



The easy guide to

NAVIGATING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS ON REFUGEE RIGHTS



WHAT'S THIS GUIDE ABOUT?

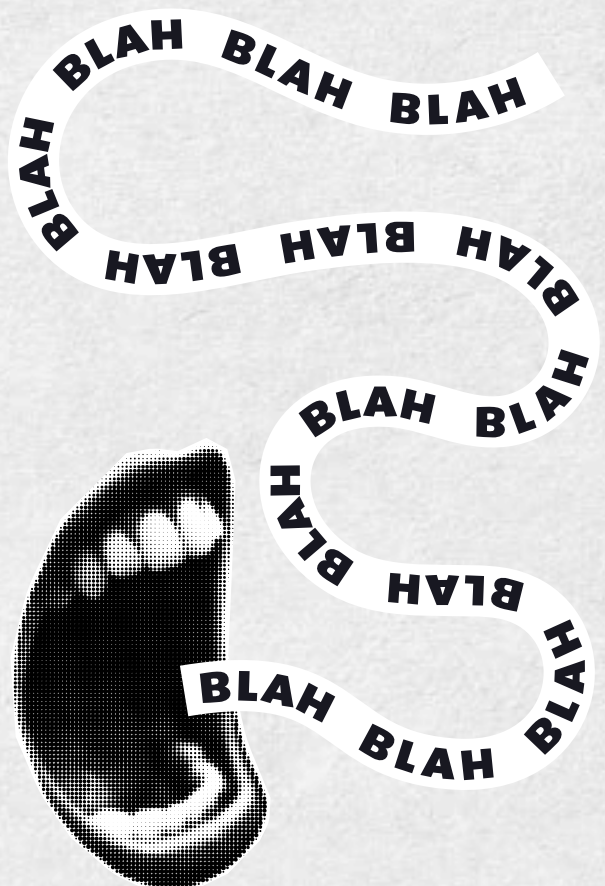
We've all been there. You're having a good time — maybe it's over dinner, a group chat, or in the pub — and then someone drops that comment about refugees. It's awkward, upsetting, and hard to know what to say in the moment.

That's why we created this easy guide: to help you handle those tricky conversations with confidence, empathy, and facts — and maybe even change a few minds along the way.

Inside this guide, you'll find:

- Ready-to-use replies for common myths
- Real-life stories that build empathy
- Quick facts & stats to back up your argument
- Tips to keep the discussion productive

Ready to be a force for change?



“WHY DON'T THEY JUST STAY IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES?”

No one leaves their home, their family, and everything they know to set off on a dangerous journey across land and sea unless they have no choice. **Refugees flee war, persecution, or the impact of natural disasters – situations that put their lives at risk.**

Most displaced people flee to another part of their country. But for many, the threats are everywhere, or the state itself is the source of violence. Staying simply isn't safe. As long as these conditions exist, people will continue to cross borders in search of protection.

“PEOPLE CROSSING THE CHANNEL AREN'T GENUINE REFUGEES...”

No one risks their life in a flimsy boat unless they're fleeing something even more dangerous. **Almost all people arriving via small boat claim asylum as they reach the UK, and the vast majority are granted it.** This shows they have very real reasons to fear for their safety.

Most come from countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Iran and Sudan – places torn by conflict or plagued by persecution and human rights abuses. Instead of questioning refugees' motives, we should offer the compassion we'd hope for if we were in their shoes.



IYAD'S STORY

At just 13, Iyad's* world was turned upside down when an Israeli airstrike claimed the lives of his parents, siblings, and grandparents. Left severely injured and in urgent need of medical care, his only hope was to join his surviving uncle in the UK.

Iyad began the long and difficult process of applying for family reunion. After numerous challenges and multiple surgeries, our team succeeded in bringing him to the UK, where he was finally reunited with his uncle.

Iyad is now starting to heal and rebuild his life, but his story is all too rare. For most people in Gaza - trapped under relentless bombings and in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises - finding a path to safety and family remains nearly impossible because of the UK's broken system.

**Alias used to protect his identity*





“WE’RE TOO FULL TO TAKE ANY MORE PEOPLE!”

It’s easy to feel we’re at capacity when so many people in the UK are struggling right now, but blaming refugees won’t fix anything. Public services are stretched thin due to years of systemic under-investment, not because people are seeking safety. **Refugees make up less than 0.7% of the UK population. Scapegoating them only distracts from the real solutions to these long-standing issues.**

Plus, refugees and migrants bring so many skills with them. It’s important to remember just how much they enrich our communities.

“WHY DON’T PEOPLE JUST COME HERE LEGALLY?”

Here’s the catch: there’s no “legal” way for refugees to apply for asylum in the UK from abroad. You’d have to be here physically to seek protection, but there is no visa or process to get to the UK safely. That’s why many end up risking their lives in crowded boats to join family or claim protection here.

The best way to prevent this is to create a refugee visa that lets people travel safely by plane or train to claim asylum. This would save lives and enable countries to better plan for the arrival of refugees, leading to better results for both refugees and communities. Talk about a win-win!

SHAMSI'S STORY

Shamsi* was just 16 when she tragically lost her grandmother, the person who had raised her in Somalia. Forced to live with her abusive father and under the threat of forced marriage, she made the difficult decision to flee and join her aunt in the UK.

Shamsi ended up in a crowded shelter in Cyprus for months, facing violence and a serious medical condition. When her visa application was first rejected, her mental health took a severe hit.

After an appeal, Shamsi was finally able to reunite with her aunt in the UK. In just a few short weeks, she regained her confidence and is now full of hope and ambition for the future. She's now going to college, getting the medical care she needs, and using her story to campaign with other young refugees for change.

