



### **Activity 3 – Understanding the refugee crisis**

According to the UNHCR, the major source countries of refugees today are Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The majority of people in the world who are fleeing violence and persecution across state borders are currently living in refugee camps in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Only 22% of refugees are in Europe. The UK is home to less than 1% of the world's refugees.

The likelihood that a person fleeing violence and persecution will be officially recognized as a refugee and granted asylum depends on the asylum system of the country where they apply. In the UK, 34% of applicants were granted asylum in 2015. In other countries, such as Sweden, this number stands at around 50%.

In each of the 5 parts of this activity, you will get acquainted with different people involved in the border crossing of asylum seekers. This will get you thinking about the social construction of borders and the institutions that dictate how various people act at the border.

#### **Part 1: A perfect storm**

Please read this blog post by Professor of Migration Law Thomas Spijkerboer (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). Here, he explains what elements came together to result in the refugee crisis the world is facing today: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/02/europe%E2%80%99s-refugee>

#### **Part 2: Perspectives of police officers**

The EU has an external border control agency called Frontex that polices the EU's borders, mostly in the Mediterranean. Have a look at this blog post about police work within this agency: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/02/divided-loyalties>

#### **Part 3: The role of the smuggler**

To get to EU states, asylum seekers often pay smugglers to help transport them across borders. This blog post describes the perspectives and the roles of smugglers: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2015/11/how-become-human>

#### **Part 4: One asylum seeker's story**

Finally, read this essay by Joe, who came to the UK to seek asylum. Joe talks about how he came to be an asylum seeker and about the specificities of the UK system:



<https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/01/joes-story>

**Part 5:  
Concluding the exercise**

This exercise was meant to prompt your critical thinking about the interactions that take place at borders in light of the current refugee crisis, and to think about borders as complex phenomena that are shaped by the actions of different groups of people and institutions.

Think back to your list of “agents” at work at the border, which you made for Activity 2 of this module. Did you mention all the agents you got acquainted with in this exercise? Have your perspectives on the roles and the challenges faced by these agents changed since you started this module?

In this module, we have mentioned sociology of mobility, sociology of migration, sociology of displacement, political sociology. There are many scholars working across all these fields and working together to increase our understanding of borders and the refugee crisis in the world today.

Sociologists of mobility study all types of mobility across the globe (permanent migrations as well as tourists, commuters to work from a suburb into a city, bikers, etc). Sociologists of migration study those who move from place to place, the social consequences of these processes, the political policies involved in these processes, and topics of integration, assimilation, acculturation. Political sociologists study a broad range of topics relating to the state, society, citizens, power relations, and conflicts. Sociologists of displacement study the causes, consequences, and experiences of forced migration, and focus heavily on state power, transformation of the state, asylum policy, and borders.

This module has touched upon studies conducted in each of these research areas to give you an understanding of what sociology can tell us about borders and displacement. Below is a diagram showing you each of the areas of sociology you have encountered while working through this module.

