

# On the Move

Poems About Migration

TEACHERS' NOTES

MICHAEL ROSEN

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with drawings by

Quentin Blake



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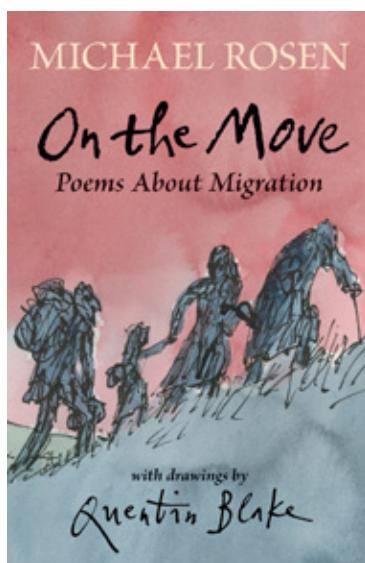
## ABOUT THE POET

**Michael Rosen** was born in Harrow, Middlesex just after the end of the Second World War. His Jewish parents came from Bethnal Green and Whitechapel in the East End of London. During the war, his father had served with the US Army in Germany. But after the war when he returned to England, the family lived in the north west London suburb of Harrow. Michael's extended family of grandparents and great grandparents were migrants from Russia, Romania and Poland. All were Jewish – some were religious and some were not. The older generations spoke Yiddish and sometimes his parents used bits of Yiddish too. The rich cultural and linguistic mix surfaces in many of the poems in *On the Move*.



## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Quentin Blake** was born in London in 1932. He is a former Children's Laureate and recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Award for a lifetime's achievement in children's literature. Quentin Blake is famous for his collaborations with Roald Dahl, Joan Aiken, Russell Hoban and, of course, Michael Rosen.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

This collection of poems is a personal reflection on the theme of migration. Many of the poems relate to family and friends and like a stone thrown into a pond they make ripples that expand to embrace the wider context. This makes the collection both personal and universal.

Read from cover to cover the poems provide a loose narrative thread. While each poem stands alone, this collection is unusual in that the structure invites a sequential reading.

The poems are organised into 4 themes: Family and Friends, The War, The Migrants in Me and On the Move Again, each theme adding a different perspective to the main topic, migration. These four themes form the basis for this set of teachers' notes.



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## CLASSROOM CONTEXT

These materials are written with children in the upper junior years in mind (years 9 - 11), but some elements will work with younger classes and with children in the lower secondary years.

For the best experience, I suggest building in frequent opportunities to read the poems in the collection. Read and reread to develop familiarity. Have multiple copies available for children to read independently. Have them read their favourites aloud to each other and to the class if they would like to.

If you are closely reading a poem the children will need access to books so they can read comfortably and at their own pace.

## BEGINNINGS

### Let's Start with Reading

For the best experience, I suggest building in frequent opportunities to read the poems in the collection over a period of at least a week. Some poetry books can be dipped into and the poems read in any order. You can do this with *On the Move* if you want to because the poems do stand alone and some are known from other collections of Michael Rosen's poetry. However, my preference would be to read this collection from cover to cover because the poems have been put together in a way that builds a loose narrative and as you read on you find that the poems relate to each other in a way that invites deeper reflection.

Read and reread to develop familiarity. You do not have to move quickly into using the poems for teaching. Allow the children to share their personal reflections. Have multiple copies available for children to read independently. Have them read their favourites aloud to each other and to the class. Answer questions that arise spontaneously from this initial exploration. Taking the time to explore and respond will form a good base for the following teaching ideas.

### Preparing for Discussion

One of the central ideas of this poetry collection is the concept of identity. Personal identities are complex, they are formed by our individual personalities, gender, family, friends, language, ethnicity, historical background, the place we live in and the place we may have come from. The poems in *On the Move* touch on many of these ideas

Before reading the collection, or poems from the collection, you might want to explore these ideas with children, providing opportunities for them to share stories, thoughts and feelings about their identity.

Children will arrive at this discussion with multiple perspectives. Some might have been touched by war or displacement, and it is possible that others will have had experiences that you are not aware of. It's impossible to know with 100% certainty how different children will respond or the feelings



that will be aroused. However, this does not mean that difficult subjects should not be dealt with in the classroom. Where else will they be given space? The classroom is an ideal environment for learning about social justice when led by a thoughtful and supportive teacher.

When dealing with any potentially sensitive situation it is important to anticipate what questions might arise and to also have considered in advance how you might deal with issues. So here are some straightforward considerations:

- Make sure you know the children in your class to the best of your ability and anticipate how individuals might respond. If you have particular concerns, then you may want to consult with the child's parents or adults caring for them.
- Develop an ethos where children are encouraged only to share the things they feel comfortable to share in a public forum. Do not coerce them to speak and accept that they might have strategies to protect themselves such as talking about an event as though it happened to someone else, or perhaps presenting themselves in a way that is not consistent with what you believe to be their reality.
- Have a mechanism for children to share with you things that they do not want to share with the class that might be triggered by the poems or by the class discussion. I used to have a box on my desk where children could post messages to me, either signed or anonymous as they preferred.

A lot of the teaching ideas in these notes involve talking about potentially challenging topics and so some ground rules for discussion and dialogue need to be made clear and adhered to. I suggest something along these lines:

1. Always treat others with respect when they are talking. Listen carefully to what the speaker is saying. If you disagree, you will have an opportunity to explain why, in a respectful manner.
2. Set boundaries for sharing. It's important to be clear from the outset. Make clear the sort of information that crosses these boundaries and tell children how they can let you know if something is troubling them, that should not be shared with the class.
3. Speak from your **own experience** and avoid generalising about other groups of people. You may need to give an example so that this rule is properly understood.
4. Everyone has different experiences. When we add all of those experiences together, we understand far more than if we rely solely on our own experience. Sharing is very important for learning.
5. Be bold and speak up. Don't allow the loudest voices to dominate. Your view is equally valid, so try and step out of your comfort zone, if you usually let others do the talking.



## Thinking about Identity

You could either carry out this work prior to reading the collection or at any point during or after reading. There are different advantages to teaching this lesson at different stages. Before reading it sets the children thinking about some of the issues in the collection, so that they are already developing awareness and will be starting to ask questions, and the poems may consequently have a deeper resonance.

This activity comprises two complementary elements:

1. Thinking about personal identity using the personal identity wheel.
2. Considering which parts of identity are personal and which are about the groups we belong to.

This serves to show children how identities are made of many components, that we can belong to more than one group and that we have personal identities that mean we are never just a member of a group.

Through discussion, we can help children begin to understand that identities are not fixed but continue to develop and change over time.

## Personal Identity Wheel

This wheel is used to help children think about themselves as individuals and to consider their interests and preferences. It is a good discussion starter, allowing children to share information about themselves with classmates and also with you, their teacher.

Introduce the personal identity wheel. Start by sharing one that you have completed. Sharing both models the process but also conveys to the children in the class that you are engaging alongside them in this process.

Explain to the children that they are completing this with information about themselves. In the centre circle, they choose three adjectives to describe themselves.

After they have completed their wheels, organise a sharing process. One way to do this is to have the children move around the class. On a signal from you, they find the nearest person and compare wheels. Encourage them to:

- Ask questions to find out more about their interests and skills.
- Discover what they have in common with other class members.

Repeat this several times so that the children share with several other children. Then ask:

- Did anyone learn something interesting today about a classmate **that they did not know before?**
- Did you discover what aspects of your identity were **shared** with other members of the class because they belong to the same group?



- What aspects of your identity were **unique** to you?
- Which aspects of your own identity are **most important to you**?

Ask the class what we could do with these wheels now (they might suggest displaying them, so they can learn more about the rest of their classmates, or they might suggest that they could write about their wheel). Respond to their suggestions as you think best.

**Name**  
.....

**Three Adjectives**

1 .....  
2 .....  
3 .....

**Favourite food**

**Number of siblings + order in family**

**Favourite place**

**Favourite film, book and music**

**What is most important to you?**

**Languages spoken**

**Religion**

**Skill or talent you are most proud of**



## Migration

This collection of poems is called *On the Move: Poems About Migration*

The terminology around migration can be confusing, with the words “migrant”, “refugee” and “asylum seeker” being used interchangeably. As Michael Rosen cautions in his author’s note, it is important to know the difference. Not all migrants are refugees and not all refugees are asylum seekers. Migration is not a new phenomenon and most of us will be the descendants of migrants of one kind or another.

This lesson aims to develop some clarity around terminology and debunk some commonly held myths. It could be taught before reading the poems or after reading.

Display the following words on the board and prepare sets of cards for small groups of children to discuss; Share some prompt to support the discussion:

- Have you heard these words before?
- In what context? (e.g. where and when)
- Do they mean the same thing or do they have different meanings?

**migrant**

**refugee**

**asylum seeker**



After the children have had time to think about the words and share their understandings with the class, show these definitions and make sure the children understand the differences by using examples.

immigration	Moving to live permanently in a new country.
migrant	A person who moves from one place to another, perhaps for better economic conditions, for a better life, or perhaps for marriage or to live close to family.
refugee	A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster.
asylum seeker	A person who has left their home country as a <b>political refugee</b> and is seeking asylum (protected status) in another.

### Choice Words: On the Move

A good title can add layers of meaning to a book, even one that is as apparently straightforward as "On the Move". Spending a bit of time thinking about the title before reading can bring different definitions to the fore. These can be recorded and reviewed after reading the book to consider how the theme of "on the move" applies to the poems in the collection. Potentially this reflection can bring out nuanced meanings and may even be interpreted as ironic in some.

Write the words "On the Move" on the board and invite the children to share what these words make them think about. Pairs or small groups can share first thoughts before you gather ideas from the class.

Make notes of the children's ideas, or have another adult or confident writer from the class make notes while you manage the conversation.

When you have a good range of ideas, read them aloud together so the children hear their thinking repeated back to them.

Draw out from the suggestions some of the main ways in which the expression "on the move" is used:

- Travelling from one place to another.
- Moving from one job to another (usually used to mean making progress or advancing in a career).
- Someone who enjoys being busy and is always on the move.





Briefly consider whether the expression “on the move” has positive and/or negative connotations. You can revisit this lesson later and ask the children if they would add any new ideas to the original notes having read the poems in this collection.

## DURING READING

### Family and Friends

The first section in the book is all about friends and family. It’s a great choice for an opening section as it allows all readers to connect to the subject of these poems through their own experience. Most children have family, albeit that families have different structures. Children in care may not live in a traditional family unit, but they are likely to have formed special bonds with other children and carers. Friendship is something that all children can relate to.

### Where Do We Come From? (p18)

After reading, invite the children to respond to the poem. Possible prompts:

- What did you think about when we read the poem?
- Did it remind you of anything?
- Was there anything strange or puzzling about this poem?

Teacher’s note: these questions are based on Aidan Chambers’ Tell Me questions and they are great opening questions for other poems in the collection too.

Model speculative thinking:

“This poem seems to be about Michael Rosen’s family but it is titled ‘Where Do **We** Come From?’ Rather than Where do **I** Come From? I wonder why he might have done that. It makes me think that he is inviting me... all of us... to ask that question, where **do** we come from?”

It started me thinking about my own family and I thought about this...”

Teacher’s note: Take the opportunity to share some family history with the class. Include some of the stories that you have been told by your parents or grandparents that have been instrumental in the formation of your identity. Your family don’t need to have come from far flung places. For instance, both of my parents were born and raised in a mining village but moved to South East London just 3 months before I was born. I spent my early childhood holidays in South Yorkshire and was acutely aware of the differences in the routines, costumes and language (accent and dialect) between these two places that were so important in my formative years.

Encourage the children to talk about or write about where they come from. Remind them that they only have to share what they feel comfortable sharing.



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## The Languages We Know

Many of the poems in this collection include snippets of Yiddish and other languages. After reading the poems listed below you can explore the languages profile of your class. Even if the main language spoken is English, you might find that children have special regional words or snippets of languages from countries that they have visited or special family words that nobody else uses.

Two Languages p20,

The Songs My Father Sings p22

A Word p24

## Bubbe and Zeyde p33

Michael's maternal grandparents are called Bubbe and Zeyde. You can begin your exploration by simply exploring what names the children call their grandparents.

