



The journey

Leaving home

War, disasters, persecution and poverty can make it necessary for people to leave their homes. They may decide to leave slowly, after a long period of their situation getting worse. They could also make the decision suddenly. When events change quickly there's no time to plan, pack or sometimes even keep families together.

On the road

Families are at great risk. They may be attacked, or lack food, water and shelter. They may get lost or not know where they're going and they can travel for days, weeks or even months. People may get turned back from the border or reach terrain that is too difficult to cross.

Seeking refuge in your own country

Most people seeking refuge go to another part of their own country, especially if they can't get to the border to escape.

They are called Internally Displaced People (IDPs). Unlike refugees, IDPs lack protection under international law.

Some refugees stay for a few months before they can return home or resettle. Others may live in a refugee camp for many years. The camp can be the only home that the children know.

Seeking refuge in another country

Some people cross the border into another country, and a refugee camp may grow where aid can be delivered. Other refugees also try to get there to receive help. In the new country, refugees may be treated like prisoners and prevented from leaving the camp or moving about freely.

Returning home

When it is safe, or if conditions have improved, many displaced people and refugees go back to their old homes. They may need to rebuild destroyed houses, farms, schools and businesses. Displaced people may not receive as much help as refugees returning from another country.

Local integration

If their home is not safe or if someone else has taken their land, displaced people and refugees may make a home in the new area they escaped to. This can mean living on land nobody wants or staying in the refugee camp with poor conditions and little land. The people who already live in this area must make room for these new residents.

Resettlement

Some refugees get a chance to move to a third country. From the refugee camp, they can apply to live in a new country. However, countries control the number of refugees they allow to enter. Living conditions there can be much better but it is often difficult to adjust to a new country.

Phong Nguyen

I came to Australia in 1979 as a refugee from Vietnam. I came with my family - my mum, two sisters and a brother.

Four years after the war ended in 1975, life was very hard for many families. My father was a soldier with the South Vietnamese army and he was placed in gaol for 13 years. My mother had to work very hard to support us. Together with thousands of other families, we were forced into the countryside where we were given shovels and axes to fend for ourselves. There was no running water and we had to build huts. Also, my sister was kicked out of university. Four times my mother tried to escape from Vietnam.

Eventually, we got out by wooden boat with about 1,100 people. It was very crowded and it looked like sinking. Somehow we survived on the ocean for 10 days before reaching a little town in Indonesia. Two people on board died and one lady gave birth to twins while we were at sea.

We then spent seven months in a refugee camp in Indonesia before coming to Australia. I couldn't understand a word of English (Phong could speak French, Vietnamese and Chinese) but I knew it would be very important to learn.

Today, one thing I love is the beaches in Australia. I love the sea but I still feel uncomfortable to get into the water. I take my kids to the water, but each time they get into the water I



cringe. Somehow I have not got over the terrible memories of being in the sea on that boat. Even on big Australian ferries I still feel uncomfortable.

We consider that we are the very lucky few because many Vietnamese families perished and never made it to Australia.

For You To Do!

1. Use the Journey (p. 12) to write a story of an imaginary family. Take the family through the four stages on p. 12. Read other refugee stories in this issue to help with your ideas.
2. Read Phong's story above (p. 13) and make notes under the four headings or stages below:

Leaving home	On the road	Seeking refuge	Resettlement

Phong's story can be seen and heard at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne.