



MODULE 5: MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT



LESSON ONE: INTERNAL & EXTERNAL MIGRATION



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore how famine impacts different communities in different ways and students will understand how different societies have been impacted as a result. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Greek Famine (1941-44)**
- » **The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)**
- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand that famine can impact differently on different people and communities in the same country or region.
- ✓ Identify reasons why some communities may be more affected than others.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Describe how different communities might have experienced famine and with different levels of severity.
- ✓ Understand how famine can impact differently at an individual as well as a community level.

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will inform students about the displacement caused by famines and the impact of migration both internally within a country and externally to new societies. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**
- » **The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)**
- » **The Yemen Famine (2016-Present)**

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Discuss the reasons for migration during times of hunger crisis.
- ✓ Understand the reasons behind host countries accepting people from new societies.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ To describe the relationship between food crisis and migration.

**USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

- » [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- » [Image of internal migration in the Holodomor](#)
- » [Image of a Kulak family having to leave their farm during the Holodomor](#)
- » [Fictional story set during the Great Famine Years, also available in English translation](#)
- » [Spanish article on the return of migrants, might be interesting to discuss and deepen class discussions](#)
- » [Internal migration Dutch potato famine](#)
- » [Song about Irish emigrants during the Great Famine](#)
- » [Short newspaper article on the Finnish famine: describing people wandering from place to place](#)

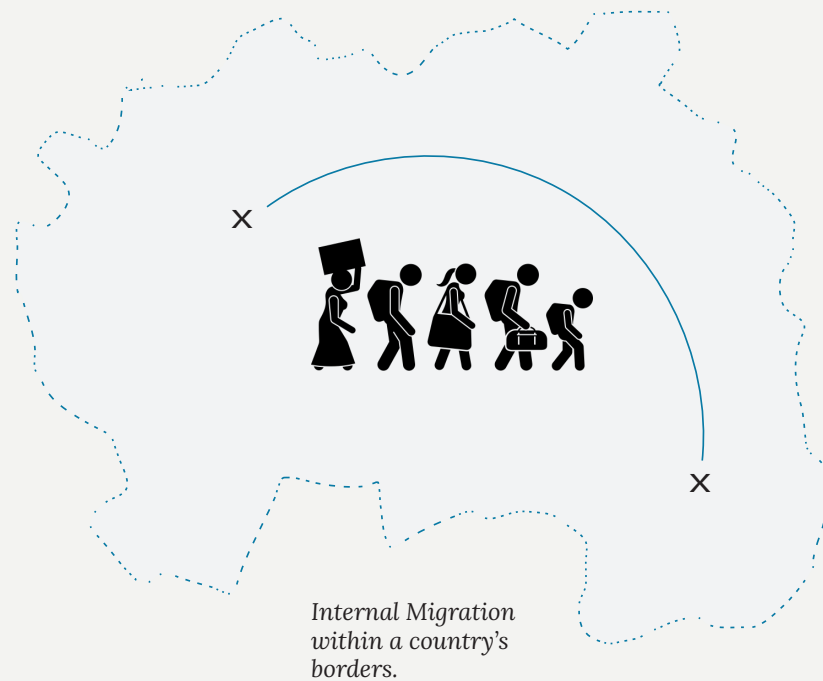
INTRODUCTION

The devastating impacts of famine mean that it has often been a powerful catalyst for both internal and external migrations of people as they seek to escape from famine-affected areas.

Such movements of people may then lead to the famine having much wider and long-lasting repercussions across a range of geographies and peoples that go much further than the initial famine area itself.



> INTERNAL MIGRATION



Internal migration has often been a significant feature of famines through history as people desperately seek food and better living conditions but are keen to do so within their home nation, rather than leaving the country altogether.

In general, famine-induced migration typically involves rural populations moving to urban areas or regions less affected by food shortages. This can be for several different reasons:

Food scarcity

People migrate to areas where food is more readily available.

