

FAMILIES TOGETHER

Oxfam Teacher's Guide



September 2023

Introduction

UK refugee law and government policy are contested, controversial and fast moving. For example, implementing the **Illegal Migration Act 2023** is uncertain while government policies are challenged in Court and by citizen action. Some elements of the Act may even be practically impossible to carry out.

This resource is therefore *not* designed to provide a comprehensive or detailed review of UK asylum and refugee law and how it is implemented. Instead it asks young people to participate in the **Families Together** campaign. This calls for an expansion in the rights of people already granted legal refugee status to have their family members join them in the UK.

The learning and social action which follow ask young people to thoughtfully implement the culture of **Welcome** and **Inclusion** at the heart of **Schools of Sanctuary** and become young advocates for the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC). Work on this project may be submitted for the Learn, Embed or Share criteria of the Schools of Sanctuary award.

Definitions

Person Seeking Asylum

A person seeking asylum (frequently referred to as an 'asylum seeker' in the media) is a person who has fled their own country to seek protection from the risk of persecution. However they haven't yet been legally recognized as a refugee in their host country and are waiting to receive a decision on their claim. Seeking asylum is a universal human right and is usually done at a border.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of persecution. Their claim to be legally recognised as a refugee by their host country has been legally recognised and they are granted similar rights to work and study as citizens of their host country. Refugees have a right to international protection.

Adapted from [Amnesty International](#)

A New Context - War in Ukraine

In February 2022 the escalation of the war in Ukraine suddenly created Europe's largest movement of refugees since World War 2. In February 2022 the UNHCR estimated that 4 million Ukrainians would flee the country. However, by August 2023 a total of 6,203,300 people out of a population of 43.79 million had fled Ukraine. The majority were women and children. The numbers of Ukrainian refugees entering the EU in the first 12 days of the war exceeded the total numbers from all countries who arrived throughout 2015-2016, a period which saw a large increase in the numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

The response of European countries to this sudden crisis was generous. The UK established the **Ukraine Family Scheme** and **Homes for Ukraine**. Ukrainian refugees and their families were granted the right to live, work and study in the UK and to access public funds. As of May 2023, 174,000 people had entered the UK under the schemes, approximately 4% of the total number of refugees fleeing Ukraine. 72% of adult Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK were women and 29% of the total were children. This is slightly fewer than the Government's estimates of 200,000 Ukrainian refugees arriving and 100,000 Ukrainian children enrolling in UK schools made as the conflict escalated in February 2022.



Refugees from Ukraine at the Polish border - 11 March 2022
Photo: Bekki Frost/Oxfam

The welcome extended to Ukrainian refugees, and to [British National \(Overseas\)](#) visa applicants from Hong Kong, is evidence that Britain can be an open, compassionate and generous society. However many thousands of people fleeing other countries from Syria to Afghanistan and Iraq to Eritrea are locked in an increasingly hostile asylum system and separated from all but their closest family members. The Families Together campaign calls for all settled refugees, regardless of where they are from, to be treated with equal compassion, kindness and generosity. All refugees have a right to family life wherever they are from.

Refugees - the Global Picture

According to UNHCR, 'at the end of 2022, 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order.'

This number has been steadily increasing over recent years. Now more than 1 in 74 people on earth have been forced to flee their homes. 35.3 million of these people have crossed a frontier to claim asylum. However, most people who are forced to flee never cross an international border, and remain displaced within their own countries. They are known as internally displaced people, or IDPs. An emerging feature in the global statistics is the increasing number of people displaced because of disasters, including disasters linked to the climate crisis. These are in addition to those forced to flee because of persecution, conflict and violence.

Low- and middle-income countries host 76% of the world's refugees with 70% of refugees hosted by a neighbouring country. The five countries in the world hosting the largest numbers of refugees are Türkiye, Iran, Colombia, Germany and Pakistan. The Caribbean island of Aruba has the largest density of refugees in its population, with almost one in five residents a refugee.

At the end of November 2022 there were 231,597 refugees settled in the UK and 127,421 people seeking asylum waiting to hear whether their claims were successful. Despite statements by some politicians and media, these numbers (a total of 359,018 people) are modest on a global scale. For example Türkiye hosts 3,568,300 refugees, Colombia hosts 2,455,500, Uganda hosts 1,463,500 and Poland hosts 971,100. Contrary to belief, the UK is not a primary destination for the world's refugees. (Statistics are from the UNHCR Global Trends Report 2022)



Flooding at Cox's Bazaar Refugee Camp in Bangladesh, July 2021
This is the largest single refugee camp in the world, and in March 2023 was home to 639,692 Rohingya refugees from neighbouring Myanmar.
Photo: Shaikh Ashraf Ali/Oxfam.

The lesson of recent years is that the world is an increasingly volatile and unpredictable place. Few people would have foreseen a major war breaking out in Europe in 2022, people risking their lives to cross the English Channel crowded on unseaworthy rubber rafts or that almost one in five residents of the Caribbean holiday island of Aruba would be a refugee.

