

EXODUSZINE.CO.UK

ISSUE
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Refugee stories

EXODUS

Produced for the community by people seeking sanctuary

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Exodus is a non-profit magazine produced by a small group of volunteers to give a voice to refugees seeking a new life in the UK. Exodus team and regular contributors: Jean-Marc Hall, Souran Soleimani, Helen Ball, Tamirat Astatkie, Kynz, Sam Jonkers, Martin Trepte.
 Email: exodusfanzine@gmail.com
 Web: <https://exoduszine.co.uk/>
 Facebook: [Exodus Fanzine](#)

Trip into rural past brings a welcome change of scenery

A GROUP of people seeking sanctuary in the UK enjoyed a change of scenery when they visited the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading University.

The museum focuses on the history of the English countryside and its people, and sparked lots of conversation and learning among the visitors.

New vocabulary included 'midwife', 'forceps' and even 'bone shaker'.

The group viewed some of the literary artefacts at the museum, including first editions of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and agreed to either read the book or watch the film.

The visit concluded with a continuation of the group's art project and planning for an exhibition based around the museum's nature collections.

One of the group said: "It was a day full of happiness. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Now isn't the time to give in to despair

THE number of active worldwide disputes and armed conflict is at its highest level since the end of the Second World War.

The wars in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza are the primary drivers and show little signs of any resolution.

Current disputes involving political motivation, criminal gangs and terrorism are rising and violence aimed at civilians has surged to an all time high.

Africa, the Middle East, Europe, South America and Asia are all experiencing conflict and this is driving the surge in people seeking asylum.

Economic policies and so called 'internationalised' wars are becoming more prevalent, with support of international allies involved in conflicts beyond their own borders.

Many of those seeking asylum are

fleeing war, along with violence, persecution and varying crises.

It is an international right under the 1951 Refugee Convention that individuals can seek asylum from persecution or conflict in any country, with no requirement to claim asylum in the first 'safe' country they reach.

Exodus supports and welcomes those seeking asylum on our shores.

We collaborate with humanitarian organisations and groups who interact and connect with those seeking sanctuary to amplify their amazing work.

And while the current worldwide circumstances might seem futile, EXODUS is determined to remain optimistic and pragmatic.

Jean-Marc Hall
 Exodus Project Co-ordinator

Award-tipped film aims to break through echo chamber



A still from the *Largo*. Photo: Slickfilms

LARGO is a short film about a Syrian refugee living in foster care in the south of England. It tells the story of 10-year-old Musa who, feeling homesick and unwelcome, decides to build a boat and sail home to his family.

The film, in which Musa is played by first-time actor Zack Elsokari and his foster parent by Tamsin Grieg, has been tipped as a possible contender for the Oscar and BAFTA awards.

Last November it was shown at three schools and more school screenings of the film are planned for this year. At Stoke Newington School in north London, Zack joined year 9 students and head of year Anna Gluckstein, who described it as 'eye-

opening' for students who were 'totally empathetic'. "To have a sympathetic story about a child for other children to see is more powerful than anything teachers can tell them in the classroom," she said.

Co-writer and director Salvatore Scarpa said *Largo* was 'a counter to the negative narrative surrounding refugees in the UK, which school students have grown up with their entire lives'.

He added: "Our goal has not only been to inspire empathy for refugees, but to do so in a way that breaks through echochambers." Teachers interested in screening *Largo* and running the associated workshops are asked to email:

largofilm@slickfilms.co.uk

Finding hope in the dark

British Iranian former prisoner tells of how he found meaning while incarcerated in Iran's notorious Evin jail

British Iranian Anooosheh Ashoori spoke passionately about his incarceration in Iran's notorious Evin prison and the effect it had on his life, when he was a guest speaker hosted by Amnesty International Reading.

His prison ordeal started when visiting his elderly mother in 2017. He had only been in Iran a few days when, on his way to the local market, he was accosted by four men and told to get in their car. He was shown an arrest warrant accusing him of espionage, (allegedly, spying for Israel), before being blindfolded and taken to Evin prison in Tehran.

He was completely unable to understand or react to what was happening to him and was initially placed in solitary confinement, enduring interrogation that subjected him to sleep deprivation, threats against his life and psychological pressures.

Anoosheh started to believe the lies they were telling him



Mayor of Reading Cllr Alice Mpfu-Coles with Anooosheh Ashoori and Helen Ball from Amnesty International at the talk.

and they soon threatened the safety of his family back home in the UK.

This pressure made him feel that the only way to help them was to not exist. He at-

tempted suicide several times, including staying on a hunger strike until his fellow captives helped by persuading him to start eating again. Anooosheh searched for a meaning to get

him through the pain and suffering. He started running in the limited space of the prison and created 'goals' that helped him to get fit and strong.

He gained access to the prison gym and managed to find books to read, including 'Man's Search for Meaning', by Victor E Frankl. It was this book that inspired him to aim for running a marathon after being released from prison.

"In prison I had the incentive to try to find meaning in my suffering and now I have passed that stage, I can try and find meaning in my life."