Economic opportunity

Famines often coincide with economic downturns, prompting people to seek work elsewhere.

Collapse of local support systems

As communities struggle, traditional support networks break down, forcing individuals to look elsewhere for help.

Government aid distribution

Sometimes, aid is concentrated in specific areas, drawing people to those locations.

These phenomena have been observed in various historical famines, including the Highland Potato Famine (1846-1856) and the The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45).

Skye Cottage
- Image Credit 1



CASE STUDY

THE HIGHLAND POTATO FAMINE (1846-56)

The Scottish Potato Famine, also known as the Highland Potato Famine, led to significant internal migration. As the potato blight that also affected Ireland and Holland led to crop failure in Scotland, and other food sources became scarce, many Highlanders were forced to leave their homes, with their landlords generally unsympathetic to their plight. This migration took two main forms:

1. Rural to urban movement

Many Highlanders moved to lowland cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh in search of work and food.

2. Coastal migration

Some communities relocated to coastal areas where they could supplement their diet with fish and seafood.

This internal migration contributed to the urbanisation of Scotland and the depopulation of the Highlands, a demographic shift that had lasting cultural and economic impact on the country.

“

'It is no doubt an acceptable recompense to those who have taken a part in promoting the success the Highland and Island Emigration Society, to know that by their aid 3000 human beings, who, for the last five six years have been hopelessly struggling with misery, have been rescued from the suffering and the moral evils of such a condition, and have been placed, with their descendants for some generations, beyond the reach of want, as surely as anything in human affairs can be considered sure.'

Extract from 'Emigration from the Isle of Skye'



CASE STUDY

THE DUTCH HUNGER WINTER (1944-45)



The Dutch Hunger Winter, occurring during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in World War II, also triggered internal migration. As food became increasingly scarce in urban areas, particularly in the western Netherlands, people embarked on desperate journeys.

Movement to less affected regions: Some Dutch citizens moved from the worst-affected western provinces to the relatively better-off eastern and southern regions.

Movement of children: This dire period led to the evacuation of thousands of children from urban areas in the western part of the country, particularly around cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, to rural areas in the north and east. The objective was to protect them from the compounded threats of starvation, harsh winter conditions, and the dangers of ongoing wartime conflict.

Organised by resistance groups and Christian Churches, the evacuation efforts were vital for survival. Children were transported by trains, barges, and horse-drawn carts to foster homes in safer, agricultural regions where food was more accessible. Despite the harsh circumstances, these evacuations were generally successful in providing a lifeline for many children, illustrating the resilience and solidarity of the Dutch people during one of the darkest periods of their history.

*Dutch Children
- Image Credit 2*

These migrations were often temporary, with people returning to their homes after obtaining food. However, they highlight the extreme measures individuals were willing to take to survive.

In both cases, these internal migrations had lasting effects on the affected societies, influencing population distribution, urban development, and cultural identities. They serve as poignant examples of how famines can reshape the demographic landscape of a country, forcing people to abandon their homes and communities in the basic human quest for survival.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might people be forced into internal migration in times of famine and emergency?



EXTERNAL MIGRATION

Famines have often forced populations to emigrate in search of survival and better living conditions. The devastating impact of a famine goes beyond immediate hunger, as it disrupts social, economic, and cultural systems, often leaving migration as a viable response for those affected.

