

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO 14TH INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
CONFERENCE:

Beyond the Headlines: The Russia-Ukraine War and Its Global Impacts (2023)

Lesson Plan: Migration Crises and the Middle East
Differential Treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees

[Please send any questions/comments/feedback to Ney Grant (CMES Outreach Assistant) at njgrant@uchicago.edu]

Objectives and Outcomes

Students will:

- Learn general facts regarding two recent refugee crises; the Syrian crisis of 2011-present and the current Ukrainian crisis.
- Gain awareness regarding the differential treatment of the Middle Eastern and Ukrainian crises by Western journalists, politicians and publics, and begin to locate and discuss the causes of this difference.
- Expand their ability to identify how double-standards towards world issues can lead to entrenched or systemic marginalization over the long-term.

Hook:

Watch introductory videos (if time is limited one video suffices):

[Ukraine refugee crisis: Is Europe behaving differently?](#)

Watch this video on the different treatment these refugee crises received from Western media. Al Jazeera English.

[Comparing Ukrainian refugee crisis with Syrian refugee crisis](#)

Similar subject matter from ABC.

Compare Headlines (links in references):

Syria:	Ukraine:
Is the European Union Failing Syrian Refugees?	Ukrainian refugees: Challenges in a Welcoming Europe

Denmark asylum: The Syrian refugees no longer welcome to stay	Refugee children to be taught in Ukrainian in Danish schools
UK Home Office tells Syrian man it's safe to be deported back to his homeland	Ukrainian refugee exhibits paintings in Wiltshire
Danish Law Requires Asylum Seekers to Hand Over Valuables	Denmark Won't Take Away Ukrainians' Assets Under 'Jewellery Law'. All About the Rule & the Spcl Relief

For Middle-High School Classes: *Ask students to share what they know of the Ukrainian crisis and the Syrian crisis. Does there seem to be a gap in students' understanding when it comes to Syria, as opposed to Ukraine? Do they see, or remember seeing, much attention among media, peers, and family regarding Syria? (The peak of the Syrian conflict may have occurred when students were younger but the crisis continues and this simple exercise should still be useful.)*

Without blame or guilt, draw some attention to the lack of US public awareness regarding Syria. Briefly discuss why solidarity towards non-Western countries should coexist alongside solidarity for Western peoples and why our effort to learn about other regions can begin to help this problem.

Optional for more advanced classes

The following excerpt from [this article](#) may be helpful in quickly exploring major differences between Ukraine and Syria – but also major differences in Western sympathy. Clearly, more than exclusivity and racism is involved in the different reactions. Yet still, the matter-of-fact delivery of comments like “[Ukraine] is not Syria” (below) speaks to a deeper problem of apathy when non-Western people are suffering. Discuss with students:

European analysts point out the differences between the wars in Syria and Ukraine that could lead to different Western responses. Unlike Mr. Putin, Mr. al-Assad fought to regain control of his own country, not take over one of his

neighbors. Unlike Syria, Russia is a nuclear-armed power, complicating the issue of military intervention.

And while the United States and its European allies largely let Mr. al-Assad get away with using chemical weapons in the Middle East, Mr. Putin's doing so on the European continent would most likely cause greater alarm and elicit a stiffer response.

"If Putin thinks that he'll be treated like al-Assad, he is wrong because he is not al-Assad and this is not Syria," said Patricia Lewis, director of the international security program at Chatham House.

Project: Journalists for a Day. Give Students quick summary of activity before exploring videos all together (below):

- Class will be split into an even number of groups (~2-5 students per group).
- Half of the groups will report on the Syrian refugee crisis, half will report on the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Each group will produce a short (2-5 min) presentation for the class.
- As Journalists, students will be working to raise awareness and receptivity in the US or other Western country. **The goal will be to frame refugee crises from a more global perspective.**
- After the project, the class will discuss together their thoughts, both as journalists and as audience members. (The point **should not be** to ask which refugee group received more sympathy from the class but, rather, how groups tried to raise awareness and avoid in-group mentalities with their reporting.)

Content for whole class (before getting into groups). 3 videos (optional 4th)

[Which countries host the most refugees?](#)

*Which countries host the most refugees worldwide? (Please tell students this video was made **before the Ukrainian crisis**, so numbers will be different now. Still, this is important information to offset misunderstandings about world refugee reception.)*

[Refugee crisis: The Syrians abandoning Europe - BBC News](#)

Note: intense beginning, teacher may want to start at 0:32 to avoid this, or give trigger warning. Quick overview of Syrian refugees returning to Syria – despite the ongoing conflict – due to deep racism they experience in Europe.

Optional Videos - Thinking About Internationalism

[Seyla Benhabib - Transnational Democracy and Rights Across Borders \(Part 2/2\)](#)

-Philosopher Seyla Benhabib quickly discusses nation-states, borders and migration. (note, video spells “sights” when Dr. Benhabib mean’s “sites”)

[Stand up for the human rights of all migrants](#)

U.N. Human Rights channel discusses migrants rights.

Reporting on Migration from an *International* Perspective

Break into Groups and Get to Work!