**Alias used to protect her identity*





“REFUGEES GET EVERYTHING FOR FREE WHEN THEY ARRIVE!”

Refugees don't get “freebies.” Most aren't even eligible for benefits and live on the bare minimum while awaiting their asylum decision. **Many have to live on less than £9 a week to survive and live in squalid, cramped temporary accommodation for months or even years.**

Most refugees would love to work and contribute to society, but they're not even allowed to. The reality is that they're often struggling to get by waiting for a decision.

“BUT FRANCE IS A SAFE COUNTRY, WHY DON'T THEY STAY THERE?”

Most people actually stay in the first country they reach – **69% of the world's refugees live in neighbouring countries from where they fled.** Those who continue their journey to the UK often have strong ties here, like family, friends, or a shared language, which make it easier for them to rebuild their lives.

It's not about the UK being a 'better' place; it's about finding somewhere that feels a little bit more familiar after surviving such danger. Wouldn't we all want that if we were in their shoes?

Plus, many more refugees apply for asylum in European countries – in fact, the UK is only ranked 17th in Europe for asylum applications per head of population among EU countries. Just because we're an island doesn't mean we shouldn't play our part!

QUICK FACTS

**CHILDREN MAKE
UP 40% OF THE
WORLD'S
REFUGEE
POPULATION**¹

Child refugees are particularly vulnerable to global conflicts and persecution. Many flee with their families in search of safety, while others are separated or orphaned along the way. In 2024 alone, 4667 had no choice but to make a terrifying journey across the Channel to reach safety in the UK.

2024 was the deadliest year on record in the Channel and on migration routes worldwide. This is a tragic consequence of hostile policies and the lack of safe routes for refugees.

**NEARLY 9,000
PEOPLE DIED
TRYING TO
REACH SAFETY IN
2024**²

**MIGRATION
CONTRIBUTES
£3.3 BILLION A
YEAR TO UK
PUBLIC
FINANCES**³

We shouldn't need economic justifications to treat people with compassion, but it's worth knowing that research consistently shows the positive impact of migration. Migrants contribute in so many ways, from paying taxes to bringing diverse skills or helping keep vital services running.

¹ Child displacement and refugees - UNICEF data. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>

² International Organization for Migration, March 2025. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/2024-deadliest-year-record-migrants-new-iom-data-reveals> (Accessed: 23 May 2025)

³ CEBR, 2023. Available at: <https://cebr.com/blogs/immigration-is-estimated-to-yield-3-3-billion-annually-for-public-finances-as-the-uk-sees-near-threefold-increase-in-non-eu-immigration-since-2018/>

“WE JUST NEED TO CRACK DOWN ON SMUGGLERS!”

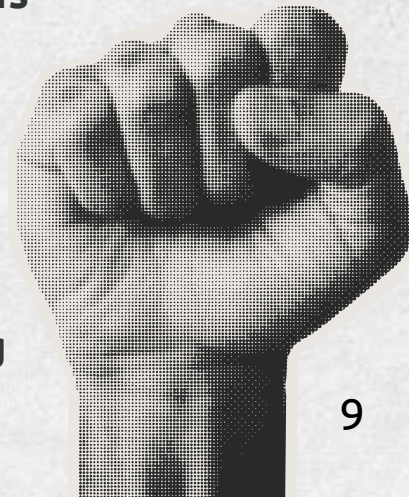
That may sound like an easy fix, but cracking down on smugglers alone won't do much. **Smugglers actually thrive on the lack of safe routes.** Tough border policies focused on security, not people's safety, have led to dozens of deaths at our borders over the last few years (over 80 last year alone!). But dangerous journeys haven't stopped. So, clearly, this approach isn't working. What we haven't tried yet is creating new safe routes – like a refugee visa – for people to come here safely.

Did you know that only two people fleeing Ukraine crossed the Channel? That's because Ukrainians were offered a Government scheme to seek safety in the UK. Not only does this save lives, but it also gives refugees the best chance to settle in, rebuild their lives and contribute to their new communities.

“THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM IS TOO STRETCHED ALREADY...”

The idea that the UK is being 'overrun' by refugees is a misleading narrative, pushed by a handful of powerful media and politicians. What's actually increased is the asylum backlog, which has skyrocketed in recent years. **This creates the illusion that there are many more people seeking protection than our system can handle.**

The truth is, it's largely a result of policy decisions that failed to make the system quicker and more efficient. Safe routes would help the government manage the system more effectively — by knowing who is arriving, how, and when.



FINAL TIPS

1 STAY CALM

It's easy to get upset, but keeping your cool will help you have a more productive conversation.

2 SHARE STORIES

Facts matter, but real-life examples can humanise the issue and build empathy, making it more likely for people to change their minds.

3 ASK QUESTIONS

Asking things like “where did you get that information from?”, “what would you do if this happened to you?” or “what makes you say that?” can make people pause and think about their position.

4 FIND COMMON GROUND

Emphasise shared values – like safety, family, freedom – to guide the conversation toward understanding.

5 KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

If the conversation gets too heated or unproductive, it's okay to disengage. There's no point in pushing if it's not going anywhere.

YOU GOT THIS!

THANK YOU FOR SPEAKING UP!

Thank you for reading our guide to navigating tough conversations on refugee rights. By engaging in these discussions, you are challenging divisive narratives and sparking change, one conversation at a time.

If you'd like to share any feedback or personal experiences using this guide, please email us at campaigns@safepassage.org.uk.

Your support makes resources like this and our vital legal and social support for refugees possible. Please consider donating today to help us push back against harmful rhetoric and policies, and empower communities across the UK to do the same.

SUPPORT US

