ASYLUM & REFUGEES PATHWAYS IN THE UK

DIOCESE of OXFORD

KEY TERMS & ARRIVAL ROUTES:

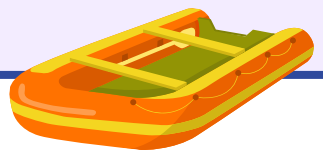


1 | ASYLUM SEEKER

A person seeking asylum is someone who is seeking for asylum outside their country of origin. They are waiting for a decision on their asylum claim, so are also waiting for their legal recognition as a refugee.

Someone can seek asylum through spontaneous arrivals (eg small boats) or they are already in the country for another reason (eg student or short-term worker's visa).

No-one can be an 'illegal asylum seeker' because there is a legal right to be able to seek asylum in the UK. You cannot claim asylum from outside the UK; you have to arrive in the country first. *However, there are currently no government-approved 'safe routes' to arrive in the UK to seek asylum.*





2 | WAITING FOR A DECISION ON AN ASYLUM CLAIM

The average wait for an asylum decision ranges from between 1 and 3 years. During this time people seeking asylum are not usually allowed to work, and they cannot claim benefits.

Whilst people are waiting for the decision on their asylum claim, they will be in 'dispersal accommodation' provided by the UK government. This is often in former hotels, which are unsuitable for long terms stays and provide limited independence. Some will be accommodated in shared houses or flats, or at large scale sites like military bases. Individuals do not have a choice of accommodation or location.

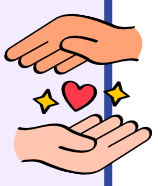
There is typically a small weekly allowance to cover the bare essentials like clothing, food, and toiletries. Those in full-board accommodation will receive less.

Individuals who can support themselves financially are not given this financial or accommodation support.

Social services have responsiblity for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, which involve children's care homes or foster care.



3A | REFUGEE: STATUS GRANTED



A refugee is someone who is unable to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion.

To be officially recognised as a refugee in the UK, an individual's asylum claim must be accepted by the UK government, granting them refugee status and a time-limited 'leave to remain' (permission to stay in the UK).

3B | ASYLUM CLAIM REFUSAL

An asylum claim can be declined if the government determines the application does not meet the strict criteria for refugee status, and subsequent appeals have been unsuccessful (nearly 50% of appeals are successful).

At this point, government support will be withdrawn, and a person may be expected to return to their country of origin or be forcefully removed.



RESETTLEMENT ROUTES



Resettlement routes are defined by the UK government as 'safe and legal' routes, but these are very limited. An asylum claim is not needed through these routes, but they can generally still be defined as refugees. The Homes for Ukraine scheme, the British National (Overseas) visas welcoming Hong Kongers, and the former Afghan or Syrian resettlement schemes are examples of these routes. The Community Sponsorship programme also enables local community groups (including churches) to directly welcome and support refugees, although this is only a fraction of people resettled in the UK.

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THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN WELCOME:

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1 | A THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY & WELCOME



Throughout the Bible we see the movement of people from one part of the world to another, and God's people are encouraged to welcome and care for those who are displaced or far from home.

Provision is made in the Torah to ensure those on the edge of society can find food (Deuteronomy 14:28-29), that people who are new to a land are treated with kindness and dignity, and that strangers are not ill-treated or taken advantage of (Exodus 22:21).

In the New Testament, we are encouraged to accept strangers with open arms, to treat them as equals (e.g. Colossians 3:11), and to offer hospitality (e.g. Romans 12:13).

As Christians, we are called to be beacons of hope and people of welcome to all. We are being asked to hold these values, and extend welcome to fearful and terrorised people who are seeking asylum and refuge.

When we welcome others, we can be transformed, made more whole in our humanity, and be blessed by our interactions with others.

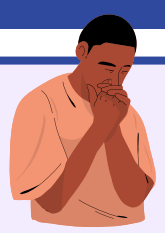
To consider further what our faith says about welcome and hospitality, see Churches Together's free study resource.



4 | STAND UP FOR ASYLUM SEEKER & REFUGEE RIGHTS

- Get involved with Citizens UK's Migration Justice campaign , working on national focuses like Pathways to Citizenship, Named Sponsorship, and Earned Citizenship. Locally there's also work on safety for asylum seekers, and on asylum accommodation food standards.
- Celebrate Refugee Week
- Show support by displaying Together With Refugee posters

2 | PRAYERS OF COMPASSION & JUSTICE



Dear Lord, we lift before you all who are fleeing persecution and war, knowing your love for them and your power to heal and comfort. Each person is precious to you, and made in your image; help everyone in this changing world to remember that. Guide those in authority to make decisions about migration that honour each person's humanity. Help us to welcome new neighbours, seeing you in the person we greet. Break down the barriers of hostility that keep us apart and diminish our humanity. We ask these things trusting in your infinite love. Amen.

