

33 - A list of expressions for everyday communication

Aim: To help you to choose expressions that are related to scenarios that you plan to focus on in your language support activities with refugees.

Introduction

Most of the items on this list are 'set' or 'fixed' phrases suitable for people with elementary proficiency in the language. Some of these expressions can also be found in the lists of common phrases included in many travel guides. Unlike those lists, the phrases and expressions in this tool, and those in the equivalent list in other languages, are based on the 'reference level descriptions' used in language teaching. These descriptions are derived from the 'common reference levels' described in the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#) (CEFR - chapter 3) and are supported by language learning research. More information about reference level descriptions in different languages can be found on the Council of Europe's Language Policy website (www.coe.int/lang → RLD).

The expressions have been selected taking into account that, while refugees are no different from other language learners, they often have specific urgent needs when communicating in another language. When using the scenarios, this list can be used to provide ideas about which expressions to include in the activities related to the scenarios you have chosen.

The lists are organised in sections and in three parallel columns. Each section contains expressions in the same related group, for example, 'expressing emotions and feelings'. Following a brief introduction to the section, the column on the left lists the communicative functions concerned; the middle one contains the type of language (fixed phrases, vocabulary, grammar) that is suitable for each function at elementary levels, and the third gives examples of the expressions in use in the form of questions, answers or other utterances.

Parallel lists of expressions are provided in several languages. Equivalent expressions across different languages can be found by using the reference numbers for each function, which are the same for each list.

Communicating in English for beginners

1. Personal expression

It is very important for refugees to talk about themselves in order to start constructing their identity in another language.

1.1 Introducing oneself

They need to be able to state their names and to be aware that their names might cause certain reactions, or be mispronounced.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
1.1.1	Saying who you are. Introducing yourself. <i>Take account of the structure of names (here, the structure of English names is used).</i>	<i>I am</i> first name. First name, family name. <i>My name is</i> first name, family name. <i>I am</i> first name, family name.	<i>I am Iklas.</i> <i>Hello, Hector Vion.</i> <i>My name is Bond, James Bond.</i> <i>I am Samir Milled.</i> <i>Hello, I am your neighbour.</i>
1.1.2	Spelling, pronouncing <i>(possibility of starting to learn how to say the letters of the first and second names).</i>	Spell. <i>... it is spelled ...</i>	<i>Mir Samii: M, I, R - then S,A,M,I,I</i> <i>Wassim; double U, A, double S, I, M</i>
1.1.3	Correcting a person's pronunciation <i>(when the name is mispronounced).</i>	<i>..., no, ...</i> <i>..., sorry, ...</i>	<i>No, not Wazim, Wassim.</i> <i>Sorry, it's Moussa, not Moussad.</i>

1.2 Talking about oneself

Refugees need to explain who they are, what they did before they left their country; they need to be able to tell their story in a simple way.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
1.2.1	Describing. <i>Requires mainly vocabulary.</i>	Verb phrase. The verb <i>to be</i> + [adjective].	<i>We have come from Ethiopia.</i> <i>I am tired. The children are OK.</i>
1.2.2	Telling a story. <i>Requires mainly vocabulary.</i> <i>At this level, using basic verb forms in statements like "me go through Greece" is acceptable.</i>	[Verbs (past tense)] + <i>and, and then, after that.</i>	<i>I thought about it and decided to leave.</i> <i>I looked everywhere and found my mobile phone.</i>

1.3 Expressing emotions and feelings

Due to the difficulties faced by refugees, the personal feelings they wish to express, especially when talking about themselves, their loved ones, their country, etc., are more predictable than would normally be the case.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
1.3.1	Expressing pleasure, joy.	<i>That's great/fantastic! Wonderful!</i>	<i>You have a visa! That's fantastic!</i>
1.3.2	Expressing sadness.	<i>I am sad / unhappy. Things are bad/not good for me.</i>	<i>Things are bad for me at the moment!</i>
1.3.3	Expressing hope.	<i>I hope (that) ...</i>	<i>I hope (that) you are all right.</i>
1.3.4	Expressing disappointment.	<i>What a pity!</i>	<i>I can't come tomorrow. What a pity</i>
1.3.5	Expressing fear, anxiety.	<i>I am scared. I'm worried about + [noun].</i>	<i>I'm worried about my parents.</i>
1.3.6	Expressing relief.	<i>Phew! I feel better!</i>	<i>That's done. I feel better now!</i>
1.3.7	Expressing physical pain.	<i>Ouch! My [part of the body] hurts.</i>	<i>My feet hurt.</i>
1.3.8	Telling someone you like something.	<i>Ah! Oh! Wonderful! Great! Fantastic! Good! I like + [noun/verb]. What a great + [noun]!</i>	<i>I like walking/to walk. What a great day!</i>
1.3.9	Saying you do not like something or someone.	<i>What a great + [noun]! I hate + [noun/verb]. I don't like + [noun]. That is not + [adjective].</i>	<i>I hate Sundays. I don't like salad. That is not nice! This cake is not very nice.</i>
1.3.10	Expressing satisfaction. Expressing dissatisfaction, complaining.	<i>Perfect! Great! I'm so pleased! I don't like + [noun].</i>	<i>You've got your driver's licence! That's great! I don't like your attitude.</i>
1.3.11	Expressing surprise.	<i>Ah? Oh! What? Really? No!</i>	<i>No! I don't believe it!</i>
1.3.12	Expressing lack of surprise.	<i>(Yes) I know.</i>	<i>- There's been a mistake - Yes, I know!</i>
1.3.13	Expressing thanks, gratitude.	<i>Thank you (very much) for + [noun]. It's kind of you to + [verb].</i>	<i>Thank you for your invitation. It's kind of you to phone.</i>

1.4 Sharing emotions

Refugees need to have the language skills to share emotions during their day-to-day social interaction but also to talk about themselves and to talk to other refugees/migrants.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
1.4.1	Asking about feelings.	<i>Are you OK/all right? What's the matter? What's going on?</i>	<i>What's the matter? Are you ill?</i>
1.4.2	Asking about satisfaction or dissatisfaction.	<i>What's the problem? Is everything OK/all right?</i>	<i>You look pale. Is everything all right?</i>
1.4.3	Consoling, encouraging, comforting.	<i>It/everything will be all right!</i>	<i>Don't worry my friend; it will be all right.</i>
1.4.4	Expressing sympathy.	<i>I understand. You poor thing!</i>	<i>I understand, how awful! poor you.</i>
1.4.5	Reassuring.	<i>It's nothing. It's nothing to worry about.</i>	<i>Don't worry; it's not important.</i>

2. Social interaction

Good social interaction requires an understanding of different forms of polite language. It is important to remember that these may differ from one country to another.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
2.1	Thanking. Receiving thanks.	<i>Thank you. Thank you very much. You're welcome! Don't mention it!</i>	
2.2	Apologising.	<i>I'm sorry. I apologize. Sorry!</i>	<i>Sorry!</i>
2.3	Attracting someone's attention.	<i>Hello! Excuse me! Please Sir/Madam/Miss</i>	<i>Excuse me! Is it far to the post office? Excuse me! Where's the checkout, please? Excuse me, where is the exit?</i>
2.4	Greeting.	<i>Hello! Good morning/afternoon /evening/ Mr/Mrs/Miss + [name]. Hello Dad/Mum/darling/first name... Hi! How are you?</i>	
2.5	Answering greetings.	<i>Good morning/Good afternoon! Hello! I'm fine, and you? Good morning/afternoon/evening/ Mr/Mrs/Miss + [name]. Very well, thank you, and you?</i>	

2.6	Leave-taking.	<i>Goodbye!</i> <i>See you soon!</i> <i>See you ...</i> <i>Bye!</i>	<i>See you tomorrow! See you on Tuesday! See you later!</i>
2.7	Introducing someone.	First name. First name, family name <i>This is ...</i>	[gesture] <i>Adrian and</i> [gesture] <i>Lucy.</i> <i>This is Mr Williams, Andrew Williams.</i> <i>This is my daughter Nar.</i>
2.8	Welcoming someone.	<i>Welcome!</i> <i>Come in!</i> <i>It's good to see you.</i>	<i>Please come in!</i>
2.9	Congratulating.	<i>Well done!</i> <i>Excellent!</i> <i>Congratulations!</i>	
2.10	Wishing someone something.	<i>Have a nice/good + [noun]!</i> <i>Enjoy your + [noun].</i> <i>Happy + [noun].</i>	<i>Have a nice day/evening!</i> <i>Have a nice weekend!</i> <i>Best of luck!</i> <i>Enjoy your holiday!</i> <i>Have a good trip!</i> <i>Enjoy your meal!</i> <i>Happy birthday!</i> <i>Happy anniversary!</i>

