

ACTIVITY **BUST SOME MYTHS!**

Ask the group to stand up. When you share the following statements, get them to put their hands on their heads if they think it's a fact or put their hands on their hips if they think it's a tall tale. Then share the correct answer.

- Refugees don't contribute to Australian society. **myth**  
*Quite the contrary, once refugees are established in Australia, they make positive economic and cultural contributions.*
- There are more than 35 million refugees worldwide. **fact**  
*That is more than the number of people there are living in Australia. 63 million are internally displaced (have had to leave their homes but still living in their own country).*
- People seeking asylum who arrive by boat are illegal. **myth**  
*Seeking asylum, regardless of how you arrive, is a basic human right under the UN Refugee Convention that Australia is a signatory to, but not keeping its word on.*
- 40% of all forcibly displaced people who have fled their homes are children **fact**

## DAVID'S STORY

When he was 16 years old David was passionate about his beliefs and an active member of a social group in Sierra Leone. Because of this he became a target of extremists who believed his group was trying to go against their regime. He knew they had to leave, as they had received many threats against them. This extremist group had been responsible for the deaths of many of his family members and friends.

One morning he saw his mother killed and so became the sole carer for his little siblings.

David and his siblings travelled across Africa from camp to camp avoiding persecution. David found what little work he could as an interpreter as he spoke four languages fluently.

Coming to Australia was his only option as his home no longer existed and it wasn't safe for he and his siblings to return. They had no idea where their father was or if he was alive. In Australia, he was able to find education and a safe home for his siblings. He now works with refugees as a case worker, interpreter and advocate.

## ACTIVITY

Reflect on David's story and discuss in pairs:

- Are you part of any groups?
  1. How does this make you feel?
  2. How do the ramifications of David being part of a social group compare to the ramifications of you being part of your group(s)?
- What are the transitions that David has faced and will be facing in the near future?
- What would be different in your life if you had the responsibilities and experiences that David had in his teenage years?

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

Ask the group questions then discuss the facts.

## WHAT IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee is a person who has fled their homeland for their safety.

## WHAT IS A PERSON SEEKING ASYLUM?

A person seeking asylum is someone who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been granted. They are still *seeking asylum*.

## DOES EVERY PERSON SEEKING ASYLUM BECOME A REFUGEE?

No, if their application is declined, that means they can be sent back to the country they fled from.

## WHERE DO REFUGEES COME FROM?

More than half (52%) of all refugees come from just 3 countries: **Syria (6.5m), Ukraine (5.7m) and Afghanistan (5.7m).**

The majority are staying in neighbouring countries including: Türkiye (3.6m), Iran (3.4m), Colombia (2.5m), Germany (2.1m) and Pakistan (1.7m)

## WHY DO THEY LEAVE THEIR HOMES?

Becoming a refugee is not a choice. People are forced to flee their homeland because of:

- War;
- Persecution on the grounds of race, nationality, sex, religion, or political opinion

While there are environmental refugees who have to flee their homes (UN estimates 21M people are displaced per year) they are not protected by international law and recognised under the refugee definition.

## HOW MANY REFUGEES COME TO AUSTRALIA?

The Australia government grants up to 20,000 refugee and humanitarian visas each year. That's not many considering the 35 million refugees worldwide.

\*Source: UNHCR Global trends report <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

# WHAT VINNIES DOES

## VINNIES MIGRANT AND REFUGEE SERVICES

Across Australia, we welcome and support newly arrived families of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds and help them settle into their new community. These programs help enable newly settled individuals and families to become self-reliant, participate in the broader Australian community and develop a sense of belonging.

These services include accommodation and material aid, settlement support, referrals and education scholarships. We also run programs such as Homework Help, Buddies Days and Multicultural Playgroups.

## VINNIES CAMPAIGNS

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a vocal advocate for the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum at a local, state and national level.

Check out the current campaigns at [socialjustice.vinnies.org.au](http://socialjustice.vinnies.org.au) to get involved or to start your own local campaign.

Sometimes all we need is enough signatures from everyday people to force the parliament to discuss an issue. You can help us collect these signatures!



## ACTIVITY

Discuss how the decisions made by our government affect the lives of those seeking protection in Australia. In an ideal world, what decisions would you make to better help people seeking asylum?

***“The past decade has seen thousands of people who arrived in Australia by boat seeking asylum treated with cruelty and neglect despite being entitled to seek protection under international law... Surely the time has come for Australia to show compassion and care towards people seeking a better life in this country.”***

- Mark Gaetani, St Vincent de Paul Society National President.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

## BE ADVOCATES

Talk to your family, friends, classmates, and community to help raise awareness about refugees and people seeking asylum and fight stereotypes.

## RESEARCH THE TOPIC

See what Vinnies is doing in your local area and how they're advocating to government. Collect signatures for a Vinnies petition, start your own or invite a local MP or Mayor to your group meeting or event so you can share your concerns with them - and let us know about it!

Visit: [socialjustice.vinnies.org.au/issues/refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum](http://socialjustice.vinnies.org.au/issues/refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum)

## BE GENEROUS

Run a fundraising activity at school. Volunteer at a local Vinnies service – as a volunteer based organisation, we always need more hands on deck! Check online to see what's in your area and how you can help.

## CONNECT WITH US



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