The struggle to free another UK prisoner, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, stemmed from a government dispute between Iran and the UK that had implications for the diplomatic release of Ashoori and Zaghari-Ratcliffe's detention.

A £400m payment for tanks to be delivered from the UK to Iran in the 1970's was made by the Iranian government before it was overthrown in the Islamic Revolution. The tanks were not delivered, and the new Iranian government demanded the state's money back.

However, because of EU sanctions and diplomatic wrangling, the payment was not returned.

Finally, under pressure from humanitarian organisations, including Amnesty International and Hostage International, Ratcliffe and Ashoori were released, but not until on the same day, the British government had paid back the money to Iran.

Jean-Marc Hall (Additional material from Hostage International and Amnesty International)



Anooosheh Ashoori speaks of his experiences.

Detention is not the answer

Community resists re-opening of Campsfield removal centre

As readers might remember from Exodus issue 5, the threat of Campsfield being re-opened became a reality under the previous government. Sadly, despite statements by Sir Kier Starmer prior to winning the election last year that immigration detention was not the answer, this decision was not overturned.

To give you some history, Campsfield Immigration Removal Centre near Kidlington, just north of Oxford, closed in 2018 after 25 years of campaigning by people detained there and supporters including the Campaign to Close Campsfield.

But in 2022 plans were announced to reopen it.

Every relevant elected body in Oxfordshire – parish, county, Cherwell District and Oxford City councils – plus local MP Calum Miller, all opposed the reopening.

But in early December 2025, the site was re-opened and the first detainees arrived.

Campsfield has been ‘refurbished’ by Galliford Try at a cost of £70million.

It will be run by Mitie Care and Custody, a branch of the Mitie facilities management company, whose record at Harmondsworth elicited a scorching report from the Chief Inspector of Prisons only last year (‘the worst conditions [ever] seen in immigration detention’).

The Government says there will be a Phase 2 new-build to bring the number of beds up from 140 to 400 by 2030.

To get round the solid local opposition, the government pursued a Crown Development Order (CDO) route that cuts out the local planning authority, Cherwell District Council.

The CDO route effectively invites one government minister



to agree with the wishes of another despite the clear wishes of local people.

More detention means more years of danger, misery and harm for detainees.

Mistreatment of vulnerable people, including survivors of torture and trafficking, is deeply ingrained in the system. Immigration detention is not the answer to the arrival of people in the UK, regardless of how they get here.

Helen Ball, with thanks to Bill MacKeith, Coalition to Close Campsfield treasurer, for the content of this article

What can we do?

- Join the regular demonstration at 12noon on the last Saturday every month - Campsfield gates, Langford Lane OX5 1RE
- Join the online organising meetings and keep up to date with the Keep Campsfield Closed campaign through its website at: www.keepcampsfieldclosed.uk
- If you would be able to visit detainees, please contact the charity Asylum Welcome which is organising visits. These take place on Tuesday mornings. Please note – visitors should be different people from those attending the monthly demonstrations.

Alternatives do to detention do exist. Stand up for human rights and join the fight to close Campsfield and end immigration detention.



Pictures courtesy of Coalition to Keep Campsfield Closed



COALITION TO CLOSE CAMPSFIELD

**DEMONSTRATION
TO CLOSE
CAMPSFIELD**

EVERY LAST SATURDAY OF THE MONTH AT 12 NOON

**CAMPSFIELD,
LANGFORD LANE,
KIDLINGTON, OX5 1RE**

SOLIDARITY ACROSS WALLS



Birth of a new nation

Souran Soleimani says the widespread recent protests in Iran show the people want a future based on equality and the rule of law rather than putting their faith in personalities and ‘heroes’

Picture: VahidOnline telegram channel is marked with [CCO.1.0](#).



January in Iran’s contemporary history has often been a month of great events, but January 2026 had a different vibe.

This time, it was no longer just a passing protest; it was the result of years of resentment and experience that have now borne fruit.

If three years ago, during the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ movement, we were all talking about women’s right to choose and dignity, in January 2026 we learned that this dignity is tied to people’s tables and livelihoods.

Today, no one can separate bread from freedom.

One of the strangest and most important events this time was the arrival of the bazaar – the traditional class of Iranian merchants and traders, rather than the market in a general economic sense.

The bazaar, which had always been a symbol of caution and tradition, this time became a driving force.

This means that even the most conservative sections of society have under-

stood that under this economic dictatorship, there is no future.

In January 2026, workers, employees, and the bazaar gathered under one umbrella – an umbrella called ‘the right to live with dignity’.

A very important point heard in peo-

‘Dignity is tied to people’s tables and livelihoods. Today, no one can separate bread from freedom.’

ple’s conversations these days is that no one is waiting for a hero anymore. We have learned how dangerous it can be to tie the fate of a nation to a ‘particular person’.

Years ago, I wrote in an article in the first issue of this magazine, titled ‘When a Slogan Becomes a Lifestyle’, that real power lies in our ‘awareness’. When we are

aware, we no longer need a hero to come and save us.

