

# Resources to stimulate school student discussion on the “refugee crisis”

This document we hope offers some questions and ideas that might be useful in leading discussions in the classroom. It is not our intention to make you think a certain way but we would like to challenge assumptions and get you thinking – even if it is only to disagree. The text below comes from academics that worked on a project that looked at different ways of presenting and challenging the **‘Ethics and Politics of the Refugee Crisis’**. We ran an exhibition with the **Migration Museum**, a theatre project with **ActREAL** and recorded some of the activities with illustrations by **Laura Sorvala** (some are shown below). At the end of this document you will find links to further resources that came to us as a result of the project. If you find this useful or have other resources to add then please do get in touch – [communications@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:communications@compas.ox.ac.uk)

## How should we think about migration?

In 2015 our screens were filled with images of people on the move and seeking to enter Europe. Most of them were fleeing wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, others were from very poor countries in West and

East Africa, such as Niger, Eritrea and Sudan, where social unrest and poverty make life extremely difficult. European governments were not bystanders to the situations that had led to their mobility. They were implicated in the wars, trade relations, climate change, and resource depletion that made lives elsewhere unsustainable whilst making lives prosperous here. This was the motivation behind our project ‘The ethics and the politics of the refugee crisis’.

## Who is a migrant? What is a crisis? Who is a refugee?

What are we to call the events at the borders of Europe? A refugee crisis? A migrant crisis? Is the word ‘crisis’ appropriate for a phenomenon that promises to be well established and far from temporary? Words matter.

In August 2015 Al Jazeera asserted that ‘for reasons of accuracy’ it was no longer going to use the term ‘migrant’:

“Migrant” has become a degraded term ... It has evolved from its dictionary definition into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative. It is not hundreds of people who drown ... It is hundreds of migrants. It is not a person – like you, filled with thoughts and history and hopes – who is on the tracks delaying a train. It is a migrant. A nuisance.



It is a strong statement, but it captures the hostility of some of the ways in which migrants are referred to and Al Jazeera and others are now describing these arrivals as 'Refugees' to indicate that they merit help and protection. But it is important to remember that the term refugee is an international legal status, and to achieve that status the refugee is distinguished from the migrant.

## Should we have deportation?

There can be no refugees without migrants. There can be no deportation without asylum. If we are prepared to accept deportation and, if we are, under what circumstances, is a critical question. Calling people refugees is an understandable and perhaps correct response, but it does not solve the issue of hostility towards migrants. Are migrants all mobile people who live in another country than their birth for various reasons – economic, political, cultural, or health reasons? And what is the difference between a migrant and a refugee?

## Who is doing the counting?

Who counts as a migrant depends on who is doing the counting. In datasets migrants can be defined as foreign national, foreign born or by their movement into a new country to stay for a period of time. The second two of these, foreign birth and movement, can both be applied to people who have citizenship of the state where they are residing. None of these definitions

are equivalent, and the definition used has a significant impact on the data. This matters because numbers look objective, but the definition one selects to be informed by is not so objective.

## Does it all come down to politics?

What is invoked when we use the terms migrant and refugee is not a legal figure, nor a dataset, but a political figure. British people living abroad almost always think of themselves as 'expats' not 'migrants' at the same time as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people who have been born and lived all their lives in the UK can be called 'second generation migrants'. Who counts as a migrant is framed by assumptions about race, class and nationality. There are some groups of people, Muslims, the poor, people from the global south etc. whose mobility is regarded as inherently problematic. It is these people who are called 'migrants'.

## Is migration inevitable?

Mobility, particularly problematic mobility, is often the result of a multitude of other factors. In 2015, the vast majority of entrants to the EU were from the world's top ten refugee producing countries, and US and EU foreign policy is deeply implicated in the wars and instability that fuel population outflows from the top three countries of origin, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Nearly one half of applicants were from Syria, and over 2.5 million Syrians are living in Turkey. In 2015, as the situation in Syria became even more unstable, those living in Turkey with precarious status and limited access to education and employment began to look towards building a future rather than tolerating a present. This mobility cannot be seen in isolation from European and North American foreign policy decisions. For over twenty years the outsourcing of migration controls, agreements with source and transit countries, readmission agreements, the creation of migration management policies and facilities in countries of origin and so on have kept the consequences of war and global inequalities largely out of sight. As one 'migrant' put it: 'We are a disturbance ... because we show you in a terrible way how fragile the world we live in is.'