3. Coping with conversations

Beginners need help with conversations. They can try to use the languages they know. But they can also ask the person they are conversing with to help them understand.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
3.1	Replacing a word you don't know with another, more generic term.	<i>Thing.</i>	<i>You know, the thing to open bottles with.</i>
3.2	Asking how to say something.	<i>What is the English word for...?</i> <i>How do you say... in English?</i> <i>What does... mean?</i> <i>What do you call [this].</i>	<i>What does "ingredient" mean?</i> <i>What do you call this in German?</i>
3.3	Asking a person whether they understand.	<i>Do you understand?</i> <i>Do you follow me?</i>	
3.4	Explaining a word or expression.	<i>... means ...</i> <i>A [noun] is/means ...</i> <i>..., is to [verb phrase].</i> <i>... means ...</i>	<i>"Kabir" means great in Arabic.</i> <i>A dromedary is a camel with one hump.</i> <i>A vaccination is to stop you from catching a virus.</i> <i>Gelato means ice cream.</i>
3.5	Telling someone you don't understand (very well).	<i>What?</i> <i>Pardon?</i> <i>I don't understand...</i>	<i>I don't understand the word "gelato".</i>

3.6	Asking someone to repeat.	<i>Can you say that again? Could you (can you) ...</i>	<i>Could you repeat that?</i>
3.7	Asking someone to speak more slowly.	<i>Can you/could you speak more slowly, please?</i>	
3.8	Asking someone to explain.	<i>What is a + [noun]?</i>	<i>What is a "mechoui"?</i>

4. Asking for information or an explanation

In a new life situation, many things are unfamiliar and refugees will need to ask for explanations.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
4.1	Identifying.	<i>This/that. This is [noun]. (Over) there.</i>	<i>I want one of those! This is a picture of my daughter. You have to take that street, there.</i>
4.2	Getting information.	<i>What ...? Who ...? When ...? Where ...? How ...? How much ...? Why ...? Right?</i>	<i>What did you say? Who is that? - It's my daughter. When are you leaving? Where is the post office? How do you get there? How much is it? The class is here, right?</i>
4.3	Responding to a request for information.	<i>... by giving information (place, time, quantity) ... by identifying something: This /It is with a question. ... by expressing one's ignorance: I don't know.</i>	<i>- When are you arriving? - Tomorrow, Monday. - Hello, it's me. - Do you like asparagus? What is asparagus? - Where is the bus stop? - I don't know.</i>
4.4	Confirming, denying and correcting.	<i>- Yes. - No.</i>	<i>- Do you like this? - Yes, very much! - Shall we buy a TV? - No, there's no need. - Oh no, that is a mistake!</i>

5. Expressing an opinion

It is often necessary to express an opinion when interacting socially. There are very simple ways to do this, even for beginners.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
5.1	Expressing an opinion.	<i>I think (that) ...</i>	<i>I think (that) Fadhila is cold</i>
5.2	Agreeing. More or less agreeing.	<i>Yes.</i> <i>(Yes). You're right.</i> <i>Maybe.</i> <i>If you say so.</i>	- <i>(Berlin is a big city) - Yes (it is).</i> - <i>(It's cold this morning.)- Yes, (you're right) it's not very warm.</i> - <i>(We should come back to this shop). Maybe.</i> - <i>(It's a great match!) - If you say so.</i>
5.3	Disagreeing. Disagreeing politely.	<i>No</i> <i>I don't agree/ I don't think so.</i> <i>Do you really think so?</i> <i>Are you sure?</i>	- <i>We're late - No we're not!</i> - <i>It's a great film! - I don't agree/ I think so!</i> - <i>He's right! - Do you really think so?</i>
5.4	Approving. Disapproving of something.	<i>I am in favour of + [verb phrase].</i> <i>I agree.</i> <i>I am against + [noun].</i>	<i>I am in favour of finding a solution.</i> <i>I am against this project.</i>
5.5	Protesting.	<i>Oh no!</i>	<i>Oh no! Another questionnaire!</i>
5.6	Saying you know. Saying you don't know.	<i>I know that ...</i> <i>I don't know.</i>	<i>I know that there is still a long way to go.</i> - <i>Is it closed on Sundays? - I don't know.</i>
5.7	Remembering. Saying one has forgotten. Reminding someone of something.	<i>I remember.</i> <i>I have forgotten.</i> <i>I don't remember.</i> <i>Remember?</i>	<i>Oh yes! I remember now; it's number 34!</i> <i>I've forgotten his name.</i> <i>Which bus goes to the station? - I don't remember.</i> <i>We're meeting tomorrow, remember?</i>
5.8	Expressing certainty. Expressing a probability.	<i>I am (absolutely) sure/certain that</i> <i>....</i> <i>Perhaps.</i> <i>Maybe.</i>	<i>I am sure that this is the right telephone number.</i> <i>Perhaps you're right.</i> <i>You may be right/maybe you're right.</i>
5.9	Expressing one's ability to do something.	<i>I can + [verb phrase].</i> <i>I know how to + [verb].</i>	<i>I can run a marathon.</i> <i>I know how to swim.</i>
5.10	Expressing the desire to do/have something.	<i>I would like + [noun or infinitive verb].</i>	<i>I would like a cup of coffee please.</i> <i>I would like to learn German.</i>
5.11	Expressing one's intention to do something.	<i>I am thinking of + [verb-ing].</i>	<i>I am thinking of moving soon.</i>
5.12	Expressing an obligation, or prohibition.	<i>I must + [verb phrase].</i> <i>You must + [verb phrase].</i> <i>No + [verb-ing].</i>	<i>I must be home before midnight.</i> <i>You must go to sleep now.</i> <i>No smoking in this building.</i>