Write the word "Bubbe" on the board or on a large sheet of paper. Remind the children that this is the name that Michael calls his grandmother on his mother's side.

Harvest from the children different words that are used to describe a female grandparent: gran, granny nanny, nonno, daadi, naani, anneanne, babaanne. There is great diversity in the names that children call their grandparents. This activity provides an opportunity to talk about the different names used in a range of cultures, and to identify some of the similarities as well as differences.

After sharing the children's examples, ask whether both sets of grandparents are called the same name. In some cultures, such as Turkish, a maternal grandmother is distinguished from a paternal grandmother.

In the Katie Morag stories (set on an island) the two grandmothers are called Grandma Mainland and Grannie Island, after the places where they live. Ask the children if any of their grandparents have nicknames.

Make it explicit that nicknames should only be used kindly and with the consent of the person the name is attached to. We sometimes use the term 'pet name', which means a name that we give to someone we care about.

### Ask:

Are any of the names we have listed derived from languages other than English?

What other languages do we know in this class? (If needed and the children think they don't know



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any other languages, prompt them to think about phrases they may have learnt on holiday or song lyrics, advertising taglines etc.)

Individually ask the children to list all the languages they know, even if it is just one phrase. Collect the lists and use them to build a WORDLE which you can display in the classroom.

The children might like to write a poem about the languages they know, as Michael Rosen has done.

## The War

The second section in this poem is called “**The** War”. The Second World War is often assigned the definite article because it affected the lives of everyone around the world but also because children born after the war would hear it referred to in this way by parents and grandparents,

as Michael’s mum does in the poem “The War” (p48). Some children might not know which war is being referred to, especially if you have children in the class who are refugees from a different war, to them their war might be **the** war. They may also not see a connection between war and migration, so it is worth spending some time talking about this.

After reading the poems in this section, organise a discussion. You could use a Circle Thinking Map (David Hyerle, 2011) to record the children’s ideas.

Display an enlarged copy of a Circle Thinking Map on the board. Have individual copies available for the children, or ask them to draw their own.

If they are not used to using Thinking Maps, explain how they are used.

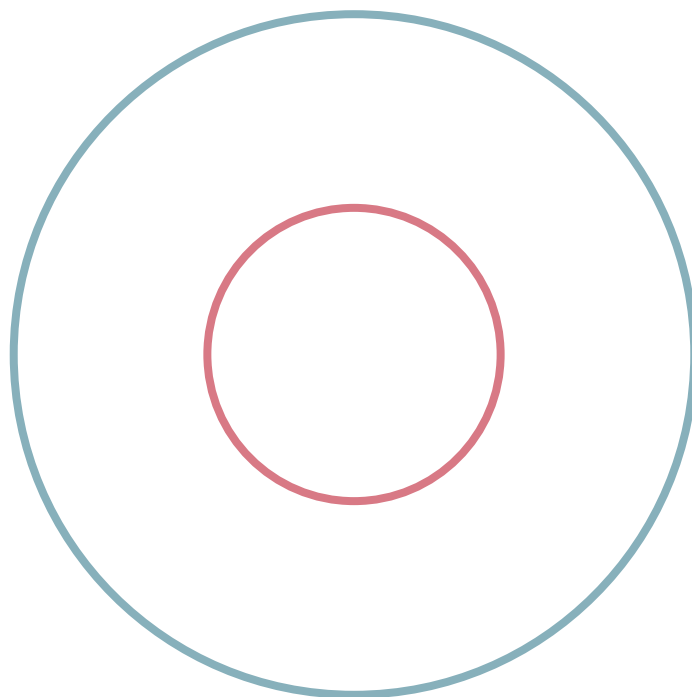
In the centre circle, write the subject that you are going to be thinking about. i.e. the war. In the large circle you are going to make notes about your existing knowledge,

In the rectangle (called the Frame of Reference) you record **how** you know the things that you know (somebody told you, you saw it on the news, read a book, watched a film, visited a museum etc.)

Harvest ideas from the children to complete a class map. Don’t forget to include things that you have learnt from reading Michael Rosen’s poems. Which bits of the poems tell us things about the war (e.g. the resistance in France).