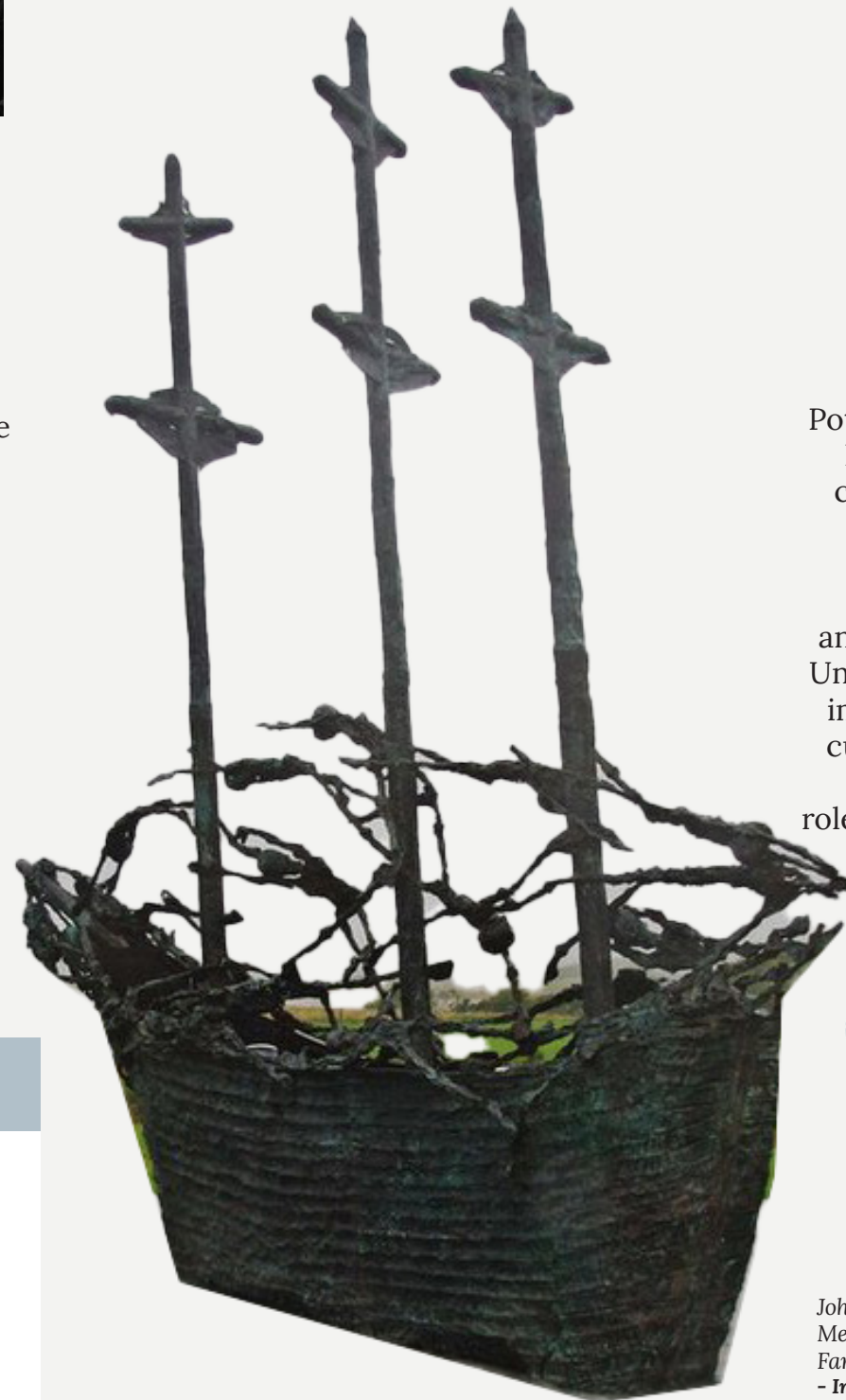
In desperation, people see no way of survival in their home nation and feel that they have no option other than to leave in order to ensure both their own and their family's lives and futures.



CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

One of the most poignant examples is the Irish Potato Famine, or the Great Famine, which struck Ireland between 1845 and 1852. The famine was caused by a potato disease known as late blight, which destroyed the staple crop. As a result, approximately one million people died, and another million emigrated to escape starvation and poverty. The Irish emigrated primarily to the United States, Canada, and Australia, significantly impacting the makeup of the population and the cultural landscapes of these nations. In America, for instance, Irish immigrants played a crucial role in shaping urban cultures and contributing to industrial growth.



*John Behan's Coffin Ship
Memorial to the Great Irish
Famine / with detail
- Image Credit 3*



CASE STUDY

THE YEMEN FAMINE (2016-PRESENT)

- Image Credit 4



Fast forward to the 21st century, and the ongoing famine in Yemen serves as a contemporary example. Yemen has faced severe food insecurity due to prolonged conflict, economic instability, and humanitarian blockades, leading to what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Since the conflict began in 2014, with famine following in 2016, millions of Yemenis have been internally displaced, while others have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, and Somalia.

In both the Irish and Yemeni examples, emigration serves as a survival mechanism amidst staggering hardship. While the motivations for emigration often include the immediate need for food and safety, the search for long-term stability and opportunity are often also important.

These migrations prompted by famine underscore the intersection of environmental disasters and geopolitical factors, and highlight the resilience and adaptability of human societies in the face of life-threatening challenges. They also underscore the need for far-reaching international responses to aid affected regions and lessen the impact of such crises on global migration patterns.

DISCUSSION POINT

What might happen to people if migration is not an option in times of famine?



WHY COUNTRIES MAY BE WILLING TO ACCEPT MIGRANTS



- Image Credit 5

Countries may have been willing to accept immigrants escaping famine for a variety of reasons, including humanitarian, economic, social, and political factors:

Humanitarian Concerns

Many countries offer asylum and support to those fleeing dire situations like famine out of compassion and a sense of global responsibility. Humanitarian aid and accepting refugees reflect international commitments to human rights and welfare.

Economic Benefits

Immigrants can significantly contribute to a host country's economy by filling labour shortages, bringing diverse skills, and stimulating economic growth through entrepreneurship and increased demand for goods and services.

Cultural Enrichment

Immigrants bring cultural diversity, enriching the social fabric with new perspectives, traditions, and cuisines. This cultural exchange can enhance community experiences and promote social progress.

Political Strategy

For some countries, accepting refugees can enhance their international standing and strengthen diplomatic relationships. It aligns them with global policies and initiatives for human rights and may bring in support or alliances with countries and organisations backing the refugees.

Population Support

In regions with declining birthrates or ageing populations, immigrants can help maintain population levels and ensure a stable future consumer and tax base, supporting public services and social systems.

Moral and Ethical Obligations

Many countries are guided by moral and ethical principles rooted in religious, cultural, or national values that emphasise helping those in need, particularly during global crises like famines.

WE
ARE
ALL
IMMIGRANTS



- Image Credit 6



Migrant support protest London
- Image Credit 7

CONCLUSION

Overall, accepting immigrants escaping famine is often the result of a mix of altruistic intentions and pragmatic needs of the host nations, reflecting a common humanity and connected global community.

However, there have always been issues around acceptance of migrants for host countries too. The potential cost of supporting those escaping famine, the impact on services and infrastructure of hosting an increased population, the perception that national identity is being diluted, and competition for employment, can all be problematic in migration to another country.

DISCUSSION POINT

In what ways has immigration and emigration been experienced in your country or community? Has famine played a part in that migration?

OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



ROLE-PLAY DEBATE

Divide the class into groups representing different stakeholders (e.g., migrants, host country citizens, government officials). Have them debate the pros and cons of accepting migrants during a famine crisis.



DIGITAL TIMELINE

Using a timeline creation tool (e.g., TimelineJS), students create a visual timeline of a major famine-induced migration event, highlighting key dates, events, and the progression of the migration.



MIGRATION JOURNEY MAPPING

Using a large world map or regional map, have students trace potential migration routes during a famine. They can use string or markers to show movement and discuss the challenges faced along these routes.



NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE

Students create a physical newspaper front page reporting on a historical famine and its impact on migration. They can include headlines, articles, and images to convey the situation.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Unknown, 1853

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_view/157

Image Credit 2

Menno Huizinga, 1945

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/76

Image Credit 3

John Behan, 1997

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/media/memorialsite/behannationalfaminemorial_2.jpg

Image Credit 4

Mathieu Genon, 2008

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhdam#/media/File:Akhdam_children_Taizz.jpg

Image Credit 5

Miguel Discart

<https://rapidtransition.org/stories/migrants-welcome-how-international-hospitality-in-a-warming-world-benefits-everyone/>

Image Credit 6

Alisdare1 2018

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:We_are_all_immigrants_-_Banner_at_the_anti-Trump_rally_in_London._%2832575834102%29.jpg

Image Credit 7

Alisdaire Hickson, 2012

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alisdare/52759689824/in/album-72177720306894113>

LESSON TWO: REFUGEES IN NEW SOCIETIES

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will look at the impact of migration on refugees entering new countries and the difficulties they faced, and will also examine the perceptions of refugees in their new host societies. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Greek Famine (1941-44)**
- » **The Somalian Refugee Crisis (1992-Present)**

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Discuss the reasons why people migrated to certain countries.
- ✓ Understand how new communities were met, with a particular emphasis on media coverage.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ To understand the difficulties faced by refugees on arriving in new societies.
- ✓ Describe the significance of how different refugees were treated.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Anti-Irish attitudes in Liverpool](#)
- > [Graphic novel describing anti-Irish attitudes a refugee experiences in Canada](#)
- > [Picture of people waiting to leave during the Holodomor](#)
- > [Very short newspaper article from the New York Dispatch mentioning the emperor gave people permission to emigrate](#)

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen, refugees seeking to escape from famine and its effects have existed at many times throughout history. The need for food, the need for security and safety, and the effects of eviction can all drive people to leave their homes, and their homelands, in times of famine.

Whilst the human instinct for survival is a very powerful driver in leading people to emigrate or flee famine, such refugees or migrants have often faced great hardships as a result of their decision to leave.



WHERE TO GO?

Very often, those leaving a place can be drawn to a particular country or community for their escape. This may be because of practical reasons of geography or ease of travel, for cultural reasons because of a shared language or heritage, for religious reasons of a shared faith, or for other local factors.



- Image Credit 1

Irish immigrants crossed the Atlantic in what later came to be known as “coffin ships,” because of their often dangerous unhygienic and overcrowded conditions. Despite the difficult journey, the promise of work and a new life spurred the movement.

Upon arrival, many Irish settled in urban centres like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where they faced significant challenges such as discrimination and competition for low-wage labour. Nevertheless, their willingness to take on difficult jobs such as miners, builders and servants, often under harsh conditions, gradually established an Irish presence in these cities.

Over time, the Irish community contributed significantly to the economic and cultural development of the United States. They played roles in building infrastructure, joining labour movements, and integrating into the political landscape. The legacy of this emigration is substantial, as Irish Americans today continue to celebrate their rich heritage and the resilience of their ancestors.

A DIFFICULT JOURNEY?

Refugee journeys have traditionally been difficult and dangerous.

