




**Asylum seekers –
dispelling the myths!**



**Do not forget
to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing so,
some people have shown
hospitality to angels,
without knowing it !**

(Hebrews 13:2)

Sanctuary

- ▶ **sanctuary**
- ▶ /'sɑŋ(k)tʃʊəri/
- ▶ A **sanctuary** is a place of safety, refuge, or holiness. It most commonly refers to a secure haven for people or animals, or the most sacred, consecrated area within a place of worship.

City of Sanctuary

- ▶ The City of Sanctuary movement was founded by Inderjit Bhogal, himself a refugee, in 2003 to offer places of welcome to those who are forced to flee their country of origin due to war, persecution, threat or danger of any kind
- ▶ Leeds became a City of Sanctuary in November 2010

Horsforth – a Town of Sanctuary since April 2023

- ▶ For about three years now I have worked as a volunteer each Monday morning at a Drop-in for asylum seekers at a North Leeds hotel for asylum seeker men
- ▶ Sheila and Mark Cahill joined the team in February 2025
- ▶ We help with English conversation skills, finding pathways through the process of seeking asylum, outings and social activities, amongst many other things

Above all, we welcome..., we listen... we care

Being an asylum seeker – what is it like?

- ▶ I cannot tell you ...
- ▶ but those with lived experience can!
- ▶ Let's welcome our guests ...

Welcome, Ali and Mo !

- ▶ السلام عليكم
- ▶ (as-salām 'alaykum) Peace be upon you!
- ▶ هلاً وسهلاً
- ▶ (ahlan wa sahlan) Welcome !
- ▶ كيف حالك؟
- ▶ (kayfa ḥālak) How are you?
- ▶

Introducing our team today (1)

- ▶ Name: **Ali**
- ▶ Age: 39
- ▶ Country of birth: North Sudan
- ▶ Nearest city to home: Wadi Halfa
- ▶ Native language: Arabic
- ▶ Other languages: English

Africa



Introducing our team today (2)

- ▶ Name: **Mo**
- ▶ Age: 41
- ▶ Country of birth: Iraq
- ▶ Nearest city to home: Baghdad
- ▶ Native language: Arabic
- ▶ Other languages: English





Dispelling the myths ...

...Or...

challenging fake news!

What is an asylum seeker?

- ▶ An asylum seeker is a **person who has fled their own country due to persecution, war, or human rights violations** and is seeking international protection by formally applying for asylum in another country, awaiting a decision on their claim for refugee status.
- ▶ So these people are **not yet legally recognised as refugees** and therefore their rights and access to services, such as public funds and work are restricted until their application is approved by the Government (“Leave to remain”)

What is refugee status?

- ▶ **Refugee status is a formal, legal recognition granted to individuals who have fled their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.** In the UK, this status provides five years of protection, permission to work, and access to public funds, allowing recipients to rebuild their lives safely.

What is a migrant?

- ▶ 1. a person who moves from one place to another to find work or better living conditions
- ▶ 2. a bird or animal that migrates

What is an immigrant?

- ▶ A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country

What is “illegal immigration”?

- ▶ An "illegal immigrant" in the UK refers to **a non-citizen living in the country without legal permission**, meaning they lack valid documentation or a residence permit, often due to entering without authorization, overstaying a visa, or arriving via irregular routes like small boats, which under the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) can prevent them from claiming asylum and lead to detention and removal.

What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

- ▶ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone international document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on **December 10, 1948**, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris. It was the first global **agreement to define the fundamental human rights and freedoms that belong to every person.**
- ▶ **Individual Rights (Articles 3–11):** Includes the **right to life, liberty, and security**; prohibition of slavery and torture; and the right to a fair trial.
- ▶ **Individual in Society (Articles 12–17):** Covers privacy, freedom of movement, **right to asylum**, nationality, marriage, and property ownership.

UDHR articles 13 and 14

▶ **Article 13**

- ▶ Everyone has **the right to freedom of movement** and residence within the borders of each state.
- ▶ Everyone has **the right to leave any country**, including his own, and to return to his country.

▶ **Article 14**

- ▶ Everyone has **the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.**
- ▶ This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

What is “leave to remain”?

- ▶ **Leave to Remain (LTR)** in the UK is permission for non-UK citizens to stay in the country, either for a limited time (like on a work or student visa) or permanently, known as **Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)** or settlement, granting the right to live, work, and study indefinitely, and is a path to citizenship.
- ▶ Different routes exist for family, work (like Skilled Worker visas), study, or long residence, each with specific requirements, but all require proving you meet the criteria for your visa category and potentially passing the **Life in the UK Test** and English language proficiency.

