

# Subpopulations of English Learners— Refugees

Massachusetts Department of  
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY  
EDUCATION



# Who is considered a Refugee?

- ★ There may be many different definitions of a refugee.
- ★ Here is the definition from the Geneva Convention (amended in 1967): (A refugee is a person who,) “owing to a **well-founded fear** of being **persecuted** for **reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion**, is **outside the country of his nationality**, and is **unable** to or, owing to such fear, is **unwilling** to avail himself of the protection of that country”\*

**Do you have any refugees in your district that you know of? What are the implications for instruction?**



# Illustration #1 – Reality Check

- ★ A Massachusetts teacher was doing a graduate course assignment of interviewing an older ELL student asking him about his prior schooling.... “How much homework did you have each night?” “What would your teacher do if you didn’t do your homework?” Etc.
- ★ He indicated that he was from the Congo and had spent the last number of years in a refugee camp. He had lived through his father’s murder, his mother’s rape, and the kidnapping of a sibling. The teacher reported later, “At that moment in the interview, I put my notes aside and had the conversation of a lifetime.”

**What might school struggles look like for this refugee student?**