This was put thus by then UK Foreign Secretary, Phil Hammond talking about the situation in Calais:

The gap in standards of living between Europe and Africa means there will always be millions of Africans with the economic motivation to try to get to Europe ... So long as there are large numbers

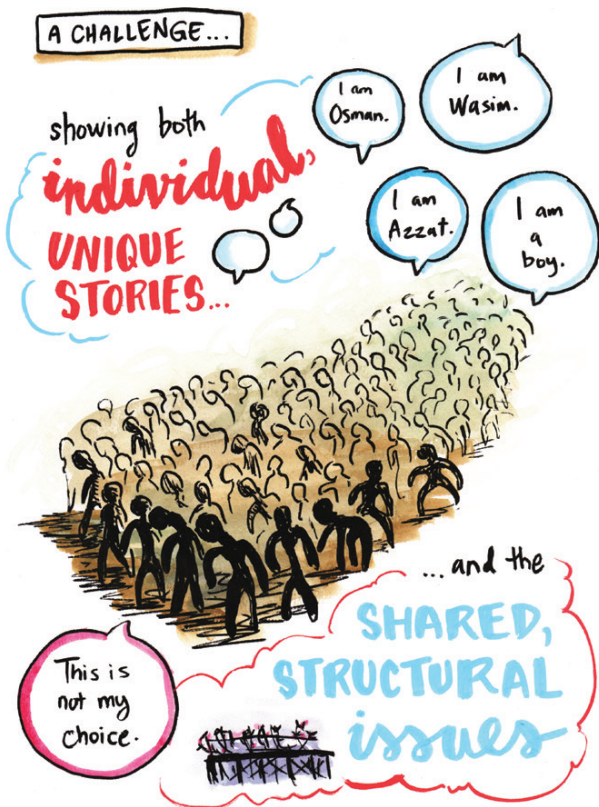




of pretty desperate migrants marauding around the area, there always will be a threat to the tunnel security. We've got to resolve this problem ultimately by being able to return those who are not entitled to claim asylum back to their countries of origin ... Europe can't protect itself, preserve its standard of living and social infrastructure if it has to absorb millions of migrants from Africa.

## Have 'we' actually caused migration?

'Marauding' might be a better description of European racism, slavery and imperialism in Africa, and Asia. This marauding offered benefits, not only



to the wealthy capitalists and the middle classes, but also to European citizens more generally. Our welfare states are emblematic of European values. Politicians who may in other contexts not be that keen on provisioning welfare states, invoke them as a critical national resource that needs to be protected from the depredations of migrants. However, welfare states were not and are not funded simply from the contributions of citizen tax payers. In the UK the welfare state, and particularly the National Health Service, is practically synonymous with Britain. Arguably, a defining characteristic of Britishness that unites left and right, would be support for the NHS.. Richard Drayton, Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at Kings College London writes:

When in about 1950 British democracy created a welfare state at home, it ... depended on invisible donations from tea-pickers in Ceylon, rubber-tappers in Malaya, goldminers in South Africa, copper-miners in Rhodesia, the oil of Iraq and especially Iran.

The reliance of the national welfare state on the profit derived from workers abroad adds a new dimension to the current concerns about the consequences of Brexit for the National Health Service and suggests we must think twice before complaining about non-citizens taking advantage of the National Health Service.

## Are 'we' still implicated?

The standards of living that Hammond wants to protect continue to be dependent on the resource exploitation and cheap labour that marks so many areas of the world. There has in recent years been a massive shift in production from North to South. Developing countries' share of global manufactured exports was around 5% in the 1950s. It rose to 30% by the year 2000, and is currently some 60%. The proportion of the industrial workforce living in less developed regions was 79% in 2010, up from 34% in 1950 (Smith 2016). Goods are affordable for impoverished workers (and non-workers) in the Global North because of a system of resource extraction, outsourcing and arm's length super exploitation in the Global South. States alleged concerns to protect

