

**Session 1**  
**BACKGROUND READINGS**

Half of all refugees who apply for resettlement in countries like Australia are children and young people. Refugee children and young people are among the most vulnerable people in the world. By the time they arrive in Australia, most of them will have lived through many traumatic experiences. These include leaving behind everything they know - their home, village, or community; their extended families, school, friends, and familiar culture. They may have been separated from family; made long and dangerous journeys; and lived in terrible conditions in refugee camps. These are common pre-arrival experiences for refugee children and young people.

Resettlement is often a traumatic experience for refugee students. They face a variety of problems, including learning a new language, racism, the impacts of torture and trauma and trouble adapting to changes in traditional family structure, roles and culture. The adults they are dependent on

medical attention if they are sick or injured. Their normal childhood activities have to be put on hold.

## **ALEXANDRIA'S STORY**

*This very moving story by a young Bosnian Christian girl tells of the death of her best friend who was Muslim in the fighting in Sarajevo.*

When I was asked to write a story about my life, I could have written about absolutely anything since I was born in Bosnia and have lived there during the war. I would like to tell you how my family escaped from Sarajevo and came to Australia but since it is my best friend's birthday in seven day's time I will tell you about her.

Well to start from the beginning, my best friend was Renata and I have known her ever since I could remember or ever since I was able to know for my self. She lived just



## DURING ESCAPE AND SEEKING ASYLUM

### Section d

Most refugees today have fled from war or armed conflict in their home countries. Often this is internal conflict between government forces and guerrilla or separatist groups who are fighting for the independence of a certain group or region. Due to the nature of this warfare, civilians, including children, are frequently caught in battles and targeted in the fighting. Many children actually take part in armed conflict as child soldiers.

Sometimes governments have sustained campaigns of persecution against some of their citizens, because they belong to a particular religion or ethnic or racial minority or because of their perceived support of guerrilla groups. The most extreme form of persecution is ethnic cleansing and genocide, but persecution also includes systematic rape, torture, denial of work and education, and the displacement of people from their homes and land. This persecution is targeted directly at civilians, often women and children.

Flight from persecution often involves difficult and dangerous ordeals along the way. Many refugees are forced to flee at night in the midst of conflict and confusion. There may be no time to collect travel documents. For some people it is too dangerous to travel on genuine passports or identity papers.

Sometimes families will have time to sell their homes and possessions to raise money to pay for a people smuggler to carry them safely across the border or to organise a boat trip to safety. Other people do not have prior warning of the danger they face. Bombs destroy their homes or armed people invade their villages and towns (src) 04 15 23 34 5 11 13 19 2 28 39 5 10 11 21 5 20 38 (b) (6) (rel) 7 of 7 (encls) 15 14 11 15 17 s

of cities, towns and villages. The local people often mistrust them and the conditions under which they live can be harsh and unsafe. From there they move to refugee camps or try to move to third countries like Australia where they hope to find safety.

The majority of the world's refugees live in camps in developing countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Tanzania and Kenya, as well as other parts of Asia, Europe and Africa. The largest urban refugee populations are in the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Other refugees were dispersed in rural areas.

In escaping from dangerous situations, some refugees have no option but to use people smugglers. People who use people smugglers are usually genuine refugees who are turning to a last resort to save their own lives or those of their family. The journeys that smugglers organise are extremely risky and dangerous in themselves. Boats are often un-seaworthy, horribly crowded, and lack basic provisions and facilities such as food, water, and medical care.

## **DUNIA'S STORY**

***This is the story of a young girl from a well off Orthodox Christian background from Bagdad. She tells how she had to flee her home and live with Kurds in the mountains under hash conditions before being***

shoot past and land about a kilometre away. My Father ran up to the top of the house to see what happened. Everyone was very worried.

My Father told us to leave immediately. We couldn't take anything with us. We all ran into the mountains and spent about a week without food. There were lots of people there with us. We could not find our relatives or friends. I was very scared, hungry and tired from walking. I didn't understand why Saddam Hussein was bombing us but later I found out that he was trying to kill all the Kurds because they wanted independence and their own country to live in.

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Most refugees initially escape across borders into neighbouring countries. Many of them stop there because it is too dangerous or difficult to travel on to another country. They are often not very welcome, although usually tolerated, in these poor developing countries. They are rounded up and sent to huge institution-like refugee camps in remote areas, to be placed under the 'protection' of UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

Life in the camps is often a struggle for survival. They are crowded and lack basic facilities. Often families do not have proper shelter. They rely on UNHCR and NGOs (non-government organisations) for food rations, because they are not allowed to leave the camps to work. Food, water and firewood for cooking are all scarce.

Refugee camps are also very dangerous places. Children in particular are at very high risk of armed attacks, rape, domestic violence, and abduction for sexual exploitation or recruitment as child soldiers.

Normal family routines are not possible in refugee camps. Men and boys suffer greatly from boredom and depression because they are unable to provide for their families. Sometimes this leads to increased domestic violence against women and children. Children are often not able to attend school, particularly girls who may have to stay home to look after younger siblings.



## **KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP - NORTHERN KENYA**

The Kakuma Refugee Camp in northern Kenya houses refugees who have fled from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. The majority of the refugees in Kakuma are from southern Sudan. They flee over the mountains and cross the border into northern Kenya to escape indiscriminate bombing by the Sudanese government.

All new arrivals have to register at the Lokichoggio Reception Centre, close to the Sudanese border before being taken to Kakuma Refugee Camp. The Reception Centre consists of half a dozen tin roofed concrete buildings, open on three sides. There is no adequate protection from the heat or the swirling red dust. A high cyclone wire fence topped with razor wire encloses the compound. No food is available, only water and firewood and some limited medical assistance.

Once the refugees are processed they are driven 120 kilometres in cattle trucks to Kakuma Refugee Camp. As well as Sudanese refugees, it also houses refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia. There are approximately 95,000 people in the camp. Many have been there for ten years.

Travel on this road is dangerous and is only undertaken by UNHCR staff as part of a daily convoy or with security guards, carrying rifles. There are regular attacks on travellers by bandits. The road south of Kakuma is particularly dangerous and in very poor condition. Temperatures during the day can reach 40 degrees and only drop to the low 30s at night.

The camp is situated on the lands traditionally inhabited by the Tukarna tribe who are nomadic people, depending on goat and donkey herding for their livelihood. The presence of large numbers of refugees has led to conflict with the Tukarnas.

There are also conflicts between different ethnic and tribal groups of refugees within the camp. Most of the Tukarnas and a number of the refugee men own AK47 rifles. There is a very high incidence of rape and sexual abuse of women and girls by refugee men and there are regular reports of rape and sexual mutilation of refugee women and girls by gangs of Tukarna men. Although for most of these women resettlement in another country is the only durable solution, very few achieve this.

Those who are in particular danger in the camp are imprisoned in an enclosure known as the Protection Area. They are confined in rotting canvas tents in an area

