

# APPROACHES TO TEACHING ABOUT THE CRISIS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: REFUGEES, MIGRATION AND CONFLICT

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## What is the issue?

In recent weeks the number of those seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Northern Africa, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa has increased. Many of these people are refugees from warfare and conflict in the region, are trying to escape poverty or may be economic migrants seeking employment or education in Europe. Overwhelmingly, though, these people are fleeing conflict. As they are moving from one country to another, in this article the people are referred to as migrants, though the term is being contested in respect of this issue.

Many have travelled far to reach coastal ports in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. Once there they pay vast sums to people traffickers who put them on boats that are often un-seaworthy and without trained crews, then head towards the nearest European lands - Greek islands, Italian islands or Spain. Sometimes the people are then herded into smaller boats and cast adrift, sometimes the crew take off in powerful smaller boats and leave the overcrowded refugees to their fate. Some of these boats have crashed onto rocks, been overcome by huge seas or turned over with the weight of migrants on board. The loss of life is huge, especially as it seems that sometimes those who have paid for passage are locked in the hold below and cannot escape if the ship begins to sink.

The European nations struggle to agree how to solve the issue - its causes, the sheer number of people who are crossing the seas and need rescue and how to stop this movement by sea and resolve what to do with those who are saved. For Europe, is it a matter of search and rescue once a boat is in trouble? Should the navies of Europe patrol the coast of Africa? Is this the responsibility of those European nations closest to the Mediterranean or all of Europe? How much more should we interfere in other nations to stop or alleviate the movement of people like this?

Many of the migrants say they want to stay in Italy and Greece, many more want to head north to countries like Germany, France and UK where they may get better employment prospects. Italy and Greece are not the wealthiest nations in Europe and they are struggling with the impact of these people. Some locals in Italy and Greece are now becoming more hostile to those rescued on their shores. Some people may be deported back to their home lands or indeed their point of departure as their status to enter Europe may be contested. It's a complex and emotional catastrophe that politicians struggle with and aid agencies try to manage.

Teaching about this issue is also a challenge - is it a matter of teaching about refugees? Are we clear on the status and needs of these people? Is it a matter of teaching about aid and help? Is it a matter of teaching about the consequences of warfare and conflict? Is it a matter of teaching about the responsibility of richer nations for poorer nations? At a time when issues of migration and war also occupy the political parties in the UK as the election approaches, teachers have to consider carefully how to manage discussion and debate in the classroom to enable pupils to dig deep into the issue with compassion and understanding. There may not be clear answers; much of the matter is grey, not black and white, but this is all the more reason to ensure quality in understanding, investigation, learning and action.

## What big Citizenship themes are there?

The big Citizenship themes fall into global aspects as well as local aspects. Many of the issues of migration, conflict and refugees fall within the social justice aspects of global learning. There are also issues about the impact of migration on the host nations - including the UK - and how the interconnections function between the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

## Where are the links to the KS3 and 4 PoS?

The links to the current KS3 PoS seem tenuous at first, but teachers can draw on a number of links; there are the skills to think critically, debate and explore political and social questions. Pupils will develop skills of research, interrogate evidence and evaluate viewpoints as well as take informed actions. There are more explicit opportunities in KS4, where there is reference to human rights and international law, the United Nations and Europe, identity and the use of public money.

Teachers of course should teach beyond the confines of the National Curriculum PoS and look for opportunities to conjoin with other subjects. It is also essential to consider the action aspects of the theme - to take into account what active citizenship can result from the learning.

## What should I consider in my lesson planning?

Firstly, prior knowledge about the issue of both teacher and pupils may be weak. It is important that the teacher becomes familiar with the breadth of the issue, its complexity and the contested nature of the causes and actions/solutions. Pupils may have very stereotypical views. *“These people should be told to stay in Africa.”* *“These people just want a better life.”* *“They capsize the boats so they will be rescued.”* *“If they have the money to buy the passage then they are not poor.”* Teachers should expect a range of views that may include such commentary and should be prepared to challenge these views constructively and ensure pupils can research rigorously.

In lesson planning the teacher should ensure that pupils research for facts and opinions about the causes involved; the push and pull factors. The source links below will help. Teachers should also consider using media information and pictures to contrast opinions. If possible sources from outside UK should be used. There needs to be a debate or discussion element built around the key matters of response and responsibility - issues that will be relevant, have real traction with pupils and may be emotional. Teachers will need to have the right pedagogical approaches to managing such debate. Such approaches as P4C, Community of Enquiry or OSDE Methodology would help.

Teachers need to consider actions as a result of findings and debate - what do pupils want to do with what they have discovered. Do they want to present to other pupils in assembly? Do they want to campaign about the matter in the local community or set up a stall outside the local supermarket to publicise the issue? Perhaps pupils might construct a page on the school website about this. Do they want to meet with community and political leaders locally to discuss the issue? Do they know how the issue directly affects school members or community members?

Finally, and most importantly, teachers must consider how to teach controversial, topical and sensitive matters like this. They need to be cognisant of the school population and community. They need to read carefully guidance and advice on approaching such issues and ensure that their pupils are prepared for the theme. There is more on this in the links below and a very good framework for designing activities on the GLP website at <http://globaldimension.org.uk/glp/page/10718>

### **Are there resources I can use?**

Some top class activities, advice and guidance are already there for use, mostly for free. This year there will be an additional focus during Refugee Week, 15 - 21 June.

### ***Advice and guidance on teaching approaches***

[https://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/Education/Teacher%20Support/Free%20Guides/teaching\\_controversial\\_issues.ashx](https://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/Education/Teacher%20Support/Free%20Guides/teaching_controversial_issues.ashx)

[http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/lib\\_res\\_pdf/0118.pdf](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/lib_res_pdf/0118.pdf)

<http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk/secondarieschools.html>

<http://www.globalfootprints.org/philosophyforchildren>

### ***Links to resources for lessons***

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources>

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4ab346796.html>

<http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/Info-Centre/Resources-on-Refugees/classroom-resources>

<http://globaldimension.org.uk/migration-and-refugees-resources>

<http://globaldimension.org.uk/glp/page/10718>

### ***Links to background and research***

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32390941>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32381101>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-31510336>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02k61zh>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/20/eu-ministers-meet-migrant-crisis-talks-mediterranean-death-toll-rises>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/17/death-mediterranean-africans-migrant-sea-libya>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/ending-migrant-rescue-missions-not-curbed-demand-smugglers>

*If you need further advice or guidance, contact us at [info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk](mailto:info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk) or on 020 7566 4133.*