6. Getting something done

Language is a means of interacting with other people at all times in daily life at work, at home, etc.

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
6.1	Asking someone to do something. ...by suggesting. ...asking for help. Ordering (in a café or restaurant). Asking politely (in order to buy something, for example).	Imperative sentence. <i>You must + [verb phrase].</i> <i>... isn't it?</i> <i>Can you/ Could you + [verb phrase], please?</i> [Noun], <i>please.</i> <i>I will have + [noun].</i> <i>I would like + [noun].</i>	<i>Sit down.</i> <i>Press the red button.</i> <i>You must turn left at the next traffic light.</i> <i>It's cold in here, isn't it?</i> (Meaning: "please close the window"). <i>Can you help me please?</i> <i>Could you hold this for me?</i> <i>Two coffees, please.</i> <i>I will have the lamb.</i> <i>I would like/I'd like a loaf of bread, please.</i>
6.2	Responding to a request. ...by accepting. ...accepting with reservations. ...refusing.	<i>Yes.</i> <i>OK.</i> <i>Why not...</i> <i>Yes, but...</i> <i>No.</i> <i>Sorry.</i> <i>I don't know.</i>	- <i>Are you coming to the market with me? - Yes, with pleasure.</i> - <i>Shall we go to the swimming pool tomorrow? - OK, why not?</i> - <i>Can you lend me your mobile phone? - Sorry, no.</i>
6.3	Suggesting that someone does something.	Imperative sentence. <i>Do you want + [verb phrase]?</i> Interrogative sentence. <i>We could + [verb phrase].</i>	<i>Go in my place, if you like.</i> <i>Do you want to come this evening?</i> <i>Shall we go out?</i> <i>We could have lunch together.</i>
6.4	Offering to help someone.	<i>Can I + [verb]?</i> <i>Let me, let us + [verb].</i>	<i>Can I help you?</i> <i>Let me try.</i>
6.5	Offering to give or lend something to someone.	<i>Would you like [noun]?</i> <i>Do you want...?</i>	<i>Would you like some water?</i> <i>Do you want to borrow my umbrella?</i>
6.6	Replying to a suggestion ...by agreeing. ...with reservations. ...hesitating or evading the question. ...by refusing.	<i>Yes/yes, OK.</i> <i>All right.</i> <i>Yes, but ...</i> <i>If you like...</i> <i>I'm not sure.</i> <i>No (thank you).</i> <i>Sorry.</i>	- <i>Shall we do the shopping together? All right.</i> - <i>Shall we play cards? -If you like...</i> - <i>Can you lend me 10 euros? I'm not sure I can.</i> - <i>Would you like a drink? -No thank you.</i> <i>Can you lend me a pen? - sorry (I haven't got one).</i>
6.7	Giving advice.	Imperative sentence. <i>You should/ought to + [verb phrase].</i>	<i>Read this, it's good.</i> <i>You should/ought to take a holiday.</i>
6.8	Warning.	<i>Mind + [noun].</i> <i>Mind out.</i>	<i>Mind the step!</i> <i>Mind out – there's a bus coming.</i>

