

EXODUSZINE.CO.UK

ISSUE
9

Spotlight on Iran

Giving hope a voice

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, Vahid Moghaddami Talemi, Sam Jonkers and Martin Trepte. Email: exodusfanzine@gmail.com Web: <https://exoduszine.co.uk/> Facebook: [Exodus Fanzine](#)

Compassion must be louder than hatred

COMPASSION and sympathy have been fundamental to the identity of the British people since migration to these islands began thousands of years ago.

Britain's history has been shaped by constant waves of new arrivals starting after the last Ice Age into the Middle Ages, and later with the arrival of skilled workers, helping to build the national economy.

After 1948, the ship HMT Empire Windrush brought workers from the Caribbean and began a major wave of migration from the Commonwealth nations.

Many of those migrants had already signed up to fight and help Britain win the Second World War and later contributed to helping to rebuild the economy, working in public services like the NHS and public transport.

Recently, amid the anger and controversy whipped up by Nigel Farage and other right-wing figures over the murder of white teenager Henry Nowak by a British Sikh youth, the US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, spoke at a D-Day anniversary event in France.

He criticised European nations over migration and for allowing what he described as 'an invasion' on their shores.

US President Donald Trump also criticised European immigration policy.

This type of rhetoric clearly plays into the hands of the Far Right, such as has happened in Belfast, and is fundamentally the polar opposite of the identity and morals of the British people. Exodus aims to help counter this toxic and destructive narrative and to be a platform to give a voice to those seeking sanctuary.

Our issues contain stories and features that inform the reader why people migrate, but more importantly, Exodus highlights the great work of those who share solidarity and humanity with people who seek a better life here in the UK.

Welcome to issue nine of the magazine, each one a testament to the small team that puts it together and the diverse group of refugees and journalists in exile who write for us.

This issue includes features about the struggles of Afghan refugees in the UK and elsewhere, and stories from Iranian exiles about the ongoing impact of the war started by America and Israel in February. Other articles shine a light on the everyday struggles of those seeking sanctuary here.

Above all, Exodus shows that the people of Great Britain care. We hope you find these pages informative and we thank you for your support.

Jean-Marc Hall
Exodus Project Co-ordinator

University anniversary showcases multi-cultural city



Volunteers from Care4Calais, Exodus's Jean-Marc Hall has a close encounter, and members of the Exodus team at the event.

ON THE same weekend of the 'Unite the Kingdom' and 'Pro-Palestine' marches in London, Reading University celebrated 100 years with a two-day community event.

This multi-cultural event proved that local communities in Reading are unified and work in solidarity with diverse cultures that make Reading a multi-cultural city,

engaging in the welfare of its citizens.

After the local council elections a week earlier, it was clear to see why Reading totally rejected the Reform party who did not win a single council seat.

Instead, it showed how communities can come together, despite some facing adversity and setbacks. Among the huge

range of organisations taking part over the weekend were Care4Calais, Amnesty international, and members of the Exodus team, spreading word about the magazine among visitors.

Music, words, food and dancing were the driving force behind a great community weekend.

‘Courage is in the patient details of our daily lives’

Film and art exhibition explore quiet bravery of asylum-seekers

AN ART exhibition and specially commissioned film exploring the theme of courage was used to mark Refugee Week at Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead.

The centre regularly works with the refugee community in Maidenhead and Slough providing creative opportunities to promote well being and support community cohesion.

In advance of refugee week it ran workshops with recent arrivals to the UK, exploring what courage - often a daily necessity for those seeking sanctuary in the UK - looked like to them. They were led by two artists with lived experience - journalist and filmmaker Souran Soleimani and Sara - who created a short film with participants scripted by Souran.

An exhibition of the art created at the workshops was launched with a special screening of the film.

Introducing the film, Souran thanked the arts centre for its support of the initiative.

He said: “When I look back to March and April, we were just starting our workshops. And now, seeing the results of all that hard work, teamwork, and emotion on these screens and gallery walls — I am really excited.

“For me, this project was much more than just a job. About three years ago, I came to the UK as a refugee journalist myself.

