Every year, the 8x8 Festival brings award-winning photography and film to campuses across Ireland. The festival run by students, for students, and is a great way to learn more about the burning issues shaping the world around us.

The 8x8 Festival 2016 explored the issues surrounding migration, with a particular focus on media portrayals of the tens of millions of people being forced to flee their homes. This exhibition looks at the myths and misconceptions that abound about refugees, separating the fact from the fiction. It uses images from international photographers and data gathered by international agencies working at the coalface of the crisis to bring into focus the reality facing millions of people worldwide. It follows their path, from the homes they leave behind, to the perilous journeys they undertake to find safety, to the challenges facing them when they arrive, and their prospects for a brighter future.

The 8x8 Festival is part of STAND and receives support from Irish Aid.
An Eskimo girl standing on an ice floe on the shore of the Arctic Ocean in Barrow, Alaska. With global warming, big ice floes have been found further from the shore in recent years, as the sea ice starts melting earlier and faster. In Alaska this has forced walruses and sea lions, which usually live and breed on the ice, to seek refuge on the beach. It has also made it difficult for the Eskimo people to hunt the animals that need the sea ice to sustain them.

**Location:** Barrow, Alaska
Warm Waters – Vlad Sokhin (Panos Pictures)

A collapsed house on the banks of Mataniko River in Honiara, the capital city of the Solomon Islands. This Pacific archipelago has been at the frontline of climate change since the 1970s, and recently locals have seen a steep rise in natural disasters, such as the flash floods in 2014 that killed 22 people, caused widespread destruction and displaced almost 10,000 islanders.

Location: Honiara, Guadalcanal Island, Solomon Islands
Children play in a pool in Mari. The area was later bombed by a Syrian Airforce fighter plane, missing the pool by 20 metres. Fighting in Aleppo, in northern Syria, has intensified in recent months and the death toll is climbing. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, over a 22-month period up to June 2016, more than 12,500 people – including more than 4,500 children – were killed.

Location: Mari, Aleppo Province, Syria
Next Generation – GMB Akash (Panos Pictures)

A grandmother strokes the feet of a newborn at Camp Geneva. Following Bangladesh’s independence from Pakistan in 1971, Urdu-speaking minorities were increasingly discriminated against. Many do not have citizenship and now live in poverty in urban camps lacking services and access to jobs and education. Stateless people are often denied the right to go to school, see a doctor, get a job, open a bank account, buy a house – even marry.

Location: Camp Geneva, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Refugees, many of them from war-torn Syria and Afghanistan, charge their mobile phones next to a canteen at the now-closed Idomeni camp, at the Greece-Macedonia border. The current refugee crisis is the first of its kind in a fully digital age. For many, their entire lives are on their phones, now a portal to everything from messaging and money to maps and translators. Each border crossing marks a race to find a signal, SIM card or wifi.

Location: Idomeni, Greece
Ensaf Satih (13) talks with her mother via WhatsApp inside the room she shares with her father and other families at PIKPA. This open, self-organised, volunteer-run shelter on the island of Leros houses those waiting for an appointment with the Greek asylum service. The Satih family, Syrian refugees from Aleppo, were divided in two by their journey to Europe and subsequent border closures.

Location: Lakki, Leros, Greece
Long Journey to Safety – Samuel Aranda (Panos Pictures)

A refugee woman holds her child and screams after falling from a boat which has just arrived from Turkey on the shores of the Greek island Lesbos. Having dealt with smugglers who charge them about €1,000 for the 10km journey in rickety dinghies, many refugees arriving in Greece face the beginning of a long journey across the Balkans, Eastern Europe and onwards to Austria and Germany, where most intend to seek asylum.

Location: Lesbos (Lesvos) Island, Greece
By the time they are discovered by the various NGOs awaiting their arrival in the “rescue zone”, refugees have been drifting for hours in the heat in tiny, overloaded wooden and rubber dinghies. Tensions usually run high, and one wrong move could cause the crowded boats to capsize. Pictured is the smoke rising as the Italian navy burns boats used to carry people from the Libyan coast, to ensure they won’t be reused by smugglers. 

Location: Off The Libyan Coast

The Rescuers – Amnon Gutman
Where the Children Sleep – Magnus Wennman

It is after midnight when Ahmed falls asleep in the grass. The adults are still up, planning their onward journey. Ahmed is six years old and carries his own bag over long stretches by foot. “He is brave and only cries sometimes in the evenings,” says his uncle, who has cared for Ahmed since his father was killed in their hometown, Deir ez-Zor, northern Syria.

