

***Read the article***

**What is a Refugee?** A refugee, defined by the United Nations, is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or because they belong to a particular social group.

**Why Do They Come?** Most refugees flee their country to escape armed conflict. They often leave with their families and apply for asylum in another country. Many of them do not want to leave their own country but have no choice. The journeys they undertake to reach a safe place may be almost as risky as staying in their own country. They would do anything to escape their suffering; crossing deserts, mountains, seas and rivers, sometimes using dangerous means of transport. They also hide in parts of ships that are too cramped, too hot and too smelly for anyone to check. Many never arrive.

**World Refugee Day** On the 20th June each year people celebrate World Refugee Day. An important part of this celebration is the award given to a person or group who excels in helping refugee causes.

**To Help or Not To Help?** There are an estimated 14 million refugees and asylum seekers in the world. Some countries in the world, especially the rich, are adamant against allowing too many refugees coming into their country. One worry is that there may be too many of them seeking asylum therefore causing a great problem for these developed countries. Their next worry is resources. These refugees may fill their hospitals, their schools, take over their jobs as well as abusing their social welfare system. At the end of the day, some fear there could be no more resources left for the people of these developed nations. Another worry is the thought that the refugees might not be genuine. Also, the fact that the country they flee to is culturally different to their own makes the citizens of these developed nations feel that their culture is being stolen from them.

Criminal activity seems to be a growing concern. People worry that asylum seekers who arrive penniless and without any documents might be criminals or involved in acts of terrorism. In many countries, new anti-terrorism laws have made migration legislation much stricter. Increasingly, governments are locking asylum seekers in detention centres regardless of their status. Unfortunately, this causes further criminalisation as genuine asylum seekers resist what they see as injustice. However, protests and riots lead to criminal charges and prison sentences.

These negative assumptions are not true. First of all, numbers indicate that Asia and Africa has the world's highest influx of refugees. Secondly, most rich or developed countries' economy rely on these refugees as they are the ones who are often more than willing to do the kind of work that no one else would even think of. Furthermore, the migrants tend to be very hardworking and highly motivated at their jobs and are the backbone of agricultural labour. Thirdly, governments like to play with words such as 'crime' and immigration' to gain popularity with their citizens during elections. Moreover, after all the problems a refugee has faced fleeing his own country, the last thing he wants is to be mistrusted. Finally, it is absurd for the rich nations to claim that their culture is being swamped by refugees, considering that the refugees are in a minority there.

Perhaps politicians should remind themselves of the fact that, whether they are dealing with genuine asylum seekers or economic migrants, they are dealing with human beings, not numbers, and the people should be treated humanely.

## Glossary

**absurd (adj):** ridiculous or unreasonable. **adamant (adj):** impossible to persuade, or unwilling to change an opinion or decision. **armed conflict (n):** an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles where weapons are used in the disagreement. **assumption (n):** something that you accept as true without question or proof. **asylum (n):** protection or safety, especially that given by a government to foreigners who have been forced to leave their own countries for political reasons. **asylum seeker (n):** someone who leaves their own country for their safety, often for political reasons or because of war, and who travels to another country hoping that the government will protect them and allow them to live there. **backbone (n):** the part of something that provides strength and support. **cramped (adj):** not having enough space. **detention centre (n):** a place where people who have entered a country without the necessary documents can be kept for short periods of time. **influx (n):** the arrival of a large number of people or things at the same time. **legislation (n):** a law or set of laws suggested by a government and made official by a parliament. **minority (n):** a national or racial group living in a country or area which contains a larger group of people of a different race or nationality. **persecution (n):** from the verb persecute (v): to treat someone unfairly or cruelly over a long period of time because of their race, religion, or political beliefs or to annoy someone by refusing to leave them alone. **status (n):** an official position, especially in a social group. **swamped (adj):** If something swamps a person, system or place, they receive more of it than they can easily deal with. **well-founded (adj):** based on facts.

## After reading

### Exercise 1

Below are 8 statements about the text. For each one, choose the **best** answer, based on the information in the text.

1. A refugee is a person who:
  - a. works for the United Nations
  - b. likes travelling to different countries
  - c. leaves their own countries because they are afraid
2. Travelling to another country is usually very dangerous for a refugee.
  - a. true
  - b. false
3. Refugees often apply for protection:
  - a. abroad
  - b. in their own country
4. Rich countries always welcome refugees.
  - a. true
  - b. false
5. Rich countries take more refugees than poor countries.
  - a. true
  - b. false
6. Many people assume that refugees are terrorists.
  - a. true
  - b. false
7. Successfully getting asylum is getting:
  - a. harder
  - b. easier
8. This article is generally sympathetic to refugees.
  - a. true
  - b. false

### More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of refugees at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-refugees.htm>

- **Word game:** Refugees. Match words and phrases related to refugees to their definitions.
- **Story:** Where Home Is. This poignant story is about refugees in a place where they don't belong. They spend time listening to sad, sad songs and wondering if they will ever go home..
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about refugees.

There is also a refugee-related cartoon and some carefully selected external links.

**Answers to comprehension activity:** 1.c; 2.a; 3.a; 4.b; 5.b; 6.a; 7.a; 8.a