“I know this hard journey with all my heart — the long waiting, the loneliness, the language barrier, and the struggle to survive in a new place.

“When I was asked to man-



Souran Soleimani at the launch of his film and the art exhibition at Norden Farm. and below, the screening of the film.

age these workshops and direct this film, I deeply understood the challenges of this path.

When I first received the project

brief, I told myself that I must try hard to stop this film from becoming a cliché or a sad report. I wanted to ask: How can



we show the meaning of ‘courage’ beyond the stereotypes? Over the last few months, inside the small hotel rooms in Maidenhead and Slough, and during our workshops, I found the answer.

“For the people I worked with, courage was inside the patient details of their daily lives. Asylum seekers are not just one single group with one story; each person is an individual with completely different experiences.”

Souran spoke movingly of how he had been scheduled to move to the Bibby Stockholm barge on the south coast until a wonderful local lady opened her home to him, allowing him to stay in the community.

He said: “She gave me a small empire of peace and safety so I could stay, get my refugee status, find a job, and rebuild my life. Today, with great pride, I dedicate this film and this artwork to her, to thank her for all her kindness and humanity.

“This exhibition reminds us that there is a kinder world. I invite you, when you watch the film and walk around the gallery, to listen to these stories with an open heart.

“Let us remember that we are all connected, and our safety and dignity depend on each other.

“These people brought their roots with them, and today, with the help of art, they are bravely growing in the soil of Maidenhead. I really look forward to a day when no human being is forced to leave their homeland because of war, poverty, or injustice.”

Standing up for sanctuary

Campaigning against plans to make getting settled status harder

THE day began bright and sunny. The warmth of the morning lifted our spirits as we prepared to leave for Westminster in London. On Wednesday, March 11, we set off by coach from Piccadilly in the heart of Manchester. Around 50 of us travelled together, many with lived experience of the asylum and immigration system, along with volunteers and staff from organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers across Greater Manchester.

People from groups such as GREAT! (Greater Manchester Refugees and Asylum Seekers Together), RAS Voice (Refugees and Asylum Seekers Voice), These Walls Must Fall, and Women Asylum Seekers Together, filled the coach with conversations and laughter.

Our destination was Central Hall in Westminster, where a mass lobby was taking place. Hundreds of people from across the UK gathered to raise concerns about the Government's proposed 'earned settlement' changes affecting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

In November 2025, the Home Secretary announced plans that would make it much harder for people to settle in the UK. The proposals would increase the usual qualifying period for settlement from five to ten years. In some cases it could even extend to 30 years, especially for people who have had to rely on public funds or who arrived on certain visas.

The changes may also apply retrospectively to people who are already on a path to settlement. There are also concerns the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition could be expanded to many more non-

Ethiopian journalist in exile Tamirat A Tsega joined a trip to London to lobby MPs over proposed changes to the rules under which immigrants can settle in the UK – which will mean uncertainty and hardship for many.

citizens. If implemented, these proposals could have serious consequences. Families who already consider the UK their home could face many more years of uncertainty. It is estimated that more than one million people could be affected, including about 300,000 children.

Campaigners warn as many as 90,000 children could be pushed into poverty. In Greater Manchester alone, it is estimated one in ten residents might be affected. Critics also fear the changes could harm integration, place pressure on sectors such as the NHS and social care, and create further insecurity for many workers and families.

When we arrived in Westminster, we joined hundreds of others who had travelled from different parts of the country. The atmosphere was energetic but focused. People gathered in the lobby areas, waiting for their scheduled meetings with MPs. Some met their MPs in groups; others, including me, had individual meetings.

During these meetings we shared our experiences and concerns. We urged MPs to write to the Home Secretary and ask for the proposals to be halted because of the serious concerns raised by constituents. We also asked them to push for a full impact assessment and proper Parliamentary scrutiny before any changes are made.

Another key request was that any changes should not be applied retrospectively to people already living and building their lives in the UK. In the longer term, we asked the government to work with affected communities to build a fair and realistic pathway to settlement, with a clear limit of five years.