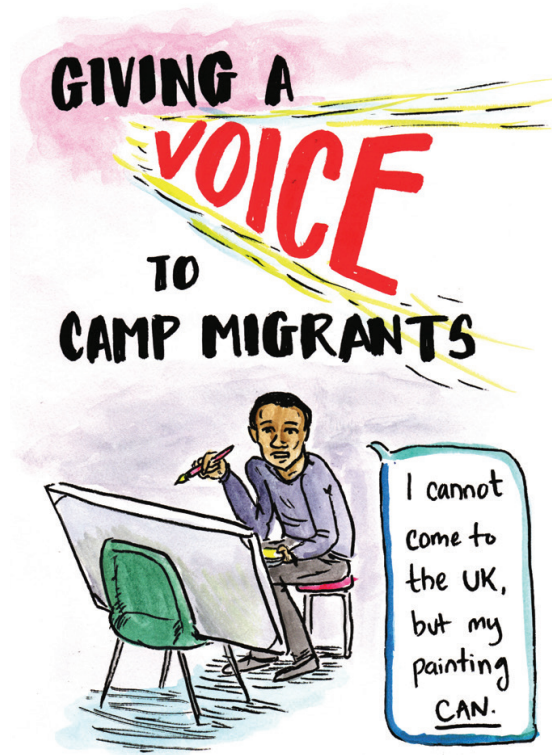


low waged labour markets for its workers are not matched by support for efforts to promote an equal international playing field for all workers, to prevent undercutting via outsourcing.

We are living at a time of the highest level of global inequality in human history, when 67 people are as wealthy as the world's 3.5 billion poorest people. The poorest 50% of the world have 6.6% of total global income. The World Bank estimates that three quarters of inequality can be attributed to between country differences.

We can quibble about the methodology of these estimates, but we cannot deny that the world has changed from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when what was critical to your life experience was if you were a master or a servant. Today for most people in the world, what is key to your life chances is where you live. The fear for those living in wealthier states is that there are a lot people who are hard up in the world, and that if you don't have much you need to hold on to it.

Thus debates about migration are caught up in anxieties about safety nets and austerity, as the migrant is set up as a competitor with the citizen for privileges of membership, whether these are for jobs, housing or health care. 'Old' immigrants complain about new arrivals spoiling it for them while different



nationalities vie for their competitive advantage: Syrians complaining about Afghans, or Filipinas complaining about Indians or Polish complaining about Black bosses (Clark and Anderson). Of course, there is also solidarity, and hospitality, but the residue of hostility can be mobilised for political purposes.

Is migration just a small part of our global connectedness?

'Migration' is only one of multiple illustrations of global inter-dependence. Anti-migrant politics disavow our global responsibilities, seeing only foreigners in search of the

good life and jobs, but more particularly seeing too many people chasing too few resources. There are too many migrants either they are employed, in which case they are 'taking jobs', or they are unemployed, in which case they are 'taking benefits'. 'They' may place demands on infrastructure, social security and health systems. The assumption is that, were it not for migration/asylum, societies and labour markets would remain the same, or subject to only very slow demographic shifts. That is, migration impacts on otherwise stable systems. However, economies and societies are always changing and the obsession with immigration has overshadowed the structural reasons for inequality and lack of social protection.

Here are some further discussion points, different representations and additional resources that were developed throughout our project:

### ART AND IMAGES

How can you present an exhibition on the current migration crisis without being voyeuristic, sensationalising the experience or using it to make fairly easy political points?

How do you avoid exploiting the vulnerable in representations of this issue?

Why are refugees so often nameless and faceless?

Resources produced in connection to this project:

- ♦ Laura Sorvala artworks from the exhibitions and learning lab discussions – [www.auralab.co.uk](http://www.auralab.co.uk)
- ♦ Migration Museum teaching resources pack that was used to introduce school children to the exhibition and its themes – [www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/the-ethics-and-politics-of-the-refugee-crisis](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/the-ethics-and-politics-of-the-refugee-crisis) (click on the 'outputs' tab)
- ♦ Ethics and Politics Thoughts and Reflections booklet on 'Call me by my name: stories from Calais and beyond' [www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/the-ethics-and-politics-of-the-refugee-crisis](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/the-ethics-and-politics-of-the-refugee-crisis) (click on the 'outputs' tab)

### STORIES

How far do these individual stories reflect what you understood to be happening?

Can you empathise with the stories? If so why?

How do you listen to multiple viewpoints and experiences?

