



Social Issues

Refugees and Internally Displaced People



Definitions:

Refugees are people who have fled from their homes due to fear or danger

Internally Displaced People may have left their homes due to fear or danger, but have not crossed an international border.

Examples:

- Somali refugees who have fled to Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen to escape the fighting in their country, which began in 1988.
- Tibetan refugees who have been living in exile in India and Nepal since China invaded Tibet in 1959.
- Refugees from former Yugoslavia moved to neighbouring countries and Western Europe to escape war and human rights abuse. Even more are internally displaced, mainly in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Hundreds of thousands of people from Sierra Leone are internally displaced having fled fighting in parts of their country.

Why the situation occurs?

When war or civil war strikes a country many people are forced to leave their homes in fear for their lives and for those of their loved ones - family and friends. Their homes and towns may be destroyed; their access to facilities and supplies cut off, their lives endangered by bombs, fighting, militia groups etc. They may move to another part of their country, or even move across international borders.

When a disaster - a flood, hurricane or earthquake - occurs in a country people are often forced to immediately evacuate their homes. They may have to leave behind all of their possessions and immediately seek shelter elsewhere.

People are discriminated against, persecuted, tortured, threatened and excluded from society for a variety of reasons. They may belong to an ethnic minority or to a particular religious group or cultural group, or have expressed a certain political viewpoint disagreeing with the country's leaders.

In countries where democracy, freedom of thought and expression and freedom of religion

do not exist – people who are discriminated against may fear for their lives and be forced to move within their country or to another country for safety.

When people have no choice but to leave their homes, they face an uncertain future, relying on the assistance and goodwill of others- governments, aid agencies, local communities etc.

People can be refugees or internally displaced for many years and the camps in which they live become established communities.

How you can make a difference:

Tackle the issue - learn about the issue and how to identify with the situation. Recognise how and why different people become refugees and the problems that they face in everyday life. See how you could help raise awareness of the issue itself and help the refugees directly.

Use the materials and tools provided to follow the process of:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Developing Awareness and Empathy
3. Taking action
4. Measuring the change

Resources and Links:

Workshop 6: "Refugees go home" from the booklet "Building Peace Together" (A World Organization of the Scout Movement publication)

http://www.scout.org/wsrc/peaceworkshops/workshop6_e.pdf (English)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website (English, French and Spanish) contains numerous interesting documents, facts and tools to help understand the subject. Their website includes lesson plans, activities and tools:

<http://www.unhcr.org>

World Scout Conference Resolution 6/53 on Displaced Persons

<http://www.scout.org>

worldbureau@world.scout.org