Frances-White Douglas Booth Emma Freud  
Emma Mackey Emma Thompson Gary Lineker Gugu Mbatha Raw Guy Berryman - Coldplay Gwendoline Christie  
Hassan Akkad Helen Mirren Jason Isaacs Jaz O'Hara Jessie Ware JJ Bola Joanna Lumley Jonny Buckland - Coldplay  
Jordan Stephens Julia Donaldson Juliet Stevenson Kaiser Chiefs Kate Moss Kwame Kwei-Armah Livia Firth Lolita  
Chakrabarti Maggie O'Farrell Martin Bell Maya Ghazal Michaela Coel Nazanin Boniadi Neil Gaiman Nish Kumar  
Nitin Sawhney Olivia Colman Sir Patrick Stewart Phil Harvey – Coldplay Sir Philip Pullman Ramla Ali Rebecca Front  
Richard Curtis Riz Ahmed Rufus Hound Rufus Jones Sita Brahmachari Stephen Daldry Stephen Fry Susie Dent  
Tanya Burr Theo James Tracey Seaward Vanessa Redgrave Vick Hope Will Champion – Coldplay William Sutcliffe

**FAMILIES  
TOGETHER**

In September 2020 prominent celebrities from the arts, media and sport wrote to the UK Prime Minister asking him to change the rules and reunite refugee families.

## Campaigning for refugee rights

Campaigning for refugee rights is fast moving and covers multiple overlapping issues. There are many campaign groups and service providers grouped together in several broad coalitions. These are summarised above, and at the end of this document.

Campaign demands are frequently reactive, depending on the circumstances at any particular time, the legislative context and the prevailing government policy. For example, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan during August 2021, the war in Ukraine which began in February 2022 and the plan announced by the UK Government to 'offshore' asylum seekers in Rwanda in April 2022 are already re-shaping refugee rights campaigning in the UK.

For reasons of simplicity this resource concentrates on the **Families Together** campaign. The campaign focuses on changing the rules which govern the rights of settled refugees, who have the right to live and work in the UK, to be reunited with family members. The Coronavirus pandemic has made us all value family more than ever before, and everyone has experienced the pain and uncertainty of being separated from loved ones. Therefore, the campaign is relevant to all and easily understood.

However young people may wish to research and participate in the other campaigns or devise their own.

## Schools campaigning during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unique restrictions on the everyday life of schools and the campaign activities young people undertake. We believe that campaigning and civic engagement during the pandemic are good for young people's (and adults') wellbeing and sense of empowerment. However, although the Covid-19 restrictions are coming to an end, campaigning should always be **safe** and **carried out according to the COVID-19 regulations and advice in place at the time**. Therefore,

- The materials in this pack are suitable for classroom use, blended learning or home learning with minimal adaptation depending on the circumstances.
- The activities may be completed face-to-face in school or online and returned to school
- We encourage young people to meet their MPs as these meetings are an important element of civic education and youth empowerment. However face-to-face meetings with MPs and public visits to Parliament were **restricted** while COVID-19 regulations were in place. These are being relaxed now. However, as an alternative, we also suggest writing to MPs and, where possible, arranging online meetings.

## Using the resources with refugee students

These resources may be upsetting and distressing for refugee students and others personally affected by the issues raised. Therefore, please consider carefully in advance how you share them with your students.

## The Families Together Campaign.

The [Ukraine Family Scheme](#) permits Ukrainians already resident in the UK to sponsor a comprehensive list of immediate and extended family members fleeing the conflict to join them in the UK. However, the same rules do not apply to refugees who have fled other conflicts around the world, for whom rights to sponsor family members to come to the UK are much more restricted. Refugees have a right to family life wherever they come from.

Therefore, the **Families Together** campaign makes three simple demands

1. Child refugees in the UK must have the right to sponsor their close family to join them in the UK.
2. The definition of who qualifies as 'family' is expanded so that young people who have turned 18 and elderly parents can live in safety with their families.
3. Legal aid is reintroduced for refugees, so they have the support they need to navigate the complicated process of applying for family reunion.

The **action guide** for this resource provides three actions for young people and schools to organise their own Families Together MP message campaign.

Step 1. Learn and be well informed about Families Together

Step 2. Collect Families Together messages from your school to hand in to your MP

Step 3. Send the completed messages to your MP and ask for their support.

There is a postcard template for writing messages. Alternatively, you may use any convenient format.

Ideally, we hope young people will meet their MP face-to-face. However, this has been difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, young people should write to their MPs and/or may arrange to meet on a virtual platform. Many MPs have been holding their Friday constituency surgery meetings online. Some are returning to face-to-face meetings while others continue to meet constituents virtually. Visit your MP's website for more information.

The postcard template asks young people to write their first name and the name of their school. As messages will be sent to MPs, please check this is consistent with your school's safeguarding and data policies and amend the action accordingly if required.

It is important to reach out to their MPs with their messages or post them with a covering letter. **MP letter templates** are included with this resource as guidelines to invite your MP to meet (online or offline) and request follow up action.

## The Families Together Coalition

Oxfam is part of Families Together, a coalition of organisations campaigning together for refugee family reunification. See <http://famielsttogether.uk> for more information. Coalition members with national school's programmes include Amnesty International, the British Red Cross and the Refugee Council. However, there are many other organisations with local and regional programmes. Where possible, make your campaigning even more powerful by joining together with partner organisations.