Read back the ideas to the class so they get a sense of their collective knowledge. This process serves the purpose of showing what the children do know and also highlights significant gaps.





If it hasn't already arisen in the discussion, ask:

- What has the war got to do with a collection of poems about migration?
- Who migrated during and after the war? (If the children don't know you can provide some background about the persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust.)
- Do we know about more recent wars where people have had to leave their homes? (the children might have heard of war in Syria because of its prominence in the news. Other conflicts in 2020 reported by the Conflict Group include Afghanistan (more people are killed in this ongoing conflict than any other around the world) as well as Yemen, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Libya, US/Iran/Israel/Persian Gulf, Kashmir, Venezuela and Ukraine. Find these places on a globe or world map.
- What might life have been like for people before the war? What might it have been like after the war? How can we find out? You may want to share this Theirworld film which documents the life of a Syrian teenager before the war in Syria:  
<https://theirworld.org/news/syrian-teenage-refugee-films-life-as-farm-worker>



The level of detail that you go into here depends on the age and experiences of the class. The main points are that war is a major factor in the displacement of people and that ordinary people do not usually want to leave their homes but the effects of war make it impossible to stay.

## The Migrants in Me

In this section the poems are about members of Michael Rosen's family who found themselves in the position of being migrants as a result of the Second World War. The discussion about the previous section of poems will help the children understand the context for these poems. Michael has also written a memoir about his search for his missing relatives called *The Missing* (Walker 2019) and you might want to read it alongside these poems.

After reading this section of poems to the children organise a discussion.

A key question to ask about this section is:

- Why might Michael Rosen have chosen to call this section of poems "The Migrants in Me?" Think about what those two small words "in me" signify. The children might suggest that our relatives are inside us because we share DNA with members of our family, or they might talk about how these relatives are inside Michael's head, either as memories, or as questions because he wants to know more about them.
- How are your relatives (not necessarily migrants) a part of you?

After the discussion, pin enlarged copies of the poems on the walls around the classroom **except for the poem "Whose Fault?"**. There needs to be plenty of space around the poems for the children to write. Organise the children into small groups and give each group a different coloured marker pen. Have them walk around the class and read the poems aloud to each other. Ask them to annotate the poems. Provide these prompts:

- How does the poem make you feel?
- What does the poem make you think about?
- What questions do you have after reading this poem?

Gather the class for a final reflection, paying particular attention to the questions that have arisen from the exercise.

Reread the final poem in this section, "Whose Fault?"

Allow a space for some quiet reflection and then reread the final two couplets, so that the final question is left to resonate.

Then read the final poem in the section Today: "One Day" to end the lesson on a hopeful note.



## On the Move Again

The final section of poems relates to contemporary migration and refugee experiences. There is one poem, "The Migrants in Me" that has exactly the same title as a previous section. This conscious connection between Michael Rosen's experience and the plight of refugees today is one that should be explored after reading the poems in this section.

After reading the poems, ask the children to consider the importance of the title of this section and in particular the addition of the word "**again**".

Reread the poem "Never Again".

Never again was a phrase often repeated at the end of the Second World War and yet, as the poem says, wars and persecutions do happen again and are happening now. Pose the following questions:

- "Why do you think history repeats itself?" This is a huge and complex question that the children can only answer from within their own experience and from the discussions that you have had in relation to reading this collection. You are not seeking definitive answers but encouraging them to think and question. Challenge their thinking with further questioning so that you have a dialogic exchange of ideas. For example, if they suggest that it's because there will always be power hungry leaders, you might say "but a leader is just one person, there are far more people that could take a stand against one person and stop them from assuming power..." etc.
- "What can individual people do to try and break the cycle of war, persecution and displacement?" Again, it's a big question. You are not asking, "what would **you** have done in this situation?" This is an impossible question and giving a desired answer is pointless. However, reflecting together on how we can endeavour to make a better society, take our democratic responsibilities seriously and acknowledge that we all have a part to play is likely to be more useful.

## Looking at Pictures

Quentin Blake's illustrations are remarkable. They powerfully convey the emotions of the different people "moving on" without pinning down the context, leaving space for the reader to reflect and interpret them.