Lord Acton, a British historian, warned ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’. For today’s Iranian society, this statement is not a theoretical proposition, but a lived experience.

For this reason, it must be emphasised that the main demand of society is not to follow a name, but to build a system based on law and the limitation of power.

Iran after January 2026 is a country that no longer seeks legendary heroes, because it has found itself.

For us, who are watching from afar, the most beautiful part of the story is the ‘growing up and becoming aware’ of the people.

The Iran of tomorrow will be built on expertise and law, not on the praise of personalities.

These difficult days are, in fact, the birth of a new nation – a nation in which no one is above criticism and everyone is equal before the law.

This is what true victory means.

Calais Light charity's last act brings brightness to refugee lives

BEFORE closing down last year the charity Calais Light pulled off something really special.

The organisation, which ceased its activities on December 31, ran regular weekend convoys from Essex to Calais, to provide, sort, and distribute aid to refugees and displaced people.

Operating for nine years, it focused on providing direct humanitarian support, including food, clothing, and toiletries, and aiding with English language skills and social integration for refugees in the UK.

After five months of planning, calls, and coordination, the charity arranged one of their biggest corporate donations for one of Care4Calais' groups: two vans packed with brand new clothes, trainers, hoodies, jeans, joggers, dresses, and more.

Everything was chosen with care and delivered straight to Care4Calais volunteers, who set up a pop-up shop where people in hotel and dispersal accommodation can browse, try things on, and pick what fits them best.

It meant people could choose clothes that feel like them, just as anyone would. Something that fits well, feels new, and restores a sense of normality many of us take for granted.

This project is such a reflection of Calais Light: creative, determined and endlessly kind.

Care4Calais said it was so grateful for their years of collaboration and friendship, and for pulling off this huge donation that brought warmth and confidence to so many people.



Olha from Ukraine, who was housed through Refugees at Home.

Charity brings asylum seekers in from the cold

With the country in the grip of winter, many who fled war, violence and discrimination in search of safety now face freezing nights on UK streets. The good news is that a crowdfunding drive by the charity Refugees at Home has raised almost £12,000 to help keep them safe.

For many of us, a warm home during the cold months is something we take for granted. While we gather for cosy nights with friends and loved ones, many of those who came to the UK to seek sanctuary instead risk sleeping rough this winter.

The cold weather, coupled with the surge in anti-refugee sentiment, means the situation is particularly bleak for those seeking asylum.

Refugees at Home does not think people who come to the UK for sanctuary should end up on the streets. It connects people with a spare room to refugees and people seeking asylum in need of somewhere to stay.

Working with volunteer hosts, referrers, and supporters, it aims to enable a society where everyone looking to rebuild their lives can do so in safety and without the risk of homelessness.

Since 2016, it has placed more than 7,465 guests who might otherwise have ended up sleeping on the streets, totalling more than 766,860 nights spent in a safe, warm and welcoming home. The charity says: "Contrary to

what some might say, this is not an island of strangers.

"Time and time again we've seen communities across the UK come together to welcome those looking for a better life."

For example, last year, Olha came to the UK through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, arriving at host Angeli's Edinburgh home shortly before Christmas.

She said: "They helped me with everything – if I had a problem or needed to talk about anything. Angeli and her family were always so open with me. When I went to the local Ukrainian Community Centre, she came with me because I was new to the UK and quite shy. She asked the people there if they could help me, which was really nice.

"Angeli helped me improve my English and by April it was good enough to get a job in a souvenir shop, which was really nice and I was able to speak to so many people and improve it even more."

Now, Olha is preparing to move to London with her cousin and has a job lined up in a hotel. She says she'll never forget her host's kindness, and the two are still in touch.

"She says that if I need any help, I can ask her. She is very kind and I'm really happy that I was able to stay with her."

For more details about the work of the charity see: www.refugeesathome.org

Don't let hatred divide us

Sam Jonkers of Henley Refugee Support and Care4Calais

As I walked through Market Place this afternoon, I was struck by how beautiful Henley looked in the autumn sunshine, with the summer's bunting and Union flags still fluttering. I'm proud of my hometown and usually love to see the flags fly, but today I was saddened by the fact that our flag has been weaponised.

As well as being a local business owner I run the Henley Refugee Support Facebook group and volunteer with refugee charity Care4Calais, supporting refugees throughout the Thames Valley.

I am trusted by people who have lost everything and have newly arrived in the UK, at moments when they feel a maelstrom of emotions, relief, grief, guilt, anxiety and bewilderment. We deliver emergency clothes packs, ensure people have essentials like pain killers and help people navigate complicated paperwork.

It's easy to underestimate the value of a welcoming smile. One teenager told me I was the first person to "smile at his face" since he left his mother, it brought home the enormity of how it must feel to be alone in a strange country.

And we become one community, working together to organise events, give talks, run winter night shelters and help those most in need. We've had some great winter warmer parties for the homeless at the Quakers Meeting House. Henley Quakers are very generous with use of their beautiful garden and often raise funds for us via events such as snowdrop teas.

