



Simulation on the Refugee Crisis

On the Move invites young people to follow a refugee family on their journey to safety. The session takes about **50 minutes**, including the debrief and reflection activity.

Objective

To encourage participants to cooperate, negotiate, share, and to help them understand refugees and empathize with their situation.

How it Works

Participants are grouped into refugee families. Each group simulates the journey of a refugee family. You could create **nine simple stations** around the room to represent the journey.

The teacher leads youth through **nine stages** of the story. Each one engages them in making choices. These choices represent some of the real-life dilemmas that many refugees face.

Afterward, participants reflect on the choices they've made.

Preparation

Arrange the group into family groups of **six**. Young people can negotiate which family roles they will play, such as parents, grandparents or children, and they can choose a family name.

Each participant should have the following:

- A photocopy of the list of belongings they will choose from in gathering items for their journey (or it can be written on the board)
- Six small cards on which to draw their possessions, one item per card
- A plastic wallet or envelope representing the bag for carrying their cards

The activity may be done at tables or, if there is enough space, it can be acted out.

Introduction

Ask the young people to think about and discuss the question: Why do people move? Ensure that the young people understand there are **many reasons** why people move.

Explore the difference between choosing to move and being forced to migrate. Discuss the difference between the terms “migrant” and “refugee.” Discuss how different words carry different connotations.

Refugees often have to move because of war, but sometimes there are other reasons, such as drought, hunger, natural disasters or religious persecution.

Discuss how it might feel to be a refugee.

Ask the participants:

- How would you feel if you were told that you were in great danger and had to quickly leave behind your friends, home, belongings and maybe even some of your family?
- How would it feel to not know where you were going?
- Who would you take with you?
- What would you take with you?
- What do you think you would need for a really long journey?
- What would you have to leave behind?

The difference between refugees and migrants:

- **Refugees** *have to* move in order to save their lives or preserve their freedom. They have no protection from their own state.
- **Migrants** *choose to* move in order to improve the prospects for themselves and their families.

*United Nations Refugee Agency/UNHCR

The Activity

Stage 1

Leader:

You are about to go on a journey into the unknown. You don't know if you will ever be able to return to your home.

War has broken out in your country. You can hear the sound of gunfire and you know that fighting must be very close by. You have to leave quickly. You have been told that trucks will be arriving soon to take you, your family and neighbors to the coast, where you hope you can find a boat to take you to safety. There is no time to waste. You have to be quick.

The first thing each of you must do is pack a bag for your journey. In your bag you may carry no more than six items. Look at the *belongings* list and choose your items. Think carefully about what you really need to take. Discuss this with the rest of your family. Don't forget: Your items might be heavy to carry or difficult to look after. You have 10 minutes to draw on your cards the six things that you want to take.

[Allow 10 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 2

Leader:

The truck has arrived. You can't take anything else. Bring your bag with you and climb on the old wooden truck. You are on your way. Take a last look at your home. You are very unhappy because you have to leave friends behind, but there is nothing that you can do.

You start to cry as you think about all the happy times that you spent with them and pray they will be safe.

The seats in the truck are hard and narrow, and whichever way you sit, you cannot get comfortable. The driver is in a hurry to get you to safety. He speeds along the road and almost loses control as the truck screeches around the corner. A bag that belongs to your family member, [choose a person from the group and state their name], flies out of the truck.

The driver cannot hear you calling to stop, so the bag is left far behind. [The chosen person's name] has lost everything.

Help them make up for this loss by giving them something from your bag.

[The chosen person's name] can take one thing from each person in the family. You have 2 minutes to do this. What do you have left?

[Allow 2 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 3

Leader:

The truck has to climb a steep mountain. It gets slower and slower and a strange choking noise comes from the engine. You wonder if this truck will ever get you to the coast.

You hear a mighty bang and the truck grinds to a halt.

Something is very wrong with the truck's engine and it cannot be fixed. You must continue the journey on foot, but you find that your bag is too heavy to carry.

Make it lighter by taking out the heaviest item. You have 2 minutes to decide which item and to leave it behind.

What do you have left?

