

In 2020, there were 26 million refugees, 4.2 million asylum seekers and 45.7 internally displaced people – adding up to a total of 75 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide (UNHCR World Report 2020\*), over half of these are children. New Zealand welcomes 1500 quota refugees per year. The international protections around refugees exist to protect all of us - no one chooses to become a refugee, and anyone could become one. Refugees don't leave their countries by choice, or for a better life, they leave for "a life," a life instead of death or persecution.

## Supporting Refugee Background Learners



**Save the Children**

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCROC) is an agreement by countries who have promised to **protect children's rights**. Aotearoa has ratified this treaty, which means the government are **obligated** to ensure these rights are fulfilled. Two fundamental principles guiding the UNCROC, **non-discrimination** and **participation** for every child, ensure that children of refugee background are guaranteed the same rights as every other child, including an education that is **inclusive** of their culture, religion, language, interests and strengths.

### VOCABULARY and PHRASES

**Refugee-** A person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR definition).

**Asylum Seeker -** An asylum seeker is someone whose request for refugee status has yet to be processed legally (UNHCR definition).

**Immigrant -** A person who has made a decision to move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there.

**Migrant -** A person who is moving from place to place (either within or across borders), usually for economic opportunities such as seasonal work.

# TIPS for Supporting Refugee Background Learners



- **Welcome** - **Smiles** and **warmth**, home-language greetings, and pictures of **diverse** countries and people on the walls, all create a warm reception. Ensure families and students are given a full school **tour**. This may be the first school experience for some children and the first time apart from their family. **Familiarity** and **assurance** the environment is **safe** is important.
- Ensure you learn to **pronounce their name**, home country, ethnicity and language **correctly**. This shows respect, effort and demonstrates that you **care** - some people may have been referred to as a number in the past. Correct those who might pronounce these wrong.
- **Learn** about the student's **home country** and the security situation there. Don't ask the student incase you trigger trauma, use the internet.
- When **meeting** a new **family** for the first time, or in any meeting, set up the meeting space so that you are not inadvertently reminding the family of potentially traumatic interviews with police, immigration officials in foreign countries or other punitive authority figures. This can be done by ensuring you are sitting at **equal** height, try not to sit on either side of a large desk - sit around a coffee table, and don't forget about the **universal language** of food. Sharing a plate of biscuits or crackers is a great way to show **hospitality** and **welcome** to the new family.
- Set up a **buddy** system. Train buddies and have a rotating system with a different buddy each day. Make **connections** with families from the same culture.
- **Familiarise** with **trauma triggers**. Almost anything could be a trauma trigger - examples include loud noises or bangs, a smell (e.g. burning), uniforms and authority, intense questioning and common themes in many books and movies. You may not always be able to avoid trauma triggers, but you can be **attuned** to their reactions. Explain what happened and offer them **support** and time for the stress response to dissipate.

# TIPS for Supporting Refugee Background Learners



Save the Children

- Allow **regular breaks** - adapting to a **new environment**, or learning a **new language**, can be extremely exhausting. You may notice these students take regular toilet breaks and use these as a way of giving themselves some **respite** from this mental load - allow them to do this. Young students might appreciate the opportunity to **rest** in the afternoons.
- Remember that the student may not have had the same **developmental experiences** as other children in your class. As such, you can provide experiences that may not usually be used for your classroom age group. This could include play-doh, painting, dress-ups, construction toys, blocks, dolls and transport toys. Children may need **extra support** in skills such as cutting and gluing that they may not have had the **opportunity** to develop. Give them opportunities to **explore** all the exciting new things in their classroom. Some may not understand that there is a play element to learning, and seek **comfort** in being provided familiar worksheets while they **transition**.
- Do not study a unit about refugees - instead study the **concepts** of journeys or movement if you want your class to learn about this theme. This allows all students to **relate** - a journey to school for example. Within this unit of study groups could do **case studies** about a range of different journeys and this doesn't single out your refugee background learners (e.g. Holidays as journeys, Māori and Pacific journeys, a refugee journey, a journey to the Olympics...).
- Don't forget about the **universal languages** of **maths**, **art** and **music** - your student may be able to demonstrate their **individuality**, skills and knowledge through other means.
- Build **cultural awareness** in the staff, school and community. Make using home-languages a part of regular practise, recognise **all** national days and festivals, include **cross-cultural elements** in diverse subject areas, read books and films from **diverse cultures**, ensure teaching materials **represent** diverse cultures and abilities, ensure the school council is **representative** of all learners and seek out books that are **bilingual** or in languages other than English for the school library.