In one of the emergency clothes packs we delivered recently was a brand new pair of shoes. The shoes are extra special because they were purchased by Ali, a Sudanese man who had claimed asylum. I remember my first meeting with Ali vividly, his belongings had been lost and he was wrapped in a bed sheet from his hostel, we gave him basic clothes items and a second-hand pair of trainers. I always try to include a small treat in the emergency packs, nail clippers (you would not believe the smiles they raise), a note pad or a bar of chocolate. Ali now has refugee status and his first job in Scotland.

He said: "I remember the moment I came here with nothing and Care4calais were here to help with so much. I thank all of the people in Care4calais who work so



hard to help people in need."

Ali is no stranger to helping, while he lived here in the Thames Valley he assisted with many clothes distributions and frequently handed out food to the homeless.

So, we were touched, but not surprised, when he spent some of his first pay packet to send shoes for us to give to someone else in need. The shoes went to another Sudanese man who has recently been forced to escape the horrific conflict in Sudan, described by the UNHCR as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. This feels like the right person to walk in Ali's shoes.

Last week I gave a lift to four men who had claimed asylum in the UK, while my daughters drove three others in their car. Each car journey is a voyage of discovery.

We chat about local delicacies, family traditions and the news. I learned that in Somalia they eat lots of pasta, with bananas; in Afghanistan when two people pass under a rainbow at same time they will fall in love, while Kuwaitis say that passing under a rainbow changes someone's gender.

One of the men speaks near fluent English. He's a doctor, who had just qualified when his hospital in Sudan was destroyed, and his life was threatened. I

asked what specialism he'd like to pursue, he originally wanted to be a surgeon, but given all the suffering he's witnessed he now thinks he might become a psychiatrist.

Another worked alongside British forces in Afghanistan. He went into hiding with his family, fled and they travelled across Europe to reach safety in the UK. When one of his daughters fell ill in Calais, he agreed with his wife that he would make the dangerous channel crossing alone. Now he prays to be able to bring his family here safely as soon as possible. I'm not religious, but I prayed too.

We also talk about the news and current affairs. The rise in anti-migrant rhetoric has been intense, protests organised by Tommy Robinson and other far-right activists have stoked fear and division, asylum seekers have become scared to leave their rooms and those who support them have received abuse and threats from people who claim to be protecting our women and children. "Me and some of my friends were locked in our rooms," an Eritrean friend told me, "we lost trust in people, because we thought we would be killed or attacked by some of them."

I would be lying if I said I haven't feared for the safety of myself and my family during recent protests. But I'm driven by the desire to counter racism, promote equality and attempt to improve our communities for all.

"When people who stand up for dignity and justice are silenced, it's not just them under attack, it's the kind of country we all live in and the human rights that protect us all.

Nigel Farage says he would pay the Taliban and similar regimes in order to send refugees back, back to the places where they will face oppression, violence and persecution. Please don't let a narrative of hate divide our communities. Human Rights protect every one of us. Let's keep kindness, compassion and togetherness as our values.

If you'd like to know more about refugees and how to help, hop onto the Henley Refugee Support Facebook group or drop me an email at: sam.jonkers@care4calais.org

Story reproduced with kind permission of the Henley Standard

A tale of two policies

While the UK lurches to the right on immigration, Spain is set to legalise the status of half a million undocumented migrants

Home secretary Shabana Mahmood is seeking to reduce asylum claims and small boat crossings by returning those granted asylum with refugee status back to their home countries when it is deemed safe.

Currently, refugee status in the UK lasts for five years, after which they can apply for indefinite leave to remain and have a route to citizenship.

The policy of changing the system has been adopted from Denmark, which has the toughest asylum and immigration system in Europe.

The Government also looked at Denmark's restrictions on family reunion and Mahmood believes Denmark's policies on immigration serve as a deterrent to small boat crossings and so called 'illegal immigration'.

This is clearly a shift towards the right and a policy that echoes the immoral and unethical views of right-wing groups, including Reform.

The slogan, "less in, more out" has become a phrase more



Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood visits Eurostar Border Force (54812814733) photo by UK Home Office is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

commonly used by those determined the UK should leave the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

Although Denmark is still a member of the ECHR, it is alarming that its policies on refugees and people seeking asylum has attracted the inter-

est of the Home Secretary.

Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the spectrum, Spain has announced it will legalise the status of at least half a million undocumented migrants, in stark contrast to increasingly draconian anti-migrant policies in other countries, according to

Novara Media. The new measures will grant migrants one-year residence permits that can later be extended.

Migration minister Elma Saiz said the announcement marked a 'historic day for our country'.

"We are reinforcing a migratory model based on human rights, integration, co-existence and which is compatible with economic growth and social cohesion," Saiz said.

The residence permits will be available to foreign nationals with no criminal record and who have lived in Spain for at least five months before 31 December 2025. The window to apply for legal status is expected to open in April and close at the end of June. There are an estimated 837,938 undocumented migrants in Spain, many of them from Latin America.

Spain's coalition government, headed by socialist Pedro Sánchez, is an outlier on immigration among European nations, many of which have become increasingly hostile to immigrants amid a surge in support for far-right parties.