Location: Horgos, Serbia
Nine-year-old Fatima dreams she’s falling from a ship. She fled from Idlib, with her mother and two siblings, when the Syrian national army relentlessly slaughtered civilians in the city. After two unbearable years at a refugee camp in Lebanon, they made it to Libya and boarded an overcrowded boat. On the deck, a woman gave birth in the scorching sun. The baby was stillborn and thrown overboard. Fatima saw everything.

**Location:** Norberg, Sweden
Two recently arrived Somali refugee children play in Dadaab, the world’s largest refugee camp. With a population of 330,000 inhabitants, it is also one of Kenya’s largest cities, situated in the semi-arid border region between Kenya and Somalia. The camp was first established in 1992 to house Somali refugees fleeing the outbreak of civil war and is now home to generations of young people who know nothing but camp life.

Location: Kenya
Lay Lay Win lies beside her newborn baby in Dapaing Health Clinic, in a Rohingya segregated area north of Sittwe. Rakhine state is home to many minority groups that have faced decades of human rights violations and abuses, in particular the persecuted Rohingya minority. In July 2016, Myanmar was hit by a cyclone, with severe flooding affecting large areas of the country, including camps for internally displaced people in Rakhine.
Syrian refugees Samir (24) and Shrook Nazal (20) on their wedding day, in the Housein Meraar refugee camp, in the Bekaa valley, close to the border with Syria. The wedding is a rare day of celebration and joy in the lives of refugees in the camp, one of many unregistered, informal refugee camps that have sprung up in Lebanon. It lacks clean water, basic sanitation, healthcare and schools.
Ten-year-old Kibowa and his family fled their village to the Kanteba site for internally displaced persons in Katanga Province, to escape the Mai Mai Bataka Katanga rebel militia. Since 2011, the number of internally displaced persons in Katanga Province has soared to almost 600,000, and thousands of human rights violations – including killings, torture and sexual violence – have been committed.

Location: Katanga Province, Democratic Republic Of The Congo
Abu Rabee cuts ‘raha’ into small pieces. Abu owned a sweet factory in Daraa making these traditional Syrian sweets – a delicacy the town was famous for. Driven from his home by war, he now makes the delicacies out of a small caravan in Za’atari refugee camp, providing a welcome taste of home for the near 80,000 Syrian refugees living here.

Location: Za’atari, Jordan
Mohammed has become confident in water. In the picturesque town of Grimstad, in southwest Norway, a novel experiment is taking place. Refugees are being taught a skill that is natural to Norwegians but alien to many new arrivals from the Middle East and Africa – the ability to swim. In this way the town hopes to ensure its newest citizens feel comfortable in, on or near the water that is such an integral part of Norwegian life.

Location: Grimstad, Norway

Uncharted Waters – Johan Bävman (© UNHCR)
Super Sessions Cafe – Daniel Morgan (© UNHCR)

Syrian drummer Ali Hasan at Musiqana’s band practice at the Super Sessions Cafe in Berlin. Formed by Abdallah Rahal, the refugee performers play traditional Arabic music, creating a cultural exchange between newcomers and locals. Abdallah fled Aleppo and made the long journey to Europe with thousands of other refugees.

“People were sick on the way. So sometimes we sang together... Without music it would have been much more difficult.”

Location: Berlin, Germany
Esmeralda makes “pupusas”, a traditional dish from El Salvador, at a food stand she started with her husband, Eduardo. They and their four daughters escaped increasing gang violence from El Salvador and have been recognised as refugees in Mexico but they had problems finding work and being accepted by the local community.

Location: Chiapas, Mexico

(Names changed for protection.)
In 2009, 64 Rohingya refugees were resettled in Carlow town. Many of the boys played cricket in the camps of Bangladesh and were eager to break out the bat once more. The local rugby club in Carlow offered them their grounds to play in, and the Carlow Cricket Club – which now represents 13 nationalities – soon joined the national all-Ireland league.

Location: Carlow, Ireland
Life Lessons – Andrew McConnell (© UNHCR)

Siblings Mohammad (12), Aisha (10) and Oweis (4) with their father Mohammed Murad at their home in Edinburgh. The family fled Syria in 2013 to Domis Camp, in Iraq, where they spent three years before being resettled in Scotland. Mohammed received a scholarship to the prestigious George Heriot school. “I want to be a doctor,” he says. “I want to help people.”

Location: Edinburgh, Scotland