Resources:

- ♦ Performance of students at City and Islington College produced by ActREAL as part of this project – [youtu.be/EOjEBpqcxCs](https://youtu.be/EOjEBpqcxCs)
- ♦ **Sara de Jong's blog** on the refugee, migrant and ethnic minority staff of migrant third sector organisations and the value of their experiential knowledge (Sara is a researcher at the Open University and was involved in this project)

Other resources not produced by this project:

- ♦ Gulwali Passerlay book: 'The Lightless Sky: An Afghan Refugee Boy's of Escape to a New Life in Britain' and blog: [gulwalipassarlay.wordpress.com](http://gulwalipassarlay.wordpress.com)
- ♦ 'Why does Amina need waterproof boots?' sample teaching plans by Nona Anderson [www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/the-ethics-and-politics-of-the-refugee-crisis](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/the-ethics-and-politics-of-the-refugee-crisis) (click on the 'outputs' tab)

### NEWS

Do individual's stories reach the mainstream news?

Do any of the news articles accurately reflect what is going on?

How far do we trust the news outlets?

News coverage that might be useful for discussion (selected by Will Allen at COMPAS):

- ♦ **'Europe's refugee crisis rumbles on'** (Daily Mail, 13 April 2016)
- ♦ **'Refugees aren't the problem: Europe's identity crisis is'** (Guardian, 31 October 2016)
- ♦ **'EU prepares to scale back resettlement of Syrian refugees'** (Guardian, 16 March 2016)
- ♦ **'Turkey threatens to open the gates and send refugees to Europe'** (The Telegraph, 11 February 2016)
- ♦ **'The migrant crisis will never end. It is part of the modern world'** (The Telegraph, 8 May 2016)
- ♦ **'Migrant crisis getting worse: While politicians dither thousands more flood Europe'** (Daily Express, 6 July 2016)
- ♦ **'Refugees REFUSE to live in Eastern Europe: EU relocation programme granted a FARCE'** (Daily Express, 28 November 2016)

## DATA AND RESEARCH

Can data and numbers always be trusted?

Will researchers always be impartial?

Resources produced by COMPAS and the Open University:

- ♦ **Who Counts as a Migrant?** Migration Observatory briefing document
- ♦ **Too many? Too few? Too difficult? How should the UK think about how many refugees to take?** Migration Observatory commentary article, 21.11.15
- ♦ **Calais and clandestine migration into the UK: Concerns and context**, Migration Observatory commentary article, 24.10.14
- ♦ **Unravelling the Mediterranean Migration Crisis (MEDMIG)** Sep 2015 - Aug 2016, COMPAS collaborative research project
- ♦ **What is our moral obligation to the stranger?**, Bridget Anderson, COMPAS blog 20.2.2016
- ♦ **What to do about Calais, in 50 words**, Bridget Anderson, COMPAS blog 13.8.2015
- ♦ **The COMPAS Anthology** - This anthology is designed both as a teaching and research resource and as a provocation. Contributions range from personal reflections to succinct overviews, and include poetry and images, posing questions and sharing insights on the multifaceted phenomenon that we call 'migration', and linking it to wider patterns of social change.
- ♦ Open University's projects - **OECUMENE** and **ENACT** both focussed on citizenship.
- ♦ **Framing the Refugee** - Blog written by Phil Cole based on a presentation he gave in Learning Lab 3 as part of this project.

## MAPS

How do you map something that is constantly changing?

How significant are maps?

Resources not produced by this project:

- ♦ **The Refugee Project** is a narrative, temporal map of refugee migrations since 1975. UN data is complemented by original histories of the major refugee crises of the last four decades, situated in their individual contexts.
- ♦ **The flow towards Europe** - Europe is experiencing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. Based on data from the United Nations, we clarify the scale of the crisis.
- ♦ **Why is EU struggling with migrants and asylum?** BBC News, 3.3.16

All illustrations by Laura Sorvala ([www.auralab.co.uk](http://www.auralab.co.uk))

**The Ethics and Politics of the Refugee Crisis** was a programme of knowledge exchange activities including: a public exhibition, learning labs, school projects and a showcase event focusing on Europe's refugee crisis running between May 2016-March 2017. It was funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) **Impact Acceleration Award** and was a partnership between: **Citizenship and Governance research at the Open University**, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society's (**COMPAS**) **Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity** at the University of Oxford, the **Migration Museum**, **actREAL** and the International Organization for Migration (**IOM**).