Not seeking charity but an opportunity to rebuild their lives

INTERNATIONAL Migrants Day was celebrated the world over on December 18, recognising the contributions made by millions of migrants globally to the economies of their adopted home countries, while promoting basic human rights.

Migrants are men, women and children who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons.

They do not seek charity, but opportunity, respect and a chance to rebuild their lives and live with dignity. In the UK, migrants contribute to the economy by fill-

ing labour shortages or starting new businesses and they often pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits - making them a net contributor to the economy not the burden right-wing commentators would have us believe.

They also contribute significantly to the financial services industry, helping to make London the second largest financial centre in the world.

Migration accounts for roughly 16 per cent of the UK population and this means around 10.7 million people are foreign

born. Migration is a normal and a perpetual social process, and it has been a primary force in defining our shared history.

Today, we face huge challenges around the changing political landscape that threatens and undermines the multicultural and social cohesion that makes Britain great.

International Migrants Day promotes solidarity, understanding and respect with those seeking a fulfilled and better life in all countries around the world.

Jean-Marc Hall

Picture: "Safe and legal routes - Refugees Welcome" by Ilias Bartolini is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.



Ditch the divisive rhetoric

It's time to talk-up the obvious benefits of safe routes for refugees

Keir Starmer has once again capitulated to the anti-migrant protesters by stating 'We are furious at the level of illegal migrants and asylum hotels' and 'this government will close every asylum hotel'.

This is rhetoric that only goes to serve and build on the divisive policies splitting communities around the UK.

It is clear legislation making it difficult for asylum claims to be processed is not working. The only way to have a compassionate and practical working model is to offer safe routes.

These offer asylum seekers humanitarian, social, and economic benefits by providing an orderly, secure alternative to dangerous journeys. By helping vulnerable people reach safety, these pathways can save lives, disrupt human trafficking networks, and reduce pressure on countries hosting large refugee populations.

Safe routes, which can include resettlement schemes, family reunification, or humanitarian corridors, offer people a way to escape danger without risking their lives on perilous journeys controlled by smug-

glers. This prevents drownings, fatal accidents, and exploitation by human traffickers. Legal admission pathways enable states to prioritise assistance to individuals who are most in need of protection but cannot access regular means of entry.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for instance, refers highly vulnerable individuals to countries for resettlement. This alleviates pressure on host countries.

A small number of low- and middle-income countries host the majority of the world's refugees and asylum seekers, straining their resources.

Expanded safe routes enable the fairer sharing of responsibility among nations, which eases this burden and demonstrates international solidarity.

Safe and legal pathways allow refugees to arrive in a planned and orderly way, where support systems like housing, education, and healthcare can be put in place. This helps them rebuild their lives and more quickly integrate into their new communities.

For refugees who have already found

safety, family reunion policies are a critical component of safe routes, allowing them to bring immediate family members to join them. This upholds the right to family unity.

For receiving countries, well-designed safe routes offer a more controlled process for managing migration than reacting to irregular arrivals. This can help to manage population intake and build public and political support.

By providing an organised process, safe routes can help decrease spending on border enforcement measures, dangerous search-and-rescue operations, and managing a backlog of complex asylum claims.

Asylum seekers arriving via safe routes are also in a better position to become self-reliant and less likely to need ongoing financial support.

Smugglers and traffickers profit from dangerous, irregular journeys. Providing legal alternatives takes business away from these criminal organisations, making such routes less profitable and disrupting their operations.

Jean-Marc Hall

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**Saturday 28th March
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Add your name:
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TOGETHER

The day everything changed

Esther Rawlings describes finding safety and purpose in the UK

There are moments in life that divide everything into before and after. For me, that moment was witnessing the murder of five people I knew, who were more than friends — their lives were taken violently and suddenly on the beautiful but troubled Caribbean island of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

It happened on Wednesday evening, 19 July, 2023, just after 7pm. I was inside my small registered business, preparing to close for the night. This was where I sold local food and fresh, healthy juice drinks — a young entrepreneur building a future.

Outside, men I knew were gathered near the streetlight, playing dice and talking. Everything seemed ordinary, familiar, safe. Then a jeep pulled up, and within moments, gunfire shattered the calm.

I saw one of the shooters adjust his AR rifle, then start firing relentlessly at the men standing outside my shop. I froze. My shop door faced the line of fire — if I ran, I would have been directly in danger. I pressed myself against the wall, shaking uncontrollably, trying not to breathe too loudly. My heart pounded so hard I feared it might give me away.

Screams filled the street. People scattered in all directions; some fell as they were hit.

Five men were killed that night. One of them was a boy the age of my son, who was 13 years old at the time. Seeing him die before my eyes shattered something inside me. This was not distant violence; it was happening right outside my door.

When the shooters left, a terrifying silence settled. I realised immediately that witnessing this made me a target. Word spread quickly in an island com-



Esther Rawlings and her children hope to build a new life in Britain.

munity where everyone knows everyone. I was warned that I had been seen, that I knew too much, that speaking out could cost me my life. Threats began arriving constantly.

