

## Step in the shoes of a refugee for 21 days

Previous compulsory steps / Prior students' knowledge	None
Learning objectives	Developing an understanding of migration and integration. Developing an understanding of the terms: refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Developing empathy towards other people.
Subjects	Politics, Social Science, English as a foreign language
Recommended Age	15-18
Material needed	Laptop with the video game installed
Sequence duration	220 minutes (2.5-3 hours)
Individual or group activity	Individual
Inclusion best practices	The dialogues of the video game are simple and there are also subtitles, so it is easy to play for students with basic knowledge of English. In addition, the educator could provide additional help with the language and the definitions that come up in the game, if needed. The topic of the game might be sensitive for children, especially if they are asylum seekers, migrants, or refugees themselves.
Expected production	Essay assignment on the topic of refugees
Skills developed	Empathy, cultural skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, reading skills

The price range of the game	>20€
Extension/differentiation activities	This sequence can be used for teaching English as a Foreign Language.
Tips for shorter duration	This sequence assigns most of the activities as homework, and as a result its duration within the class is approximately 40 minutes in total. However, to make it shorter you could skip the introductory videos and ask your students to watch them in their free time. In addition, you could also make shorter (or longer) the playing session.

## Step by step: how to implement the sequence

The past decade has seen an increase in the number of people who crossed into Europe to seek asylum. But it was in 2015 that Europe saw the highest number of arrivals – 1,015,078 people crossed into Europe (BBC News, 2018). This was the year that marked a change in the European continent and led to a number of political reforms to address the needs of the newly arrived asylum seekers (Evans, 2020).

This pedagogical sequence can be used in politics and social sciences classes to provide an introduction to the topic of migration and the notion of the term “refugee”. Students will use the video game “21 Days” to experience the life of Syrian refugees in Europe (21 Days, n.d.).

**Note: This topic may be sensitive for some students, especially if they are asylum seekers, refugees, or migrants. In such cases, you should avoid using this sequence or you should discuss it with the students beforehand.**

- **Step 1: Introduction to the topic and terminology related to migration (20 minutes)**

At this stage it is important to take control of all group discussions to avoid statements that might make some students feel uncomfortable and to make sure all students feel safe to share their views.

In 2015 more than a million people crossed into Europe to seek asylum. In doing so, those people took huge risks, often leaving their families behind to find a better life. The most recent refugee crisis is the result of the outbreak of civil war in Syria and it remains one of the world's largest refugee and displacement crises of our time (Reid, 2021). More than 6 million Syrians are refugees, and another 6 million people have been forcibly displaced within Syria.

You can divide your students into groups of three to four students and ask them to discuss the notion of the term “refugee” and identify the main reasons that lead someone to flee their home and seek asylum in another country.

To help the students in this discussion, you can show them an introductory video on the topic of migration:

- [Syrian Refugees: A Human Crisis Revealed in a Powerful Short Film - Youtube](#): this video shows the life of Syrian refugees when arriving in Europe.
- [What does it mean to be a refugee? - Youtube](#): this video explains the term “refugee” and its difference from the term “migrant”.

Questions to guide the discussion:

- What is the difference between a refugee and a migrant?
- Who is defined as an asylum seeker?
- What risks and difficulties do people face when trying to cross into Europe?
- Are you familiar with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)?

By the end of the group discussion, students should be aware of the difference between the definitions of an asylum seeker, a refugee, and a migrant. In addition, they should have a basic understanding of the Syrian crisis and how this led to the recent refugee crisis in Europe.

Dictionary:

- **Asylum seekers:** people whose request for sanctuary is not yet processed (UNHCR, 2018).
- **Refugees:** people who cannot return to their country of origin because of feared persecution, violence, or war. Refugees are protected by international law (UNHCR, 2018).
- **Migrants:** migration includes a voluntary process of crossing borders (UNHCR, 2018).

- **Step 2: Introduction to the video game and assigning it as homework (90 minutes)**



Image 1: Steam, 21 Days  
([https://store.steampowered.com/app/607660/21\\_Days/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/607660/21_Days/))

Following the introductory discussion on migration, students can play the game “21 Days” to experience the life of refugees. The players play as Mohammed Shenu, a newly arrived Syrian refugee in Europe. His wife and son are also on their way to Europe but to complete their journey Mohammed should send them money every 3 days.

The players become Mohammed for 21 days, and in doing so, they should always remember to take care of:

1. Mohammed’s life: food, money, and mental health status
2. Mohammed’s family: sending money to his wife and child.

The video game can be bought on steam and it costs 1,99€. You can use this link: -

The game uses simple language, and it also has subtitles. As a result, it is a relatively easy game for students to play as part of their assignment. You should ask the student to play the game for approximately 1 hour and take notes on their thoughts and emotions while playing.

You can ask the students to think of the following questions while playing the game:

- What emotions is Mohammed going through when arriving as a refugee in Europe?
- What are your emotions when playing the game?
- What difficulties do newly arrived refugees face when arriving in a new country?

- **Step 3: Written assignments on the notions of refugees (30 minutes)**

After playing the game, you can ask your students to write a short essay on the notion of the term “refugee”. In their essay, students should define the term refugee and explain how they understand the term regarding their thoughts and emotions when playing the game. Another activity could be to write a roleplay letter or journal and explain what they are doing using their actions in the game. For example, did they manage to find a job? What type of job? This would allow the students to put themselves in the shoes of a refugee.

- **Group discussion (20 minutes)**

Students should share their essays in class and discuss their experience of playing the game “21 Days” as homework.

Students could also refer to racism incidents they are aware of and discuss whether such things are evident in their school. In addition, they can critically discuss freedom of movement in Europe in relation to the terms of refugee, migrant and asylum seeker. Could they see themselves engage in one of this type of migration someday? What might cause this? You should direct the discussion in such a way that students will understand why it is important to counter racism and xenophobia in schools and our society.



## References

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UNHCR. (2018). "'Refugees' and 'Migrants' - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)". <https://www.refworld.org/docid/56e81c0d4.html>.