[Allow 2 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 4

Leader:

You struggle on but you find it harder and harder to keep going. It is a hot day and the sun is beating down. There has been no rain for more than a year so the roads are hard, full of holes and difficult to walk on.

One member of your family, [Choose a participant and state their name.], falls and hurts their leg. They cannot go on without help. Two of you, [Choose two participants and state their names.], will have to carry them.

These three people can no longer carry their bags. The rest of the family will have to help carry their belongings, but remember that no one may carry more than six items, so some things will have to be left behind. Talk about this. You have 3 minutes to sort this out. Now what do you have?

[Allow 3 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 5

Leader:

You continue entering a thick green forest. You are all very tired, especially the oldest people in your family, but you have to keep on going. You need to slash and cut your way through the trees. What will you use to do this?

At last you can see the sea, so you know you have reached the coast.

The injured person and helpers can now carry their remaining belongings, so you return them. You have 2 minutes to sort these out. What do you have?

[Allow 2 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 6

Leader:

You are overjoyed to see the fishing boats waiting in the bay. But, unfortunately, the boats are very small and none can take more than four people.

Your family must split up into groups of four. This is very hard. You become very upset. You want to stay together and are frightened of what might happen if you separate, but you have no choice. You have 2 minutes to sort out your groups. Who will you go with?

[Allow 2 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 7

Leader:

The fisherman will not let you get on his boat without payment. You have no money, but he agrees to let you on board in exchange for the most valuable thing in your bag. The boat is leaving in 4 minutes and you must decide what you will give him.

The boat is very small and the fisherman now says that you have too much luggage.

No one may carry more than two things. Talk with the others in your family and decide what can be shared and what must be left behind.

You have 4 minutes. What do you have left?

[Allow 4 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 8

Leader:

The boat sets sail. The sea is rough and stormy. The boat starts to leak and sea water floods in. You manage to save your bag, but it is soaking wet and anything that could be damaged by water is ruined.

You have 2 minutes to check the belongings in your bag and throw away anything that is spoiled.

[Allow 2 minutes]

Your time is up!

Stage 9

Leader:

At last you can see land. It has been a terrible journey! You are anxious to find out what has happened to the others in your family, and you hope they have arrived safely too. What will happen now?

You don't know but you hope for peace and safety.

[This is the end of the activity.]

Reflection

Discuss the activity with the class. Ask:

- How would you feel if you were told that you were in great danger and had to quickly leave behind your friends, home, belongings and maybe even some of your family?
- What did you bring at the beginning of the journey?
- Did you bring the right things?
- Did you think about food and water?
- How did you feel when you had to give up your belongings?
- What was the most difficult part of the journey?
- How did you feel about what was happening to you?
- How did you feel when your family had to separate?
- How did you feel at the end of the journey?
- How do you think refugees feel?

It is strongly advised that the class pray together to reflect upon the simulation in which they just participated. Provide students with the opportunity to pray for those affected by war and who seek a safe home. Ask students to pray in gratitude for safety, the things they are blessed to have, and the people in their lives who keep them safe.

Additional reflective activities for young people to complete include writing one of the following:

- A story about their group's journey and what might happen when they arrived at their destinations
- A reflection about their simulation journey exploring any emotions and questions they have
- A prayer for people facing perilous journeys, or a prayer for the students' family and gratitude for safety, family and home
- Five words that best describe their thoughts and feelings about this experience

After you've given participants time to reflect, ask:

- Do you know of any places in the world where people have become refugees?
- Do you know why they have become refugees?
- What stops us from welcoming refugees?
- How can we welcome new people into our community?
- How can I play a part in welcoming new people?

This could be an opportunity to introduce some real-life refugee experiences through news stories, from personal testimonies or from crs.org.

Adapted from a game by Pat Baker (The Joint Board of Christian Education)

Belongings

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Spare clothes | Diapers |
| Favorite doll | Your pet |
| Thick blanket | A Bible |
| Favorite action figure | An iPod |
| Teddy bear | Mountain bike |
| Rain boots | Sharp knife |
| Family photographs | Laptop |
| Umbrella | Basket of food |
| Wedding photos | Portable TV |
| Raincoat | Container of water |
| Baby bottle and baby food | Cell phone |
| Extra pair of shoes | Rope |