Ask the children to look at the pictures in the book and choose one that interests them most.

Working with a partner, ask them to discuss what they can see.

In pairs, invite them to imagine the story of one of the people in the picture.



- Where have they come from?
- Where are they going?
- What do they hope for?
- What would be a happy ending for their story?
- Imagine that you are this person and tell your story to your partner.

They might choose to tell their stories to the class or perhaps write their stories.

They do not have to imagine a refugee from a particular country for this activity, but rather some of the universal issues, the human impact and emotions.

### Revisiting Thoughts About Refugees

Media headlines are often confusing when it comes to the facts about refugees. These myths can become fixed in popular opinion, so you may want to spend some time separating fact and fiction.

Prepare the following statements for display on the board, one at a time. The children must decide whether they think the statement is true, false or that they are uncertain. Agree three visual signals such as thumb up for true, thumb down for false and a shrug of the shoulders for unsure.

After each vote, provide some basic information. The source of the information here is from the Refugee Council website. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Most refugees are looked after by poor countries.

Asylum seekers are a tiny proportion of people arriving in Britain from other countries.

Most asylum seekers are looked after in luxury accommodation.

Migrants take jobs that British people could do.

Immigration is a recent phenomenon.

### Most refugees are looked after by poor countries.

This is true.

- What does this make you think/feel?

The UN's Refugee Agency estimates that nearly nine in ten of the world's refugees are sheltered by developing countries.



## **Asylum seekers are a tiny proportion of the people arriving in the UK.**

This is true.

People come to live in Britain for many different reasons:

Work is the main reason. People may come to the UK to be teachers, doctors, farm labourers, hotel and restaurant workers. Some jobs would not be filled without overseas labour.

Language learning and studying are major reasons for migration. Family connections are another reason.

## **Refugees take jobs that British people could do.**

This is often presented as a negative fact. Here are some facts from official reports:

- Immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse compared to their UK born counterparts. (Institute for Public Policy Research, Paying their way: the fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK, 2005)
- An estimated 30,000 jobs have been created in Leicester by Ugandan Asian refugees since 1972. (*The Observer*, They fled with nothing but built a new empire, 11 August 2002)
- It is estimated that it costs around £25,000 to support a refugee doctor to practise in the UK. Training a new doctor is estimated to cost between £200,000 and £250,000. (NHS Employers, Reaping the rewards: re-training refugee healthcare professionals for the NHS, October 2009)
- Asylum-seeking children contribute very positively to schools across the country. This in turn enables more successful integration of families into local communities. (Office for Standards in Education, The education of asylum seeker pupils, October 2003)

## **Most Asylum seekers in Britain are looked after in luxury accommodation.**

This is largely unfounded.

Some people are afraid that a disproportionate amount of the country's resources are given to people seeking asylum in the UK. But what do the facts tell us?

Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger. Many families are not able to pay for the basics such as clothing, powdered milk and nappies.

(The Children's Society Briefing highlighting the gap between asylum support and mainstream benefits, 2012; Independent Asylum Commission citizens' inquiry in The Independent, 2007).

Almost all asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support – this can be as little as £5 a day to live on.





Asylum Seekers do not receive more benefits than pensioners in the UK ([UK Parliament briefing paper, 2012](#))

## **Immigration to Britain is a new phenomenon. In the past, people used to stay in the countries where they were born.**

This is not true. Britain has a very long history of immigration. Here are just a few examples of historic immigration:

- The Romans first invaded Britain in 55 BC. They settled and ruled from 43 – 410AD. You probably know about a lot of good things that the Romans brought with them.
- The Anglo Saxons invaded in the 5th Century.
- The Vikings invaded Britain in the 8th century.
- In 1066 it was the turn of the Normans.
- Jewish people first came to Britain in the Middle Ages.
- Huguenots (French Protestants) arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Each settlement has added to the rich cultural diversity of the British Isles and the English language.

And of course, Britons have also emigrated to other parts of the world: to America and Australia... Not to mention more recent settlements in sunny Spain, Tuscany and France.

- Do you think people should stay in the countries where they were born or should they be allowed to travel and settle in other places?

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