I could not sleep in the comfort of my own home. For weeks, my 13-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter and I moved between safe houses and temporary places, constantly alert, traumatised, and exhausted.

Corruption ran deep, and gangs and police were often connected. Seeking help from the police, or even appealing to the Prime Minister, yielded nothing. There was no protection. Survival demanded action.

I could not gather anything from my shop. The small busi-

ness I had built with years of sweat and determination — my independence, my security, my children's future — had to be abandoned overnight.

It was devastating, but staying meant risking death for me and my children. The courage to leave, to board a plane to the UK, was not born of choice, but of absolute necessity. Safety demanded it.

I arrived in the United Kingdom still deeply traumatized, paranoid, and uncertain, but alive. I came here not because it was easy, or because I sought comfort, but because this country offered protection — a chance for my children and me to live without fear. I wanted to rebuild a life where they could thrive, where I could reclaim a

sense of normalcy and security, and where our lives would no longer be under constant threat.

Since arriving, my commitment has been to give back to the society that offered us sanctuary. I have sought to contribute in every way I can, volunteering at the Thames Hospice and at the Free Fridge community, helping the most vulnerable. This is just the start. When I finally have the right to work, I plan to combine my entrepreneurial spirit with a focus on community wellness and cultural sharing.

I dream of contributing economically by introducing the rich, authentic, and delightful flavours of St Vincent and the Grenadines to the UK. I want to offer genuine Caribbean dishes, cooked with fresh herbs and spices, honouring the culinary traditions that I grew up with.

This would not only be a business, but a way to share a positive piece of my heritage with the community that offered us safety.

Even now, in 2025, I am still an asylum seeker. I have been here for over two years and three months, waiting for a decision that determines our future. This uncertainty affects every part of my life. Despite these limitations, I remain determined to persevere.

The events of 19 July, 2023 changed everything. They took away my safety, forced me to abandon the life I had built, and confronted me with a fear I had never known. But they also revealed the depth of a parent's courage and resilience.

I survived. I protected my children. And now, in this new country, I am determined to rise, to contribute, and to reclaim the normal, meaningful future that violence tried to take from us.

Help making sense of the world

Complicit: Britain's Role in the Destruction of Gaza
Peter Osborne

A FEARLESS and forensic indictment of British complicity in the destruction of Gaza.

In a gripping narrative informed by original reporting, Osborne tells how Britain's Conservative and Labour parties converged to back Israel's criminal assault – in the process occupying disturbing common ground with the far right.

Rather than challenge this political cartel, British media colluded in its misrepresentations. The shocking result was that, as British authorities helped Israel set Gaza as well as international law aflame, almost everything the public was told about this momentous conflagration was untrue.

When citizens still turned out in their hundreds of thousands to demand a ceasefire, the political-media machine



smeared peaceful demonstrations as 'hate marches'.

A former chief political commentator, Osborne knows the British establishment from within. In this book he names names and provides receipts. His demand is accountability—for atrocities, and their accomplices. You will be angry.

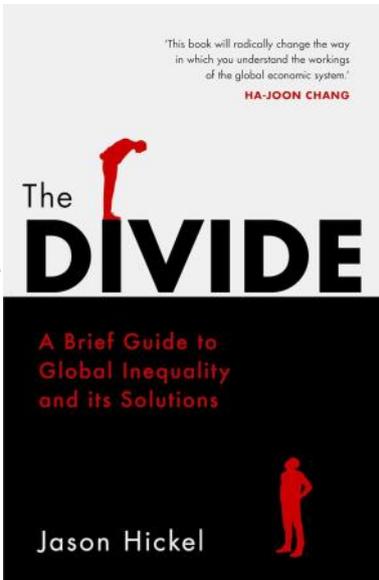
The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions

Jason Hickel

THE richest eight people control more wealth than the poorest half of the world combined while 60 per cent of the world's population lives on less than \$5 a day. And though global GDP has nearly tripled since 1980, 1.1 billion more people are now living in poverty.

We are told development is working, that poverty is a natural phenomenon and will be eradicated through aid. But just because it is a comforting tale doesn't make it true. Poor countries are poor because they are integrated into the global economic system on unequal terms, and aid only helps to hide what is also a major cause of migration.

Drawing on pioneering research and years of first-hand experience, The Di-



vide tracks the evolution of global inequality to the present day - offering revelatory answers to some of humanity's greatest problems. It is a provocative, urgent and ultimately uplifting account of how the world works, and how it can change for the better.

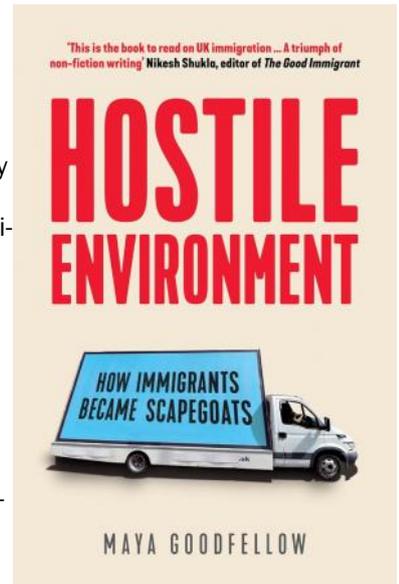
Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats
Maya Goodfellow

FROM the 1960s the UK's immigration policy - introduced by both Labour and Tory governments - has been a toxic combination of racism and xenophobia.