For me personally, the day had special meaning. As a refugee myself, meeting my own MP and speaking directly about these issues was a powerful experience. Migration is often discussed as a political topic, but behind the policies are real people, families and children whose lives are deeply affected by these decisions.

After my meeting, I had the chance to visit the Palace of Westminster, where the House of Commons and the House of Lords are located. It was my first time inside the historic building, and I felt a sense of awe walking through its grand halls. My MP kindly arranged gallery tickets so I could watch the debates in person. From the public gallery I observed proceedings in both chambers. Seeing the discussions live gave me a deeper understanding of how decisions are made.

The trip reminded us of our shared strength and resilience. Many of us have faced hardship and uncertainty, but coming together in solidarity gave us hope. Change may not happen overnight, but raising our voices and speaking directly to lawmakers is an important step.

We returned to Manchester tired but encouraged, carrying with us a renewed sense of determination, unity and hope for the future.'

Picture: Houses of Parliament by Len Williams, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons





Deni interviewing Sam Jonkers on her podcast. To watch it see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgZ3x71RVNw>

How social is our society?

Before everything else, refugees are human beings

IN JUNE 2026, an old video of a senior Police Scotland officer resurfaced and quickly went viral across social media.

The clip sparked thousands of reactions and comments. However, what caught my attention was not the video itself, but the response it generated.

Within hours, social media platforms were flooded with negative comments about refugees and asylum seekers. Reading through those comments left me reflecting on a simple yet important question:

How social is the society we live in today?

We live in a world that proudly promotes equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights. We teach our children to respect people regardless of their nationality, culture, religion or background. Yet when the conversation turns to refugees and asylum seekers, these values often seem to disappear.

Too often, people see a label before they see a human being.

A refugee is not a statistic.

A refugee is not a political debate.

A refugee is not a headline.

A refugee is a person.

A mother trying to create a safer future for her children.

A father rebuilding his life after loss.

A young person searching for an oppor-

tunity to learn, work and contribute.

As someone who has experienced the refugee journey, I understand that behind every immigration status, every application and every official document, there is a human story.

What many people fail to recognise is that refugees have always contributed to the societies that welcomed them.

Across the United Kingdom, thousands of refugees and former refugees work hard every day, contributing to their communities and helping to shape the future of the country they now call home.

Many have gone on to become successful entrepreneurs, doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, artists, musicians, athletes, community leaders and public servants. Others work quietly behind the scenes, supporting local businesses, schools, hospitals and charities.

Their talent did not disappear when they crossed a border. Their values did not change because they moved to another country. If anything, their experiences made them stronger, more resilient and more determined to succeed.

Today, many refugees proudly represent the United Kingdom around the world. They contribute to its economy, culture, innovation and community life. They are part of the story of modern Britain.

During Refugee Week, I had the opportunity to interview Sam Jonkers, a volunteer leader with Care4Calais. I asked her what she believes society still does not understand about refugees.

Her answer was simple, yet powerful: "Refugees are people like me, like you, who have had less fortunate experiences than many of us have had."

Perhaps that is what we too often forget. Refugees are not asking for special treatment.

They are asking for the opportunity to live in safety, contribute to society and build a future for themselves and their families.

The United Kingdom has always been strengthened by people from different backgrounds, cultures and experiences. History repeatedly shows that when people are given an opportunity, they contribute far more than society often expects.

Equality, diversity and inclusion cannot be selective. They must apply to everyone. Because before we are citizens, refugees, asylum seekers, professionals, politicians or community leaders, we are human beings. And perhaps that is what society needs to remember most.

Deni C
Host of Deni's Inspiring Stories
Podcast on YouTube

War threatens refugee crisis

EU agency warns conflict may cause huge numbers to flee Iran

Credit: Tasnim News Agency, CC BY 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

THE warning of a 'potential risk of a large-scale influx of refugees from Iran' has been issued by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), due to the conflict with Israel and America which began in February and again shows signs of escalating.

Although Brussels-based officials describe the scenario of a major migration wave as 'speculative' at this stage, concerns are growing within the European Union.