Order prayer postcards: socialjustice@oxford.anglican.org

3 | COMMUNITIES OF WELCOME

It can be helpful to ask people what support they need. Some common practical needs of asylum seekers and refugees include:

- Pastoral support; community and friendship
- English language support
- Physical items like weather-appropriate clothing, toiletries, food
- Host a refugee or asylum seeker through Sanctuary Hosting, Refugees at Home, or Room for Refugees once the government support has ended.
- Welcome refugees through Community Sponsorship.
- Partner or volunteer with your local charity: Asylum Welcome (Oxfordshire), Refugee Support Group (Berkshire), Slough Refugee Support, or through Care 4 Calais.

Resources/networks:

- Church of England's Guidance for clergy supporting asylum seekers
- Join CCOW's network across Thames Valley, or the national Welcome Churches network

Having conversations about migration can be difficult, but these resources will help:

- How to Have Well Informed Conversations About Asylum, City of Sanctuary
- Navigating Tough Conversations on Refugee Rights, Safe Passage







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STORIES OF CHURCH ACTION & WELCOME:

1 | REDUCING ISOLATION: OXFORD CITIZENS

Church members involved with Oxford Citizens (an alliance of local civil society organisations) partnered with asylum seekers to address isolation caused by lack of affordable transport.

Through monthly training with Oxford Citizens, participants identified bus access as a shared barrier to dignity, healthcare, and community life. Supported by church-based hospitality and advocacy, members met councillors, shared personal stories, and spoke at an Oxfordshire County Council cabinet meeting. One disabled asylum seeker's experience directly prompted policy change, making disabled asylum seekers now eligible for disabled bus passes. This was celebrated, and the campaign for free bus tickets continued.

In 2024, Oxford Citizens held a Migration Summit, and secured a six-month bus pass pilot, supporting 150 asylum seekers, and inspiring other alliances in Bristol and Sheffield to replicate the approach. The pilot led to further funding being granted in 2025 to continue the scheme, providing more bus tickets and enabling asylum seekers to explore Oxford, take part in English language lessons, and attend their places of worship.





2 | OPEN KITCHEN & OPEN HEARTS: BANBURY

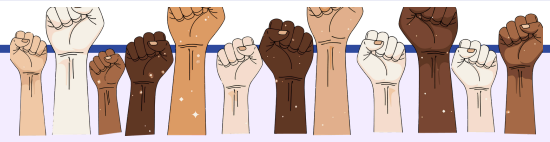
A church in Banbury opened its kitchen to asylum seekers housed nearby, offering dignity, community, and culturally appropriate food. For Rose, an asylum seeker new to the UK, the church's welcome was transformative. Access to the kitchen helped her feel human again and connected her to local life through volunteering. Over two years, the project has supported around 30 families.

More recently, funded through a church-led initiative, Rose returned to the project as the church's Wellbeing Coordinator, extending support beyond food to clothing, skills, and belonging.

3 | SANCTUARY & SOLIDARITY: READING MINSTER

Reading Minster hosted *Sanctuary & Solidarity*, a fundraising concert bringing faith, music, and action together in support of refugees. Led by the church, the event gathered diverse performers and audiences to raise funds for the local charity Refugee Support Group, while also amplifying voices of those who'd experienced displacement.

By opening its doors, Reading Minister showed how worship spaces can mobilise compassion, strengthen community solidarity, and support local organisations offering practical support to refugees locally.



4 | GROWING COMMUNITY & CONGREGATION: MAIDENHEAD

A church in Maidenhead responded with compassion and practical action when they realised asylum seekers were living in a local hotel. The church mobilised to offer clothing, meals, English conversation classes, and welcome, helping people feel seen and valued, as well as to grow community connections. Through hospitality, friendship, and advocacy, the church has become a place of dignity, hope, and belonging.

One of the key areas of need for the asylum seekers was access to education for their children. In partnership with Care4Calais, the church has supported over 100 children to access schools in the town.

Over time, trust has deepened, and some Iranian asylum seekers have explored the Christian faith within the church, through Bible studies, and through taking baptism courses. Several have since chosen to follow Jesus and been baptised.