Maya Goodfellow tracks this history through to the present day, looking at both legislation and rhetoric, to show that distinct forms of racism and dehumanisation have produced a confused and draconian immigration system epitomised by Theresa May's 'hostile environment'.

She examines the arguments made against immigration in order to dismantle and challenge them.

Through interviews with people trying to navigate the system, legal experts, politicians and campaigners, Goodfellow shows the devastating



human costs of anti-immigration politics and argues for an alternative.

The new edition includes an additional chapter, which explores the impacts of the 2019 election and immigration enforcement introduced during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity

Sander van der Linden

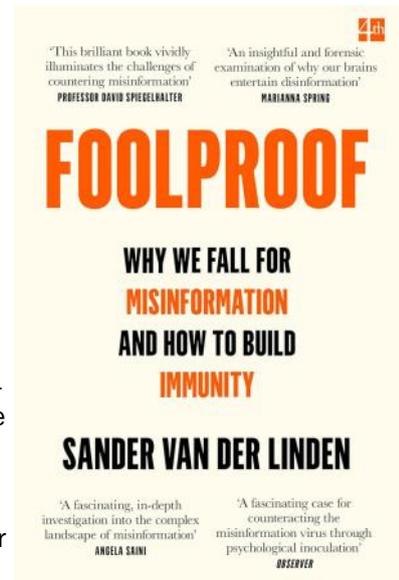
FAKE news. Alternative facts. Conspiracy theories.

Misinformation is one of the defining problems of our age, and despite what we may think, something to which we are all susceptible.

So how and why does misinformation spread? And, more importantly, what can we do about it?

Sander van der Linden, a Cambridge University professor and leading expert, takes the reader through the psychology of conspiratorial thinking and equips us with the tools needed to help stop the spread of misinformation once and for all.

He details a fascinating approach for counteracting what he describes as 'the misinformation virus' through psy-



chological inoculation.

The result is a must-read for all those interested in resisting the spread of disinformation and who want to know why people believe fake news and how to defend themselves and those around them against it.



21 years trapped in limbo

Tag Bashir's lifelong journey in search of sanctuary

A sylum-seekers' journeys to the UK can be arduous and dangerous — and very very long. One of the longest was by Tag Bashir.

He left Sudan for Lebanon in 1997 where he remained for almost a year until he took an overcrowded boat for Europe.

Unfortunately, it started sinking. Fortunately, he and 74 others were rescued by a Lebanese fishing boat and scrambled to safety in Cyprus, home to a British military base.

He breathed a sigh of relief: A British base: he would soon make it to the UK.

"Soon" turned out to be 21 years, trapped in what lawyers described as "legal limbo".

The British government doggedly argued that the rescued families had no links with Britain and could be resettled in Cyprus.

After lawyers batted around 74 lives like ping pong balls, the UK appeal court finally ruled that the survivors' conditions were unacceptable and that the Refugee Convention should apply to the case.

Even after the verdict, their evacuation to the UK was not immediate. But they were on the way.

Bashir admitted at the time that the frustration of waiting had been great and "that anywhere in Britain is better than [the base]". He was and is amazingly un-bitter.

Now in his 50s, Bashir lives in Scotland, with his wife and two children. "We

'I've waited all my life but I reached my goal, made a family, started a new life and am happy'

were very happy to start our life again," he says. His wife (a Filipina he met in Cyprus) works as a carer and will soon complete her nursing training. "The kids are doing great. They started school in Cyprus — they speak Greek too." His oldest son lives in Newcastle.

Bashir was the first of the rescued group to get a job, after "going to many

building sites in the hope of getting an interview." He still works in construction: "I'm looking to develop it as well. I'm looking to buy some flats, and refurbish and sell them."

The couple also run a small restaurant: it started with Middle Eastern cuisine but has switched to Asian food.

"I find Scotland wonderful. I met many people who are very good. We try our best to integrate. People are very friendly."

He says he is lucky to have the chance to start over again: "I've waited all my life. It's hard when you look back, it's hard to get over it, but I reached my goal, made a family, started a new life, and became happy."

Last Christmas he became British.

Do the children know about his amazing story? "We keep them away from that. They are at school, we don't want them much involved with the past.

"But," he admits, "I'm looking forward to writing a book about my journey."

Story reproduced courtesy of Migrant Voice



Volunteers from Care4Calais and the Henley Quakers with refugees at the festive party held at the Friends Meeting House



DJ Jamie Taylor, Sam Jonkers, Val Johnstone and Emma Clarke Lam. Pictures courtesy of the *Henley Standard*

Warmth in the deep midwinter

REFUGEES in the Henley area enjoyed a ‘Winter Warmer’ festive party at the Friends (Quakers) Meeting House.