Even before the recent escalation, the EU had expressed fears about possible migration flows from Iran. This comes despite an overall decline in asylum applications across the bloc.

According to the EUAA, asylum applications in the European Union have decreased by nearly 20 percent. However, the agency cautioned Iran's large population — approximately 90 million people — means even limited instability could generate migration flows on an unprecedented scale.

In a recent assessment prepared prior to the US and Israeli attacks, the agency noted that 'the displacement of only 10 percent of Iran's population would be sufficient to create one of the largest refugee movements in recent decades'.

When asked by Agence France-Presse whether it would update its assessment following the outbreak of war, the agency responded: "the current situation remains highly volatile, and further comment at this stage would be irresponsible."

At present, the number of registered Iranian asylum applications in the EU and neighbouring countries remains relatively low. In 2025, approximately 8,000 Iranian nationals applied for asylum in the EU —



A rescue worker surveys the damage on Shohada Square in Tehran in the aftermath of an air attack in March. Photo: Hossein Zohrevand

significantly fewer than Afghan applicants (117,000) or Venezuelans (91,000).

But as the conflict continues, reports indicate dozens of Iranian citizens have become stranded at the Turkish border.

According to EU assessments, a large-scale migration scenario remains hypothetical, with potential routes likely passing through Turkey toward Europe.

Iran already hosts one of the world's largest refugee populations, primarily Afghans. Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, many Afghans sought refuge in Iran.

However, in recent years, Iranian authorities have tightened residency regulations and carried out large-scale deportations. The International Organi-

sation for Migration (IOM) reported that approximately 450,000 Afghans returned from Iran to Afghanistan last summer, following a deadline set by Tehran for undocumented migrants to leave the country.

The European Commission has announced it is increasing preparedness measures and strengthening cooperation with UN agencies in response to potential developments. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen confirmed she had discussed the situation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Reports from the Turkish-Iranian border suggest increasing numbers of Iranians are attempting to leave the country. Following weeks of violent crackdowns on protests that began in late December, many

citizens reportedly decided to flee.

Since the start of the US and Israeli bombardments — and following the death of Iran's Supreme Leader — dozens of Iranians have been attempting to cross into Turkey. Reuters cited eyewitnesses saying that hundreds may already have crossed the border.

According to Reuters, the border remains open for commercial traffic. Iran allows its citizens to return via Turkey, while Turkish authorities permit Turkish nationals and third-country citizens to enter from Iran. However, some Iranian citizens reportedly face delays at the Van province crossing in eastern Turkey, with Turkish officials announcing temporary border closures in parts of the Van region.

Executions push global total to peak

AMNESTY International has reported Iran executed an 'unprecedented' 2,159 people in 2025, pushing the global total of executions to its highest level since 1981.

The charity said at least 2,707 people were executed worldwide in 2025, although the figure does not include executions carried out in China.

Amnesty said 'thousands' of executions were carried out in China, the world's largest user of the death penalty, but details were unclear due to 'state secrecy' in the communist country.

The organisation added the global tally for 2025, which includes executions in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Yemen, Singapore and the United States, was more than two-thirds higher than the 2024 total.

"This trend has been most severe in countries where authorities have tightened their grip on power by restricting civil space, silencing dissent and ignoring protections under international human rights law and standards," an Amnesty report said.

According to the charity 'the unprecedented increase in recorded executions in Iran' has come as the Islamic Republic's authorities have 'intensified their use of the death penalty as a tool of political repression and control' particularly after last summer's 12-day war with Israel.

Amnesty and other human rights groups have said the use of the death penalty in Iran has increased following widespread anti-government protests in January and the outbreak of war with Israel and the United States on February 28.



The war has so far seen an estimated 3.2 million people displaced inside Iran. Photo: Mehdi Almasi

Millions internally displaced by strikes

Humanitarian situation is 'critical', says report

AS MANY as 3.2 million people inside Iran have been temporarily displaced due to ongoing bombing and the escalating conflict, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Families are fleeing cities like Tehran, moving toward rural areas and northern regions seeking safety.

