

## UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency

### What is this lesson about?

Through the example of UNHCR, the students will learn how international cooperation and humanitarian work are paths to a more peaceful world.

### Learning Goals:

- Students will know and understand what a refugee is.
- Students will understand the history of UNHCR, the need for their existence and what they do.
- Students will reflect on why some people are forced to leave their home and the impact it has on individuals, communities, and countries.

### Materials

- Lesson Slides
- Student laptops or tablets (if applicable)
- Student worksheet (printout)

### Slides

- Slide 1: Title Slide
- Slide 2: Intro to UNHCR
- Slide 3: Intro to UNHCR
- Slide 3: What is a refugee video
- Slide 4: Moving map/noticing and wonderings
- Slide 5: Reflection

### Background Information:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a UN agency mandated to aid and protect all displaced people. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with over 17,300 staff working across 135 countries.

In the late 1940s, the UN agreed that a body was required to oversee global refugee issues. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was founded as a subsidiary organization of the General Assembly by Resolution 319 of the United Nations General Assembly of December 1949. The organization was only intended to operate for 3 years, starting in January 1951, due to the disagreement of many UN member states over the implications of a permanent body. UNHCR's mandate is to provide, on a non-political and humanitarian basis, international protection for refugees and to seek permanent solutions for them.

There are currently more than seventy million people displaced worldwide—the highest number on record since the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) began collecting statistics. At least fifteen conflicts

have erupted or reignited around the world since 2010, contributing to this crisis. Half of the world's refugees have come from only three war-torn countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. In Syria alone, where a brutal civil war has raged since 2011, over 5.5 million have sought to save themselves and their families by fleeing the country, while 6.6 million have been displaced within the country's borders. Millions of refugees are living, often in overcrowded camps, in Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Jordan, and Ethiopia. Millions of others have fled to Europe and other countries around the world.

Photos of the history of UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/history-of-unhcr.html>

### Key Facts:

- UNHCR is short for “United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”
- UNHCR is an international aid organization established by the UN
- The primary purpose of UNHCR is to help people that, for several reasons, have been forced to flee.
- Their headquarters is in Geneva in Switzerland.
- UNHCR was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War.
- After WW2 UNHCR helped millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.
- In 1955, UNHCR received The Nobel Peace Prize for their effort to heal the wounds of war by providing help and protection to refugees, mostly in Europe, but also the rest of the world.
- In the 1960s most of their work was done in Africa, after the decolonization which started numerous refugee crises in the continent.
- In the 1970s UNHCR made a significant effort to repatriate refugees in Asia, Africa, and Latin America
- In the 1980s the world's refugee problem was still greater than ever before, and still mostly in African countries.
- In 1981 UNHCR received a second Nobel Peace Prize for what had become worldwide assistance and for promoting fundamental rights for refugees (Refugee Conventions)
- UNHCR now has more than 17 500 personnel working in 135 countries
- In 2020 UNHCR had a 70th anniversary and in those years, they have helped over fifty million refugees all over the world.

### Key Vocabulary:

- **Refugee:** a person who has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.
- **International cooperation:** A universal mode of interaction between two or more countries based on sharing research results, production, commerce, protection of investments, and industrial knowledge.
- **Asylum-seeker:** a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another.
- **Internally displaced people:** someone who is forced to leave their home but who remains within their country's borders.
- **Stateless people:** someone who, under national laws, does not enjoy citizenship – the legal bond between a government and an individual – in any country.

## LESSON

**Time: 30 - 40 minutes**

### **Steps**

- **Warm-Up (5 min):**
  - Tap into students' prior knowledge by warming up the class with a few of the following questions (see answers in key facts section above). Record student answers and thoughts on the board or on chart paper:
    - What do you think international cooperation means?
    - What do you think of when I say the word "refugee"?
    - What are some reasons that refugees might flee?
    - What would it take for you to be willing to move from your home?
  
- **Introduction (10 min):**
  - Use the slides to introduce UNHCR to the students.
  - Watch [this short video](#) to explore what a refugee is. After watching the video, lead a quick discussion asking students the following questions:
    - Where do refugees come from?
    - Where do refugees go?
    - Why are refugees coming to our country?
    - Can refugees stay in our country?
    - Are there any refugees living in our community? Which countries do they come from?
  
- **[Data Analysis](#) (10 min):**
  - Display [this webpage](#) of data of global refugee trends for students to explore.
  - Either explore the page as a whole class or allow students to explore in pairs on a computer or tablet.
  - While students are exploring the webpage, have them record ideas in two categories: "I notice" and "I wonder"
  - Once students have sufficiently explored and recorded their thoughts, they come together and create a class chart of noticing and wonderings.

**Depending on time, student interest and desire, choose one of the following activities to explore:**

- **Letter Writing**

Write letters to newly arrived refugee adolescents about what life is like at school in their country. Letters could be mailed to reception centers and shared with young asylum-seekers.
  
- **Youth with Refugees Art Contest**

The [Youth with Refugees Art Contest](#), organized by UNHRC, encourages young people across the world to use their creativity to support people forced to flee. Check the link for annual theme and instructions on how to enter.
  
- **Reflection/Wrap Up (5 min):**

- Individually, have students brainstorm three ways they could help refugee youth in their country. To prompt student thinking, ask students to imagine they had to move to another country, ask them:
  - What sort of things could children in that country do to make them feel welcome?
  - What are some questions they might have?
  - What things do they think might feel confusing or different, how could children from the country help?
- Have students share their brainstorm to create a full class list of different ideas and strategies that could be used to help refugee youth thrive in their new home.