(Can use articles below or have groups to do their own research)

Students are to create mock news reports for the class that attempt to raise awareness and understanding for refugees from their chosen region. To keep projects general and quick, the teacher may choose to keep the target audience as the U.S. Or, if there is more time or interest, different groups may choose to focus on a particular country of reception (i.e. Germany, France, Netherlands, etc.) and write their presentations accordingly. Target audience should be European or American, to keep focus on the differential treatment these countries have afforded “Western” vs. “non-Western” refugees.

Presentations should include at minimum:

- Brief description of the crises’ root cause(s), and the reasons for emigration and internal displacement.
- General information on numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons, and people seeking protection and assistance.
- Brief discussion of issues refugees might face in their new residence.

“Journalists” should focus strongly on their choice of framing. Remember, the goal is to raise awareness for refugees without resorting to exclusive, Western-centric, narratives. Students may want to consider various ways to forge a voice of global solidarity, including but not limited to:

- Focusing on first-hand accounts rather than journalist’s own impressions.
- Framing migrants rights in terms of universal human rights.
- Highlighting intercultural dialogue rather than us/them rhetoric. (for instance, highlighting what Americans stand to learn from other cultures.)

Information for projects: (teacher may want to vet for intense content - quick warnings are included below)

Syrian Crisis (listed in order of relevance)

- [Syria's war explained from the beginning | News | Al Jazeera](#)
-Syria's war explained from the beginning. Some intense content.
- [UNHCR - Syria emergency](#)
-UN High Commissioner for Refugees – facts on Syria.
- [World Report 2021: Syria | Human Rights Watch](#)
*-**Warning: traumatic content.** Human Rights Watch annual report (for 2020) on Syria. Includes more info on causes and current actors.*
- [Syrian refugee crisis: Facts, FAQs, and how to help | World Vision](#)
-Interactive list of facts with short blurb for each item.
- [Syria Refugee Crisis – Globally, in Europe and in Cyprus](#)
*-More overview info **with links to first hand accounts from individual refugees.***

Subsection on multiple countries attempting to prematurely send Syrian refugees home:

- [UK Home Office tells Syrian man it's safe to be deported back to his homeland](#)
UK, brief mention of Denmark
- [Salvini fumes at EU court ruling on refugee returns – EURACTIV.com](#)
Italy
- [Denmark asylum: The Syrian refugees no longer welcome to stay - BBC News](#)
Denmark
- [Several German states plan to deport Syrian endangerers: Media report - InfoMigrants](#)
Similar sentiments in Germany

Ukrainian Crisis (listed in order of relevance)

- [Ukraine Refugee Situation](#)
-UN High Commissioner for Refugees – Statistics updated weekly.
- [Ukrainian refugees: Challenges in a welcoming Europe](#)
-Challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

Comparative Pieces

- [A New Refugee Crisis Stirs Uncomfortable Issues for Europe](#)

- *Overview on European differential treatment of refugees.*

Two on Denmark's particularly egregious differential response

- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/16/denmarks-mismatched-treatment-syrian-and-ukrainian-refugees>
Discusses Denmark's place at the forefront of European anti-immigration legislation yet mismatched treatment of Syrian vs. Ukrainian refugees.
- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/10/europe/denmark-refugees-ukraine-syrian-intl/index.html>
Denmark opens arms to Ukrainians, even suspending difficult asylum rules. Meanwhile, sending Syrians home despite Assad regimes continuing violence.

Non Refugee Related Supplementary Material:

Overview Articles on Ukraine War's affect on Middle East

- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/24/middleeast/ukraine-war-six-months-mideast-mime-intl/index.html>
"Four Ways the Ukraine War has Impacted the Middle East." Short overview.
- <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/impact-russias-invasion-ukraine-middle-east-and-north-africa>
Linked subsections for different regions and states for more specific information.
- <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/ukraines-consequences-are-finally-spreading-to-syria/>
Also listed in section on Syria, but includes helpful overview of shifting Middle Eastern geopolitical alignments consequent to Ukraine War. Turkey, Iran, Israel and Syria included.

Russian Involvement in Syria

- <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/20/1087783750/lessons-from-russias-role-in-syria-war>
Includes great 6 min recording. Discusses Russia's involvement in Syria for over 10 years and relates this to current Ukrainian crisis. Mentions lack of international consequence (i.e. sanctions etc.) for Russia's involvement in Syria.
- <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/ukraines-consequences-are-finally-spreading-to-syria/>

Discusses shifting Syrian situation consequent to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

- <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-mikhail-gorbachev-syria-middle-east-c2582dabed6158f058e58d2e2bc0d4cf>

Title speaks for itself; " General who led Syrian bombing is new face of Russian war."

Changes in Food Security and Energy Politics

Food only

- <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/28/russia-ukraine-war-threatens-the-middle-east-s-food-security.html>

Discusses huge proportion of grain the Middle East and North Africa import from both Russia and Ukraine and the fallout of the invasion on food security leading to civil unrest. (Note: information is older and portion on civil unrest is speculative. General info on food security still valid/helpful.)

Food and Oil

- <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/grains-and-hydrocarbons-middle-east-and-war-ukraine>

Discusses shifts in Middle Eastern food security and energy politics caused by Ukrainian crisis.