6.9	Encouraging.	<i>Come on!</i> <i>You can do it!</i>	<i>Come on! Only one more floor to go.</i>
6.10	Asking for permission.	<i>May I + [verb] (please)?</i> <i>I would really like to + [verb phrase].</i>	<i>May I go out, please?</i> <i>I would really like to go to the cinema.</i>
6.11	Giving permission.	<i>Yes, OK.</i> <i>Of course (you can)!</i>	<i>-Can I read just a bit longer? - OK</i> <i>- Of course you can.</i>
6.12	Refusing.	<i>No.</i> <i>I don't want to / I can't.</i>	<i>Why don't you come with us? - I don't want to / I can't.</i>
6.13	Prohibiting.	[Noun/verb-ing] <i>are/is not allowed.</i> <i>No + [verb-ing].</i> <i>You must not.</i> Negative imperative.	<i>Smoking is not allowed in here.</i> <i>No smoking in here.</i> <i>You must not smoke in hospitals.</i> <i>Don't open this door!</i> <i>Do not use after June 2022.</i>
6.14	Promising.	<i>I promise + [verb phrase].</i> <i>I promise.</i>	<i>I promise to get home soon.</i> <i>I'll be home soon. I promise.</i>
6.15	Reproaching.	<i>You shouldn't + [verb phrase].</i>	<i>You shouldn't lose your temper.</i>

7. Space, time and quantity

In many situations, it is necessary to know how to express quantities and to situate oneself in time. The following ways of doing so will need to be combined with the expressions in the examples above

		EXPRESSIONS	EXAMPLES
7.1	Space (location, geography).	<i>To be.</i> <i>Here, there, over there.</i> <i>Left, right.</i> <i>High(er), low(er).</i> <i>North, south, east, west.</i> <i>Inside, outside.</i> <i>In front of, behind.</i> <i>In, on, under.</i> earth, sea, island, mountain, hill lake, river, beach, forest village, town, city, centre, street, road, square suburbs, countryside	<i>They are in London.</i> <i>I'm getting off here.</i> <i>Take the second on the right.</i> <i>My room is higher up.</i> <i>I live in the south of the city.</i> <i>Leave your shoes outside.</i> <i>Sit in front of me!</i> <i>The sugar is in that cupboard. Put it on the table.</i> <i>You can see the sea from the top of that hill.</i> <i>Our village is about 10 kms from the city.</i> <i>I live in the suburbs not far from the centre of town</i>

7.2	Space (distance, movement).	<p><i>Far, near (close). From...to.</i></p> <p><i>Return ticket. (There and back). Arrival, departure. Entrance, exit. Go, come, get on, get off. Stay in/at Walk, run, cross</i></p> <p><i>Leave, depart Travel from/to Go back to/ return to</i></p>	<p><i>The bus stop is very near/close. It takes 6 minutes to get from my house to yours. Are you travelling there and back? - Do you want a return ticket? Arrivals, level 3. Emergency exit. Come with me. I stayed in Greece for a week I'll walk to the station Cross the road at the lights The train leaves/departs in 5 minutes We travelled from Italy to France by bus She went back to the shop</i></p>
7.3	Expression of time (division, duration).	<p><i>Year, Month, week. Spring, summer, autumn, winter. January ...December. Week, weekend. Monday...Sunday. Long, a long time, a short time. Minute, moment.</i></p>	<p><i>I'm going next year/month/week! It's nearly the end of spring. My birthday is in August. Have a nice weekend! Is it Monday or Tuesday today? I won't stay long. Just a minute, please.</i></p>
7.4	Expression of time (situating an event in time).	<p><i>Present, past, future.</i></p> <p><i>Now, today. Yesterday, before. Tomorrow. Still. Always, never.</i></p>	<p><i>In the past I was a teacher. Where will you live in the future? I'm stopping now. Things were better before. I'll do it tomorrow. Are you still asleep? I never drink coffee.</i></p>
7.5	Expressing quantity	<p><i>Numbers: one, two...</i></p> <p><i>Measures: litre, kilo, kilometre, centimetre, square metre.</i></p> <p><i>Adverbs: very, a lot, a little.</i></p> <p><i>Adverbs: enough, too much/not enough.</i></p> <p><i>Adverbs: less, more, too.</i></p> <p><i>Size: small, short, big, tall, high.</i></p> <p><i>Speed: fast, slow, quickly (adverb).</i></p> <p><i>Weight: Heavy, light, weighs.</i></p> <p><i>Surface: big, small.</i></p> <p><i>Temperature: hot, cold.</i></p>	<p><i>The size of the apartment is 42 square metres.</i></p> <p><i>We are a little tired. It is too far for me.</i></p> <p><i>It is less expensive here. He is tall for his age. This building is very high. Don't drive so fast!</i></p> <p><i>My suitcase weighs 23 kilos! What a big garden! It's cold this morning.</i></p>