International refugee law is based on the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (see the definitions at the beginning of this guide). The Convention has its origins in the population movements following the end of World War Two and almost every country in the world is a signatory. However the interpretation and implementation of the Convention is uneven and inconsistent. For example, many people argue that refugees should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. However doing so in Europe would place exceptional strain on Greece, Italy and Spain; the first safe countries where many refugees arrive. But other ways of more equitably sharing the care of refugees between countries, and even between regions within countries, have yet to be fully agreed or implemented.

Young People and Campaigning for Refugee Rights

Campaigning for refugee rights in the UK is fast moving and covers multiple overlapping issues. There are a multitude of grassroots campaign organisations and service providers grouped together in several broad coalitions. These are listed at the end of this document.

Campaign asks are frequently reactive, and depend on circumstances at any particular time and the prevailing government policies. The impact of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan during August 2021, the war in Ukraine which escalated in February 2022, the plan announced by the UK Government in April 2022 to 'offshore' asylum seekers in Rwanda and the scheme to accommodate asylum seekers on the Bibby Stockholm barge in August 2023 have all shaped and triggered citizen campaigning.

Values-based social action

Much refugee campaigning is legalistic, focusing on changing the law or how the law is interpreted and applied. The **Families Together** campaign and the **Schools of Sanctuary** programme, in contrast, take a values-based approach. We believe many young people will strongly relate to this approach.

Families Together does seek a change in the rules. However this demand is rooted in family values and young people's experiences of family life.

The Coronavirus pandemic made everyone value their families more than ever before and we all experienced the pain caused by separation from loved ones. This pain of separation is an everyday reality for refugees, yet it can be removed by a change in the rules.



This young person's creative response to Oxfam's *Museum Without A Home* exhibition focuses on a refugee child's rights and wellbeing. Photo: Abingdon & Witney College

Schools of Sanctuary is a 'movement of welcome' bringing together over 400 UK schools to build a welcoming and inclusive culture for refugees, people seeking asylum and people of all backgrounds.

It is a portfolio-based award and the Families Together campaign may complement the **Learn**, **Embed** or **Share** criteria. However meeting the full award criteria is a comprehensive process rather than a single activity.

Schools working on inclusion, anti-racism and pupil wellbeing will find Schools of Sanctuary complements their work. Likewise it complements the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools award and learning about the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Using the resources with refugee children

These resources are intended to build a sense of solidarity among young people and develop their commitment towards universal human rights. However they may be upsetting and distressing for refugee children and others personally affected by the issues they raise. Therefore, please consider carefully in advance how you plan to work safely with your students.

Refugee Family Reunion

The UK Refugee Family Reunion rules permit adults granted 'refugee status' and 'refugee leave to remain' the right to sponsor their pre-flight partner, their children under 18, and, in exceptional circumstances, their dependent children over 18 to join them in the UK in safety.

Family Reunion provides a vital alternative to dangerous Channel crossings and accelerates refugees' integration in the UK. 90% of all those granted family reunion visas are women and children.

However separated refugee children who arrive in the UK are not eligible to sponsor any family members to join them, and are usually placed in local authority care.

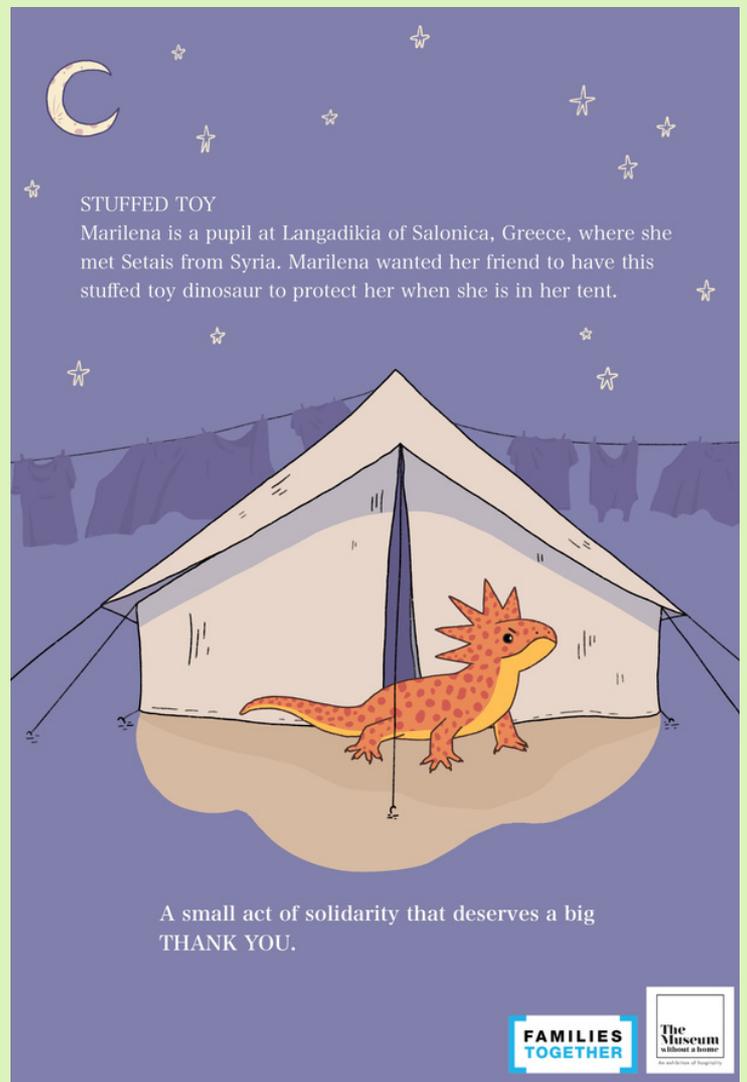
In September 2023, the Government passed the Illegal Migration Act, which means that in the future people who arrive in the UK may not be granted asylum here. This would mean that many people seeking asylum couldn't claim family reunion because they wouldn't be recognised as refugees.