### Members of the Families Together Coalition:

Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA), All African Women's Group, Amnesty International UK, Asylum Welcome, Asylum Matters, Asylum Welcome, Bath Welcomes Refugees, BOAZ Trust, Breaking Barriers, British Future, British Red Cross, CARAS (Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers), Care4Calais, CARE International UK, CARITAS, CFAB, City of Sanctuary, Compass Collective, CSWC, DEWA, Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT UK), VOICES Network, Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, GARAS, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU), Happy Baby Community, Sheffield Hallam University, Help Refugees, Helen Bamber Foundation, HOST Nottingham, Hummingbird Refugee Project, Ice & Fire, ILAYS, IMIX, Islamic Relief, Islington Centre for Refugees & Migrants, JCORE, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE), Jubilee+, KRAN, Law Centres Network, Children & Families Network, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (LRMN), Migrants Resource Centre, Music Broth, Notre Dame Refugee Centre, North East Law Centre, Nottingham and Notts Refugee Forum, One Parent Families Scotland, Oxfam, PAFRAS, Paiwand, Paper Boat Movement, Persona Doll Training, Play for Progress, PRAXIS Community Projects, Rainbow Migration, RefuAid, Refugee Action, Refugee Council, Refugee Rights Europe, RESET, RLAP, Refugee Legal Support, Rural Refugee Network, Safe Passage, Saheliya, Scottish Refugee Council, Separated Child, Social Workers Without Borders, Solidarity with Refugees, SOS Children's Villages, Springboard Youth Academy, STAR (Student Action for Refugees), Home Is Where You Feel You Belong, SYRCOX, Syrian Sisters, SYMAAG, The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, The Children's Society, The Network for Tackling Social Exclusion in Libraries, Museums, Archives & Galleries, The Worldwide Tribe, Three Peas, TCC, UK Welcomes Refugees, UNHCR, UNICEF, Rhwydwath Lleisiau, The Voices Network, Welcome Presents, Welsh Refugee Council, Woodcraft Folk, Women Seeking Asylum Together, Young Roots, Universities of Sanctuary, Uprising, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street

This resource focuses on the **Families Together** campaign as we believe the right to family life is easily relatable and relevant for young people. However young people could explore and participate in the parallel campaigns listed below.

In particular the **Together With Refugees** 'orange heart' schools campaign and becoming a **School of Sanctuary** are alternative and complementary activities to Families Together. **Refugee Week 2022** is takes place on 20-26 June and schools are encouraged to hold events. Click on the link for more information,

## **MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

### **Refugee campaign organisations and coalitions**

Families Together: <https://famielstogether.uk/>

Together With Refugees: <https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/>

Lift The Ban: <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/lift-the-ban/>

These Walls Must Fall: <https://detention.org.uk/>

Safe Passage: <https://www.safepassage.org.uk/>

Europe Must Act/Cities Must Act: <https://www.europemustact.org/>

City of Sanctuary (Schools of Sanctuary): <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/resources>

The Refugee Council: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Refugee Week: <https://refugeeweek.org.uk/theme-of-refugee-week-2022-healing/>

### **Information about refugees**

Data about refugees quickly goes out of date. The following sources help teachers to access the latest available data. The UNHCR's 'Global Trends' report is published in June every year and summarises global data for the previous year. Oxfam's 'Stand with Refugees' resource contains a range of teaching ideas and the 'Teaching Controversial Issues' guide suggests how challenging topics can be approached sensitively and thoughtfully in the classroom.

UNHCR (2021) – 'Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2020'  
<https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends-2020>

UNICEF (2021) – 'Latest statistics and graphics on refugee and migrant children' (for January – June 2020 and updated regularly)  
<https://uni.cf/2YQuYi7>

UNHCR (2021) – 'Figures at a Glance' (for June 2021 and updated regularly)  
<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>

UNICEF (2016) – 'Uprooted. The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children'  
<http://uni.cf/2viuTqb>

Refugee Council (2021) – 'Refugee and Asylum Facts' (UK) (for the year March 2020 – March 2021)  
<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/>

Oxfam Education (2018) – ‘Stand with Refugees. Creative Teaching Ideas for 7-14 year olds’  
<https://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/stand-with-refugees>

Oxfam Education (2018) – ‘Teaching Controversial Issues. A Guide for Teachers’  
<https://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/teaching-controversial-issues>

### **Information about Ukrainian refugees**

Reliefweb (2022) – ‘The Ukraine Crisis Double Standards: Has Europe’s Response to Refugees Changed?’  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-crisis-double-standards-has-europe-s-response-refugees-changed>

UNHCR (2022) – ‘Operational Data Portal. Ukraine Refugee Situation’. This site is updated regularly.  
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

Freemovement (2022) – ‘Can Ukrainians take refuge in the UK? The Ukraine Family Scheme and other routes’  
<https://freemovement.org.uk/can-ukrainians-take-refuge-in-the-uk-immigration-concessions-and-asylum-policy>

#### **Terms of use**

Copyright © Oxfam GB

You may use these photographs and associated information for the educational purposes at your educational institution. With each use, you must credit the photographer named for that image and Oxfam. You may not use images and associated information for commercial purposes or outside your educational institution. All information associated with these images relates to the date and time that project work took place.