

Stand as One

Introduction

The world is in the midst of a severe humanitarian crisis. By the end of 2017, 68.5 million people worldwide had been forced to leave their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. This was an increase of 2.9 million people over the previous year. In 2017, the world's forcibly displaced population remained once again at a record high.¹

The vast majority of refugees are hosted by developing countries. However, in 2015 one million refugees made the dangerous sea journeys from Turkey and North Africa to seek safety in Europe. The number of refugees fleeing to Europe has significantly declined recently. 42,213 refugees made the journey between January and July 2018 when it is feared that at least 1,237 men, women and children have drowned at sea.² However many hundreds of thousands of refugees are stranded, living in unacceptable conditions in different European countries with their futures and legal status unclear.

Being forced to flee tears families apart and makes family reunion an urgent humanitarian priority. In 2016 children made up over half of the world's refugees for the first time³ and 20,000 unaccompanied child refugees arrived in Europe during 2017⁴. All children have their right to family life guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and this should be respected.



Refugees are living in derelict warehouses behind the main railway station in Belgrade, Serbia. Lack of space in government accommodation facilities, coercion by smugglers and fear of deportation by authorities have pushed them to live in inhumane and degrading conditions.

Photo: Miodrag Ćakić/Info Park. February 2017

¹ UNHCR (2018) <http://bit.ly/2LuB5oK>

² UNHCR (2018) <http://bit.ly/2vFvjw>

³ UNICEF (2016) <http://uni.cf/2viuTqb>

⁴ UNICEF (2018) <https://uni.cf/2mNgJZn>

Families Together

In the year up to March 2018, there were over 1 million asylum applications in Europe. However, only 26,547 of these applications were made in the UK.⁵ Britain hosts less than 1% of the world's refugees – a figure which is declining and is dwarfed by the numbers of refugees hosted in significantly poorer countries such as Uganda and Lebanon.

People who are granted refugee status in Britain face severe restrictions on who they may sponsor to join them in the UK. For example, the UK is currently one of the very few European nations which prevents unaccompanied children who have found safety here from being joined by their closest relations from overseas.

The UK also forbids parents from being reunited in the UK with sons and daughters aged over 18 who were dependent on them before they were forced to flee. Neither may elderly people, siblings, in-laws and other dependant relatives join family members in the UK. The only family members eligible for resettlement in Britain are spouses and children under 18. Widening this narrow definition of family relationships and broadening the eligibility for family reunion would greatly reduce the trauma and hardship faced by refugees. It would help families rebuild their lives as part of the UK community.

The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill



The UK Parliament.

Photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Houses_of_Parliament.jpg

On Friday 16 March 2018, the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill⁶ passed its second reading in the House of Commons with 129 MPs voting in its support⁷. This bill gives refugees many of the rights to family reunion Oxfam and other charities are asking for.

The bill is a Private Members Bill⁸. This means it is sponsored by an individual MP (in this case Angus MacNeil of the Scottish National Party) and not the government. It is more difficult for a Private Members Bill to become law as the government and opposition do not 'whip' (or tell) their MPs to vote and support it. It's MPs' free choice whether to attend the debate and vote. Therefore, the Bill achieving its second reading with the support of 129 MPs was a major achievement for campaigners and MPs.

⁵ Refugee Council (2018) <http://bit.ly/2LuEzHQ>

⁶ UK Parliament - The Refugees (Family Reunion) (No 2) Bill 2017 – 2019 <http://bit.ly/2wxkm9u>

⁷ Hansard (2018) <http://bit.ly/2LU2aOz>

⁸ UK Parliament – Private Members' Bills (2017) <http://bit.ly/2hNvECU>

The next steps for the Bill to become law are the committee stage and then its final third reading. The earliest the Bill will reach the committee stage is October 2018 and it is unlikely this will occur until early 2019.

However, in the meantime, the Home Secretary Sajid Javid has the power to make the changes called for in the Bill without new legislation, and the new Immigration Bill proposed in the Queen's Speech could also be amended by MPs with clauses to support family reunion. The white paper for the Immigration Bill has been delayed several times and in July 2018 we were still waiting for it to be published.

Home Is...

The **Stand as One** campaign asks the public to write a 'Home is...' message to their MP to stand in solidarity with refugees. If enough MPs receive a loud and clear message from their constituents, including young people, we hope they will support family reunion by voting for the Family Reunion Bill, asking the Home Office to support family reunion and tabling amendments to the Immigration Bill.



Home Is... messages

Photo: Oxfam GB

The **action guide** for this resource provides tips for young people and schools to organise their own 'Home Is...' campaign. It is important that schools meet their MPs to hand in their messages or post them with a covering letter to their MP. An **MP letter template** is included with this resource as a guideline.

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

Good luck!

More information and resources

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. The 'Europe Situation' summary is updated regularly and the Refugee Council regularly updates UK data. Oxfam's 'Stand As One' resource contains a range of straightforward teaching ideas and the 'Teaching Controversial Issues' guide suggests how challenging topics can be approached sensitively and thoughtfully in the classroom.

UNHCR (2018) – 'Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2017'

<http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/5b27be547/unhcr-global-trends-2017.html>

UNHCR (2017) – 'Europe Situation'

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/561cc0696.html>

UNICEF (2016) – 'Uprooted. The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children'

<http://uni.cf/2viuTqb>

Refugee Council (2018) – 'Top 20 facts about refugees and asylum seekers'

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/20facts>

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>

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