About 20 volunteers from Care4Calais hosted the event, led by Val Johnstone and her daughter Sam Jonkers.

Guests were served refreshments, pulled Christmas crackers and played games while music was provided by DJ Jamie Taylor.

On leaving, the refugees were given bags containing clothes, shoes, warm hats and chocolate. They could also take away any of the leftover food with them.

Mr Taylor said: “I love doing this gig. All the music is a mix of music of where these people are from. I had to do a little bit of homework and prepare some mixes and set lists. Hopefully it makes them feel a bit more settled. It’s nice to be able to put some music together that hopefully these guys will recognise.”

Mrs Johnstone lived in France for 15 years, where she and her husband helped refugees, before moving back to the UK in 2020. It was while visiting her in France that her daughter was inspired to join

Care4Calais in the UK, a charity which delivers emergency aid to refugees.

Mrs Johnstone said: “We’re really grateful to the Quakers, whose building we are in. I really want to say thank you to them because not only have they encouraged us, they’re here helping us and they give us donations during the year.

“The village in which I live is brilliant at helping me. They all know what I want. If their husbands have bought new clothes, I get a bag outside the door. Their clothes are all in such good condition.

Ruth Tod, the clerk of Henley Quakers, was volunteering at the party. She said: “Last year, our Snowdrop Sunday event, which we hold every February when the snowdrops are ready, raised more than £400 for Care4Calais. We think it’s a great thing that Val is doing.

“It’s absolutely great to see the Meeting House used in this way with all of these people celebrating. We just want to wish them all the best for the next stage in their journey.” Ahmed Wadi is a volunteer with Care4Calais, as well as an asylum seeker. He helps the organisation as an Arabic

translator and also with events.

He said: “The volunteers are very generous inviting us here. It’s lovely to enjoy these vibes altogether. Sam and her mother are very welcoming people and we are so grateful for all of their support.”

Muhammed Misbah Abdelgadir, an engineer, is also a volunteer with Care4Calais, and an Arabic translator.

He said: “We have very limited resources in this country, so when we find an event like this, it’s a good change for us to come here. Sam is doing great with us. She is like an angel for our hotel.”

Ms Jonkers said: “It’s really lovely to help people, who have very little and who are normally stuck in hotel rooms, to get out and have a day out.

“It’s really nice to have a chance to say thank you, and happy Christmas, where people will be away from families and feeling lonely. We hope this will be a day to come together and for people to feel part of a community.”

**Story by Isabel Thompson
Reproduced courtesy of
the *Henley Standard***

Helping to build Britain

Abdulrahman Ali now runs a successful construction business

Picture: Hampar Narguizian/Migrant Voice



If you want an example of how migrants are helping build Britain today, look no further than Abdulrahman Ali.

He is helping build Britain, brick by brick, wall by wall, roof by roof.

That he has building skills is not surprising, given that his father was a successful builder, and every school holiday young Abdul would help his dad and learn more skills.

That he is in Britain is more surprising because in the 1980s the family lived in Iraq with good prospects for the future. A British businessman took a liking to his father and a respect for the way he ran his business, and proposed a joint company in which the two men would send British kitchen and bathroom equipment as well as machinery to Iraq.

Then politicians and politics intervened, and the Iraq-Iran war erupted.

Conflict transformed the family's world. The proposed venture between Abdul's father and the British businessman crashed to a halt.

"That's why I left my country. Suddenly

there was no future," recalls Abdul, now living in south-west London. "I came here to look for my future", choosing Britain partly because of his family's friendly links with visiting Brits and because he was accustomed to dealing with British equipment suppliers.

He arrived as an asylum-seeker in 2012. Asylum was not as controversial an issue as it is now. He secured permission to stay in two months and immediately started looking for — and finding — work.

He was a labourer in a construction business, and for several years "I pushed myself every day to work hard, painting, laminating, laying carpets."

Always at the back of his mind was the thought that one day he would set up his business. Finally, he did so, becoming the eponymous man with a van.

But he had more than a van. He had skills and experience and a contacts book full of bricklayers and other craftspeople with whom he had worked and on whom he could call when he needed qualified workers to help him on jobs.

His client list expanded steadily, mainly by word of mouth from satisfied customers recommending him to friends and neighbours, "because on every job I get it done in the time I promised and making sure everything is good quality."

Personal recommendations from customers remain important, but now ARN Building Construction Ltd also advertises on Instagram and other social media.

"I am happy here. I have spent a big part of my life here. I am married and my kids are here." His son supports Arsenal, his daughter's Arabic is not so fluent. They will have a chance to choose from "the best universities in the world".

But there may be another twist to the tale of the unexpected migrant's success in building a life in a new country.

He has a sister and brother in Iraq and maybe, just maybe, Abdul might seek contracts for supplying equipment to Iraq's oil and gas industry - which would be another economic gain for Britain.

Story reproduced courtesy of Migrant Voice

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