The UNHCR maintains reception centres, emergency hotlines, and support services in Iran, yet the scale of displacement continues to grow, reflecting a deepening humanitarian crisis.

According to a report published by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) on 1 June,

2026, following a recent visit to Iran, Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the NRC, described the humanitarian situation in the country as critical.

The report states extensive damage to civilian infrastructure, including schools, has affected more than 17 million students.

The NRC further warned that severe funding shortages are forcing humanitarian organisations to scale back essential assistance services at a time when needs are rapidly increasing.

The report also highlights the particularly vulnerable situation of Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran. Iran currently

hosts more than four million Afghan refugees and migrants, many of whom are facing growing hardship due to the combined effects of conflict, inflation and economic instability.

According to the NRC, these conditions have left many Afghan families at risk of losing their livelihoods, falling into poverty, experiencing food insecurity, and facing pressure to return to Afghanistan despite ongoing humanitarian concerns there.

Behind every number is a mother, child or family searching for shelter and safety, reminding the world of the human cost of war and the urgent need for peace and solidarity.



The audience at the Migrant Voice and Together in the UK event heard three migrant authors talk about their experiences.

Event gives voice to hope

Trio of migrant authors share their stories about living in the UK

MIGRANT Voice, in collaboration with Together in the UK recently opened its doors in Islington, London, to host an evening of storytelling and writing.

Its main theme was of communities driven by hope, and we listened to three guest migrant authors who

shared their writings with the inspiring title of 'Give Hope A Voice'.

Jetha Makieleka, Maria- Irina Popescu and Shaz Khan spoke passionately about their experiences

and lives in the UK. As migrants living in London, they each told their stories of how they managed to navigate the obstacles that faced them while trying to live a normal life.

Their narratives were engaging and absorbing, with the audience invited to ask questions.

An anthology of writings on migration, 'Hear Our Stories', was

also on sale at the event.

Through collections of poetry and prose, the book explores resilience, determination and hope in the face of adversity and despair.

Heartfelt words by migrants and refugees seeking freedom

and safety within the pages of 'Hear Our Stories' vividly explore these themes.

Its stories of individual experiences of coming to the UK are told with deep passion and empathy, creating

a voice that needs to be read and heard.

Migrant Voice and Together in the UK demonstrated that in one evening, shared communities can give a voice to hope a time when it seems the repulsive chorus of the far right is at its most divisive, and toxic language sows mistrust and fear into all sections of society.

'Evening of inspiration at a time when the far right is sowing fear and distrust'



Securing Leave to Remain is only the first challenge

The threat of homelessness, poor housing and a maze of bureaucracy must be navigated on the road to UK citizenship

ONCE people seeking asylum in the UK are granted leave to remain (LTR), after prevailing over a multitude of challenges, they still face massive hurdles as they navigate the maze of protocols that face them as refugees and on a journey towards eventual UK citizenship.

Upon receiving Leave to Remain, refugees have 28 days (or 56 days for specific groups, including families) to vacate asylum accommodation. They must move to private housing or apply for homelessness support from local councils.

They must set up bank accounts, apply for Universal Credit, and seek other assistance for moving on.

If an asylum seeker (including those with dependent children or who has been granted refugee status) turns down offered accommodation, they risk losing their entitlement to any housing and financial support. Refusing inappropriate accommodation without good reason can lead to, or speed up, the withdrawal of support and eviction.

For example, after spending approximately two years in a hotel accommodating asylum seekers, Kourosh and Roya, together with their 14-year-old-son, Reza, were given Leave to Remain and accommodated in a one bedroom flat on the third floor of an apartment block in Slough.

The apartment had one bedroom and a small kitchen/lounge with no furniture apart from one double bed and a sofa. The school where Reza had spent the last two years was now more than an hour's bus ride each way.

The lift serving the four floors was in poor working order, and Kourosh found it difficult to get up to his flat using the stairs, because of an injury he sustained in a previous accident in a lift at the hotel he lived at as an asylum seeker.

Unbelievably, when Kourosh used the lift at the flats it 'dropped' throwing him onto the floor, causing injuries so bad he



Kourosh was hospitalised when the lift 'dropped' in the block of flats where he and his family were housed.

needed emergency hospital treatment.

