

# Our Stories - Situation Script

The following script is designed to be used in the [Our Stories – Shabnam’s Refugee Experience Settling in Australia – Years 8 & 9](#) lesson:

“This exercise involves each pair engaging with seven real scenarios experienced by Shabnam, a 24-year old Hazara woman from a town near the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, who arrived in Australia as a 14-year-old refugee in 2009. For the sake of this exercise, you will be stepping into the shoes of Shabnam, and trying to imagine yourself as a newly arrived



refugee, trying to build a new life in Australia. Throughout the exercise, remember that Shabnam was about your age when she arrived in Australia.

You grew up in a town in Pakistan, near the border with Afghanistan. You and your family are Hazaras, an ethnic minority that is ill-treated and subject to hostility. Recently your area became very unsafe, and your family and community began to fear for their lives. You and your family were forced to escape your home and come to Australia as refugees. You are 14 years old.

It’s time to start at your new school in a suburb outside of the CBD. You have been placed in a class with other classmates who speak English as a second language. You are excited to make friends, but you are a little insecure about your English. Your accent is different from your classmates’, and you’re worried about being teased or excluded. What do you do?

- OPTION 1 – Build up the courage to introduce yourself to a group of classmates at lunchtime.
- OPTION 2 – Wait to see if anyone will come over and welcome you. You don’t feel comfortable enough to approach them.

Almost all of the states and territories in Australia make education compulsory for all school-aged children, regardless of refugee or asylum seeker status. However, for refugees and people seeking asylum, school fees and other costs such as books and uniforms can be expensive. Many states and territories do not make it clear in the relevant legislation whether refugees are eligible for fee-waivers or funding. This can be frustrating and stressful for refugees and people seeking asylum and can be a practical barrier for children to access public education.

Source: [Liberty Victoria Rights Advocacy Project report “States of Refuge: Access to Health, Housing and Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees in Australia](#)

Being the new student in a school can be hard. Which of the following three obstacles do you think you would face when trying to make new friends?



- You have a different accent to the other kids. You're worried that they won't understand you.
- Body language cues are very different here to what you're used to back home. You think you might be misunderstood.
- You don't know the local slang. You're concerned that you won't know the right thing to say.

You have now been in Australia for a few months. Your whole year level is starting to get excited about an upcoming school camp. This could be a great opportunity to deepen some friendships. The camp will cost \$250, and you feel guilty asking your parents for the money. You know they are under some pressure financially and have already made a lot of sacrifices for you. Which of the two following options would you take:

- OPTION 1 – Give your parents the consent forms but tell them it's no big deal if you don't go.
- OPTION 2 – Protect your parents from the shame of not having enough money to send you to camp. Don't bring the consent forms home.

In the end, you didn't want to burden your parents. You don't even bring the consent forms home.

Some refugees arrive in Australia with a comfortable financial situation. However, many refugees and people seeking asylum arrive in Australia with few financial resources and often have to rebuild their lives with little money. Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) is the program that supports vulnerable migrants who are waiting for the government's decision on a visa application, including people seeking asylum. However, the number of people eligible for this support has been reduced significantly in recent years.

Source: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/seekingsafety/asylum/srss/>

Newly arrived refugees face significant barriers to finding work. In 2017, a Centre for Policy Development report found that long-term, less than 50% of skilled and qualified refugees find work in their area of expertise and experience.

Source: [Centre for Policy Development report, Settling Better: Reforming refugee employment and settlement services](#)

Someone in your class has asked if you want to come over to their house after school. You want to go. You think you might have a lot in common. But tonight, your mum and dad have asked you to stay home. They don't speak much English and need your help to book a medical appointment over the phone and to speak to the phone company about an unpaid bill. Which of the following two options would you take:

- OPTION 1 – Tell your parents you will help them another night. Tonight is your first chance to make a new friend in Australia. It's important!
- OPTION 2 – Tell your friend that you can't come over. Stay home and help your parents.

Unfortunately, you have family responsibilities that most of your classmates don't have. You make up an excuse about why you can't come over tonight.



You have arrived in Australia and your English is limited. Which of the following parts of your life do you think would be most impacted by this?

- Finding a part-time job
- Making friends
- Assimilating into Australian culture
- Booking and getting to appointments.

There are many basic things you need to do in your first few weeks, not only for yourself but also for your parents, whose English is not as good as yours. Many of these tasks are things your parents would usually be helping you with. Now the roles are reversed. It's very daunting.

The information that refugees and people seeking asylum need in order to know their rights is often difficult to find or understand. Sometimes the information itself is not easy to find because it is contained in a government policy that is not publicly available. Other times, the information available online is not up to date. These obstacles make it difficult for people seeking asylum and refugees to have a clear picture about what rights they have and how to access the services they need.

Source: [Liberty Victoria Rights Advocacy Project report "States of Refuge: Access to Health, Housing and Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees in Australia"](#)

You have arrived in Australia and your family is linked in with the local Hazara community, who help you to find short-term housing for the first few weeks. But your family needs to find a longer-term housing solution. Which of the following two options would you select?

- OPTION 1 – Rent an apartment or small house near the city or in any suburb that you can afford
- OPTION 2 – Rent an apartment or small house close to the local Hazara community

For those who chose Option 1, you have only just arrived, so it will be very difficult to afford the rent. Even if you could afford it, it is very hard to prove to anyone that you would be a trustworthy tenant. You don't know anyone in Australia, so you don't have anyone who can give you a positive reference. For those who chose Option 2, living close to your community makes you feel safe and understood. Your community support each other, which makes starting a new life in Australia a little easier. It is also a little easier to find a rental property here because it is further away from the city.

You have found a place to live. But how will you set up your house? What do you think a 'home' should look like? On your Student Worksheet under Question 7, draw a sketch of your home in Australia.

Shabnam's home in her Hazara town in Pakistan was very different to a home you might find in Australia. Toilets were outside the house, and the whole family slept in the living room on mattresses called Toshak. In the morning, the family would move the mattresses to the side for people to sit on.

The concept of 'home' is not the same all over the world. When refugees arrive in Australia, their home life in Australia will often be very different from what they are used to.



Moving to a new country is difficult in many ways, but learning the cultural rules and meanings of your new home life is especially challenging.

Source: [“Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants”](#)

Almost everyone at your school has Facebook and Instagram accounts. But you’re not sure if you should set up your own accounts. You want to fit in and social media is where a lot of socialising happens at your new school. However, in your home country, women were sceptical of social media because it had the potential to bring shame and dishonour to your family. On your Student Worksheet under Question 8, tick what you would do. You have 2 minutes to choose between:

- OPTION 1 – Set up your social media presence – this is your new home and you want to fit in.
- OPTION 2 – You’re not sure how you feel about it yet. You’ll wait a few months before deciding.

You decide to wait. You’re not used to using social media like your classmates here are. You’re worried that you will embarrass yourself.

Attitudes toward immigration and cultural diversity in Australia are largely positive. 63% of people agree or strongly agree that “accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger.”

Source: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/publications-external/mapping-social-cohesion-2017/>

Tick the areas of life that you think would be most different between a newly arrived refugee’s life in Australia and the life they had in their home country:

- How people interact with their neighbours, family and friends
- Where people buy their food and other basic goods
- What people do for entertainment and leisure
- How people structure their houses
- Access to running water at home.”