How many asylum seekers does the UK have?

- ▶ As of late 2025/early 2026, the UK hosts 108,000 asylum seekers in accommodation: a record number of asylum applications
- ▶ Total asylum caseloads (including appeals) were over 224,000 work-in-progress cases as of June 2024

What is a refused asylum applicant?

- ▶ A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision.
- ▶ Some people who have their case refused voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned.
- ▶ For some, it is not safe or practical to return until conditions in their country change.

The facts: 1

- ▶ **72%** of refugees live in countries neighbouring their country of origin

The facts: 2

- ▶ At the end of 2021 around 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced across the world. Of these, 27.1 million were refugees, while 53.2 million were internally displaced within their country of origin.

The facts: 3

- ▶ Over 6.8 million people have fled conflict in Syria, and many more are displaced inside the country.
- ▶ Turkey is the biggest refugee hosting country in the world. At the end of 2022 Turkey was providing safety to 3.7 million Syrian refugees.
- ▶ By the end of February 2021 the UK had resettled 20,319 refugees from Syria under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). This includes 239 refugees who were resettled prior to the target of 20,000 being set.

The facts: 4

- ▶ The UK is home to approx. 1% of the 27.1 million refugees who were forcibly displaced across the world.

The facts: 5

The top ten refugee producing countries in 2021 all have poor human rights records or on-going conflict. People seeking asylum are fleeing from these conflicts and abuses, looking for safety.

The facts: 6

- ▶ As of late 2024–2025, the top countries producing refugees, driven by conflict and persecution, are
- ▶ Afghanistan, Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Sudan, which together account for the vast majority of global displacement. Other significant contributors include South Sudan, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Haiti.

The facts: 7

- ▶ In 2021, more than two-thirds of the refugees across the world came from just five countries: Syria (6.8 million), Venezuela (4.6 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.4 million) and Myanmar (1.2 million).

The facts: 8

- ▶ There is no such thing as an "illegal" or "bogus" person seeking asylum. Under international law, anyone has the right to apply for asylum in any country that has signed the 1951 Convention and to remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim.

The facts: 9

- ▶ It is recognised in the 1951 Convention that people fleeing persecution may have to use irregular means in order to escape and claim asylum in another country – there is no legal way to travel to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking asylum.

The facts: 10

- ▶ The 1951 Refugee Convention guarantees everybody the right to apply for asylum. It has saved millions of lives.
- ▶ **No country has ever withdrawn from it.**

The facts: 11

- ▶ There is nothing in international law to say that refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach.
- ▶ A European regulation allows countries in the EU to return an adult asylum applicant to the first European country they reached.
- ▶ This means that countries on the edge of Europe have responsibility for a lot more people seeking asylum than others.
- ▶ Some of the countries through which people travel to get to Europe are unsafe for some. Many have not signed the Refugee Convention, meaning that people who remain there will not get international protection and be able to rebuild their lives.

The facts: 12

- ▶ **75%** of initial decisions made in 2022 resulted in a grant of asylum or other form of protection

The facts: 13

- ▶ The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. It is very difficult for people seeking asylum to provide the evidence required to be granted protection.
- ▶ Despite these challenges, the majority of asylum claims are successful.
- ▶ In the year ending June 2022, 75% of initial decisions resulted in a grant of asylum or other form of protection.

The facts:14

- ▶ In 2024, approximately 47% of UK asylum applications were granted at the initial decision stage, marking a significant decline from the 76% record high in 2022.
- ▶ While initial grants have dropped, around 43% of refused cases were successful upon appeal in 2024.
- ▶ As of late 2025, the total asylum caseload remained high, with over 62,000 cases awaiting an initial decision.

The number of people currently away from home

- ▶ These are often referred to as “displaced people”
- ▶ Some of them are displaced within their own country (as in Gaza for example)
- ▶ 90% of all displaced people are in that situation due to war
- ▶ 75% of displaced people are accommodated in neighbouring countries
- ▶ The countries receiving most of them are: Türkiye, Iran and Jordan
- ▶ The country in Europe receiving most migrants is Germany
- ▶ The percentage of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK is less than 1% of the total population
- ▶ It is estimated that there are currently more than.....



123 million
displaced people