The Families Together Campaign

<https://famielsttogether.uk/>

The Families Together Campaign has **four demands**.

- 1 Fair and equal treatment for all refugees no matter where they are from.
- 2 Expand the definition of family so that sick or elderly parents who are dependent on family in the UK can live here in safety with their families.
- 3 Reunite children with their parents. Child refugees in the UK have the right to sponsor their close family to join them.
- 4 Bring back legal aid so refugees have the support they need to navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.



Refugees protected by a friendly dinosaur.
A young person's creative response to the *Museum Without A Home* exhibition.
Photo: Abingdon and Witney College

Contents of this online resource

Learn.

PowerPoint presentation. The PowerPoint presentation explains the Families Together campaign with striking photographs and statistics from around the world. The text may be adapted for different audiences and presenters.

Learning workshop. The Learning Workshop explores the real life stories of four refugees and asks young people to critically examine whether they would be eligible for family reunion, and the resulting changes young people would like to see in the rules.

Think.

Action Guide. The Action Guide encourages young people to think critically about their learning and plan and carry out a Families Together campaign.

Act.

MP Postcards and Letters. The social action to support Families Together involves young people teaching others, collecting postcard messages at school and sending the postcards to their MP with a covering letter. Ideally young people will meet their MP. This social action may be included in the Schools of Sanctuary portfolio.



Meeting your school's MP and other elected representatives

Young people meeting their Member of Parliament and other elected representatives (MSPs, MSs, MLAs and Councillors) is an important part of citizenship and civic education.

Oxfam has a full guide to organising an MP or elected representative meeting [here](#). It's easier than you think!

You can learn more about your school's MP, MSP, MS, MLA or Member of the GLA and their work [here](#). Simply enter your school's postcode.

The UK Parliament Education service is [here](#).

The aim of the Families Together campaign is to call upon MPs to bring their influence to bear upon the Government to change the family reunion rules.

The best way of doing this is for the young people who meet the MP to do the following.

1. Be passionate, well informed and persuasive
2. Demonstrate, by collecting a large number of postcard messages, that they have the support of their school community. This is called a **mandate**.



Information and resources

Refugee campaign organisations and coalitions

The following are some of the coalitions and organisations campaigning for asylum and refugee rights. Some of their logos are included in the PowerPoint presentation and young people could research and support campaigns they are interested in. Although several campaigns are broad, others, like Families Together, focus on particular issues.

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

Schools of Sanctuary - <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/>

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

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

These Walls Must Fall - <https://wallsmustfall.org/>

Safe Passage - <https://www.safeassage.org.uk/>

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

STAR (university students) - <https://star-network.org.uk/>

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

Refugee Week (June) - <https://refugeeweek.org.uk/>

Information about refugees

Data about refugees quickly goes out of date and governments' policies change. The following sources help teachers to access the latest data. UNHCR's 'Global Trends' report (the first link in the list) is published in June every year and summarises global data for the previous calendar year. Oxfam's 'Stand With Refugees' (2018) resource contains a range of teaching ideas based on visual and data literacy, and the 'Teaching Controversial Issues' guide (2018) suggests how controversial issues may be approached sensitively and thoughtfully in the classroom.

UNHCR (2023) - [Global Trends](#)

UNHCR (2023) - [Asylum in the UK](#)

Refugee Council (2023) - [Refugee & Asylum Facts](#)

UNICEF (2023) - [Child Displacement](#)

Oxfam Education (2018) - [Stand With Refugees. Creative Teaching Ideas for 7-14 year olds](#)

Oxfam Education (2018) - [Teaching Controversial Issues. A Guide for Teachers](#)