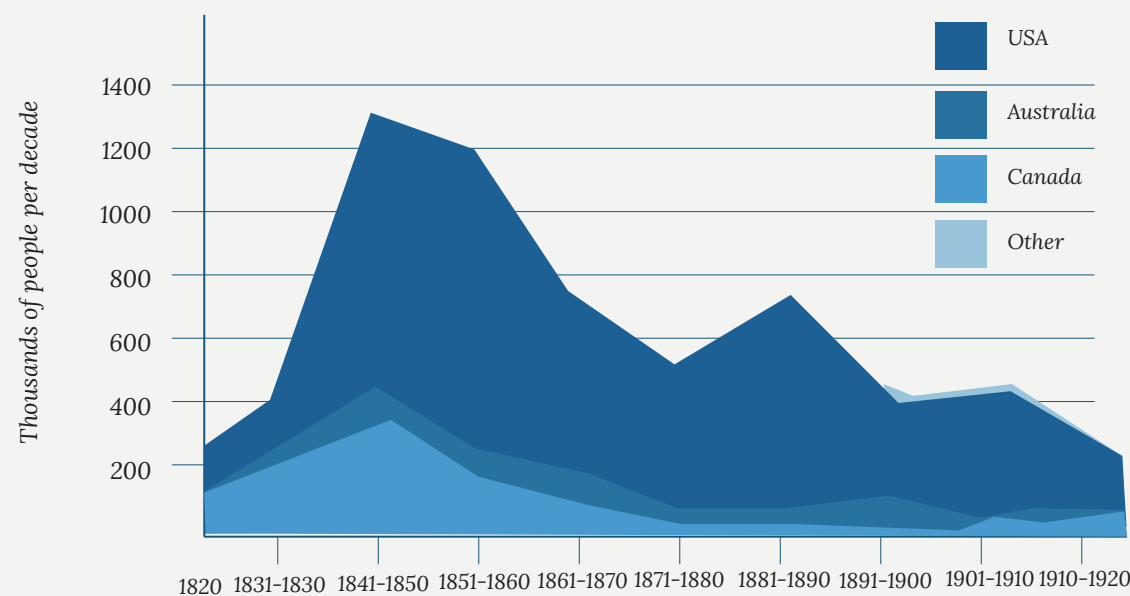
The desperation to escape famine, compounded by the poverty that often characterises famine victims, has repeatedly led, to people taking risks or being vulnerable to unscrupulous profiteers in their desire to get away.

It has not been uncommon for people to be so desperate to escape their famine, so weakened before they even start their journey, and so poorly treated, that they do not survive the journey to their destination.

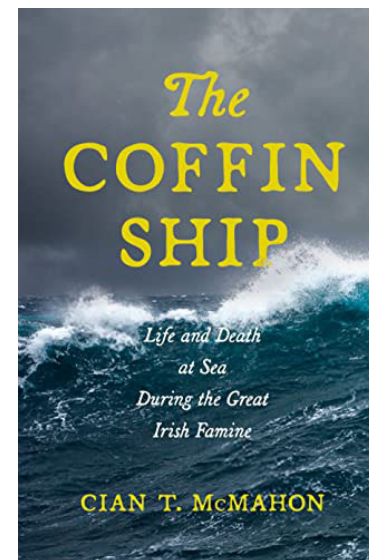
CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

DESTINATION OF OVERSEAS IRISH EMIGRANTS 1820-1920



The United States became a prominent destination for Irish emigration from the Famine of 1845-52 for a number of reasons. Geographically, it was the next country to be reached when departing the west coast of Ireland (though on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean); linguistically English was a shared language; culturally it was largely a Christian country with a high degree of European heritage; and economically it was perceived to offer greater opportunities.



Cian McMahon's exploration of the Irish exodus to Canada in 1847 provides a gripping narrative of the perilous journey faced by Irish emigrants fleeing the Great Famine. In his account, McMahon delves into the dire conditions aboard many of these ships, which were often overcrowded and unsanitary. This sometimes led to high mortality rates from disease and starvation. In 1847, the upper-class Stephen de Vere, son of a landlord, travelled steerage to Canada with a number of tenants to witness these conditions, and reported in an influential published letter on how passengers were “huddled together without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart”.

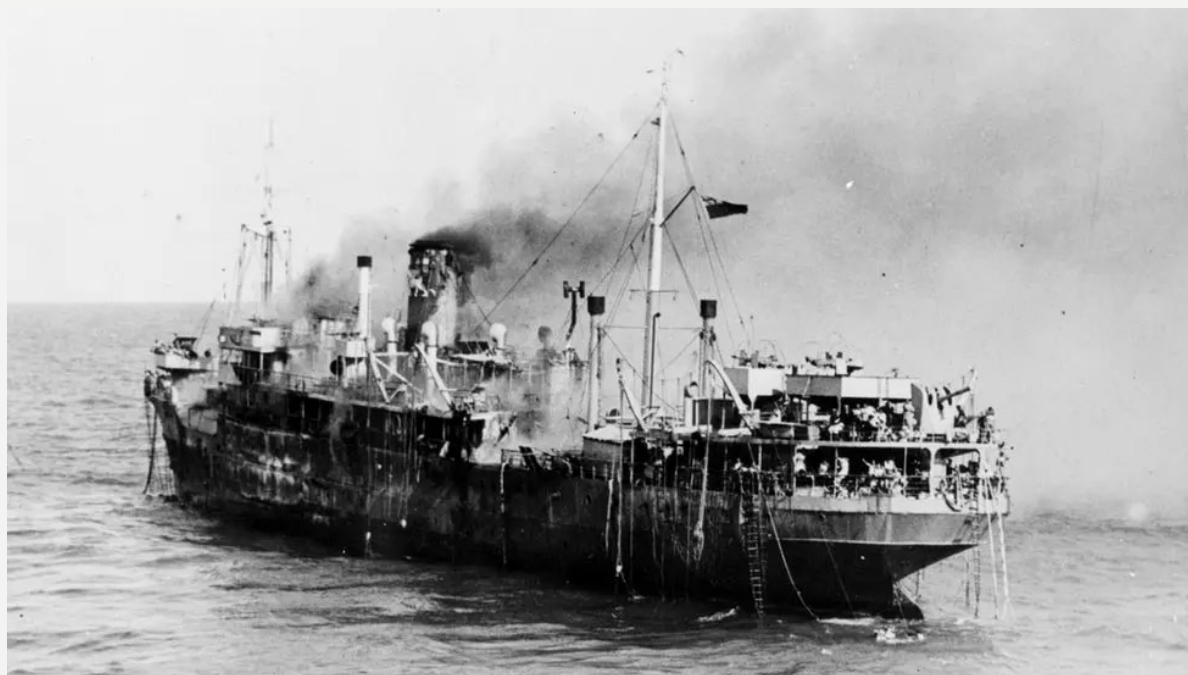
In the memory of the famine, these vessels came to be called ‘coffin ships’, though McMahon also shows that excessive mortality actually only occurred in a minority of cases.

On arrival in Canada, immigrants faced quarantine and often unwelcoming attitudes. McMahon's work pays homage to the enduring spirit of the Irish who braved horrible conditions to secure a future for their descendants, reshaping the demographic and cultural landscape of Canada.



CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)



- Image Credit 2

Even in more recent famine migrations conditions have often been perilous. In 1942, 500 Greek famine refugees were aboard a British vessel taking them to a camp in Gaza to escape the famine at home, when the overcrowded vessel caught fire, killing 33 passengers – including 14 children.

- Image Credit 3



A WARM WELCOME?

The arrival of refugees escaping famine can be challenging for the society that is absorbing them.



The new arrivals are often in need of help and support to recover from the effects of the famine and can be seen as a drain on resources in their host country, as well as destabilising the local culture by arriving in numbers, and with the potential to bring further friends and relatives to follow them once they settle in the new country.

In these circumstances, famine refugees have rarely enjoyed universally warm welcomes in their new homes, adding to the trauma that they may have already experienced.

THE SOMALI REFUGEE CRISIS



CASE STUDY



Somali migrants in Kenya
- Image Credit 4

The Somali Refugee Crisis, driven by famine, conflict, and drought, has been ongoing since the early 1990s, with a particularly severe impact in the 2011 famine. Thousands fled to neighbouring Kenya, seeking refuge primarily in the Dadaab refugee camp, one of the world's largest.

Despite Kenya's initial open-door policy and response to the humanitarian crisis, Somali refugees have frequently encountered hostility and discrimination. The influx strained local resources and led to increased tensions with host communities. Over time, fears about security, economic burden, and cultural differences fuelled negative perceptions of the refugees.

Government policies often reflected this hostility, leading to calls for the closure of refugee camps and pressure to repatriate Somalis, sometimes against international humanitarian principles. Refugees faced restricted movement, limited access to employment, and challenges in obtaining legal documentation, contributing to social marginalisation. This case highlights the complexities and challenges surrounding migration, integration, and the balance between national security concerns and humanitarian responsibilities.

CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

One notable instance of a country welcoming famine refugees occurred during the Great Irish Famine of 1845-1852. As we learned above, Canada, then a British colony, received and assisted a significant number of Irish immigrants fleeing starvation and disease.

In 1847, often called “Black ‘47” due to the famine’s peak intensity, around 100,000 Irish refugees arrived in Canada. Despite the challenges of dealing with such large numbers of arrivals, many Canadians showed remarkable compassion, though there was also sustained resistance to Irish immigration. The city of Toronto, with a population of only 20,000 at the time, took in 38,560 Irish famine refugees.

Canadian authorities and citizens mobilised to provide food, shelter, and medical care. Quarantine stations were established to manage disease outbreaks. Many Canadians opened their homes to the refugees, and communities worked together to help the newcomers integrate.

Though by no means universal, such welcoming responses demonstrated humanitarian principles in action and significantly shaped Canada’s demographic and cultural landscape.

Famine memorial in Toronto
- Image Credit 5



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“By the 1880s, the Irish were the single largest non-French ethnic group in Canada, with Irish-born amounting to nearly 25% of the population. Despite the dire situation they had left in Ireland, many Irish Famine emigrants and their children achieved remarkable success in Canada.”

Dr Laura Smith, Canada Ireland Foundation

The Irish immigrants and their descendants became an integral part of Canadian society, contributing to the country’s development and diversity.

> CONCLUSION

The desire to escape famine and the human instinct to survive can be a catalyst for those affected to seek to leave and move to a place where they feel that they will be safer and can prosper.

The circumstances that lead to this decision, and the desperation to survive, can lead to some very dangerous journeys and, even if the journey is negotiated successfully, it may lead to a hostile or challenging reception from the new community. However, migrants can make a very positive impact on a new country, and have been significant in shaping many nationalities over history.

Famine has been a key driver of global and local migration over many years and continues to be so today.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might accepting refugees be seen as challenging by some people? Do you think that your community offers a safe and welcoming environment for refugees? Give reasons for your answers.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Using a tool like Adobe Spark or Canva, students create a digital story from the perspective of a famine refugee, describing their journey and experiences in their new society.



SUITCASE ACTIVITY

Students are given a small box or paper “suitcase” and must decide what essential items they would pack if they were fleeing a famine. They then present and explain their choices to the class.



WELCOME PACKAGE DESIGN

In groups, students design a “welcome package” for refugees arriving in their community. This could include information booklets, maps, and lists of resources. They present their packages to the class.



INFOGRAPHIC CREATION

Using an infographic tool (e.g., Piktochart or Canva), students create an infographic highlighting statistics and facts about refugees’ integration into new societies.



HISTORICAL LETTER WRITING

Students write a letter from the perspective of either a famine refugee or a member of a host society, describing their experiences and feelings about the integration process. They can then exchange letters and respond to each other



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Thomas Faed - Glasgow Life Museums
<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-last-of-the-clan-83914>

Image Credit 2

Imperial War Museum, 1945
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36499727>

Image Credit 3

UNHCR
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/un-refugee-chief-calls-concerted-action-defend-asylum-international-day-tolerance>

Image Credit 4

Ingrid Prestetun/NRC
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/un-refugee-chief-calls-concerted-action-defend-asylum-international-day-tolerance>
Roger Kohn, 2016
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_Park#/media/File:The_Migrants,_Rowan_Gillespie.jpg

Image Credit 5

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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