The landlords, working in conjunction with the local council, have yet to respond to questions raised by Exodus.

It is not unusual for accommodation to be in severe disrepair or poor quality due to neglect, and this is an issue for many potentially homeless people, regardless of their legal status or their nationality.

Unfortunately, it has become yet another challenge for refugees to overcome, while facing discrimination and isolation

during a demanding and difficult time in their families' lives. The temporary housing system requires significant overhauling to address poor conditions, long-term stays, and high costs.

Experts recommend transforming the housing system by rapidly increasing social housing construction, regulating private providers, and moving from a 'temporary' focus to rapid re-housing, aiming for a permanent, stable home for all, whether native citizens or those refugees seeking sanctuary.

Lure of Gateway to Europe

Mauritania to Canaries is most popular and riskiest route in world

Picture: Mstyslav Chemov/Unframe. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0.



People smugglers promote their services on social media describing the crossing as easy and safe. The reality is very different.

PEOPLE seeking asylum from West Africa through Spain to the UK primarily arrive to reunite with family or friends.

With existing English language skills and seeking better employment opportunities, they often perceive the UK as a safer, more welcoming or better-resourced environment, even though, compared to other European nations, it takes in fewer asylum applications.

With deceptive and callous narratives given out by the right wing media, coupled with negative stories about why people are taking the perilous journey across the English Channel in the hope of being able to claim asylum, it is easy to see how British people can be tricked into thinking that the most popular and favoured routes are the short stretches of water between England and France.

But in 2024, an estimated 9,756 people died trying to cross the migration route from Mauritania to the Canary Islands, recognised as one of the most popular and deadliest in the world and known as the 'gateway to Europe'.

Migrants waiting to make the crossing are fed advertising through various social

media platforms that promise a better future and even a glamorous lifestyle.

The people smugglers use social media to promote their services, describing the crossing as easy and without danger.

In reality, undocumented migrants are packed onto boats without the necessary food and water.

And for those who survive the journey, the hope of finding accommodation and work is practically impossible. I first met 24-year-old Moussa at a hotel in London, designated for people seeking asylum.

He was hoping to go on to claim refugee status and Indefinite Leave to Remain and to be able to work and live a peaceful life in the UK.

He had left Spain, hoping to be reunited with his older brother, who had fled the violence of their home in Burkina Faso and made it to England the previous year.

Moussa's journey had taken him from Mauritania to Puerto de la Luz, in Gran Canaria.

As an undocumented migrant, he had no chance of finding work and decided to stow away on a ship bound for Cadiz in Spain. There he found work picking pro-

duce in the fields of Almeria for less than the minimum wage and lived in slum like conditions, without basic sanitation.

It is estimated that more than 840,000 undocumented migrants live in Spain, with a significant number working in the agricultural sector. In Almeria alone, roughly 25,000-30,000 jobs are filled by undocumented workers, sometimes earning as little as 20 euros per day.

Under the leadership of socialist Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez, Spain has announced the unprecedented humanitarian step to regularise the status of 500,000 undocumented migrants.

For Moussa and his brother, Spain's control and management of its migration policies has come too late. But Moussa was adamant that he had made the right decision to arrive in the UK.

He looks forward to his reunion with his brother, and their resilience and hopes reflect the determination of migrants who make the heartbreaking, but brave decision, to cross oceans in search for safety.

Jean-Marc Hall

(Additional information: Olivia Acland, The Observer)

Lack of safe routes leads to four more tragic deaths In Channel

A LACK of ‘safe routes’ to the UK has once again led to a tragedy in the English Channel and a stark reminder of the dangers posed by criminal gangs exploiting vulnerable people for profit.

Two men and two women died after attempting to board a small boat.

They were taken by strong currents south of Boulogne in the Pas-de-Calais region.

It brings the total to six deaths directly linked to migrants attempting to cross the English Channel this year.

Due to the warmer weather and calmer waters, it is expected that the number of attempted crossings will increase, further endangering people’s lives.

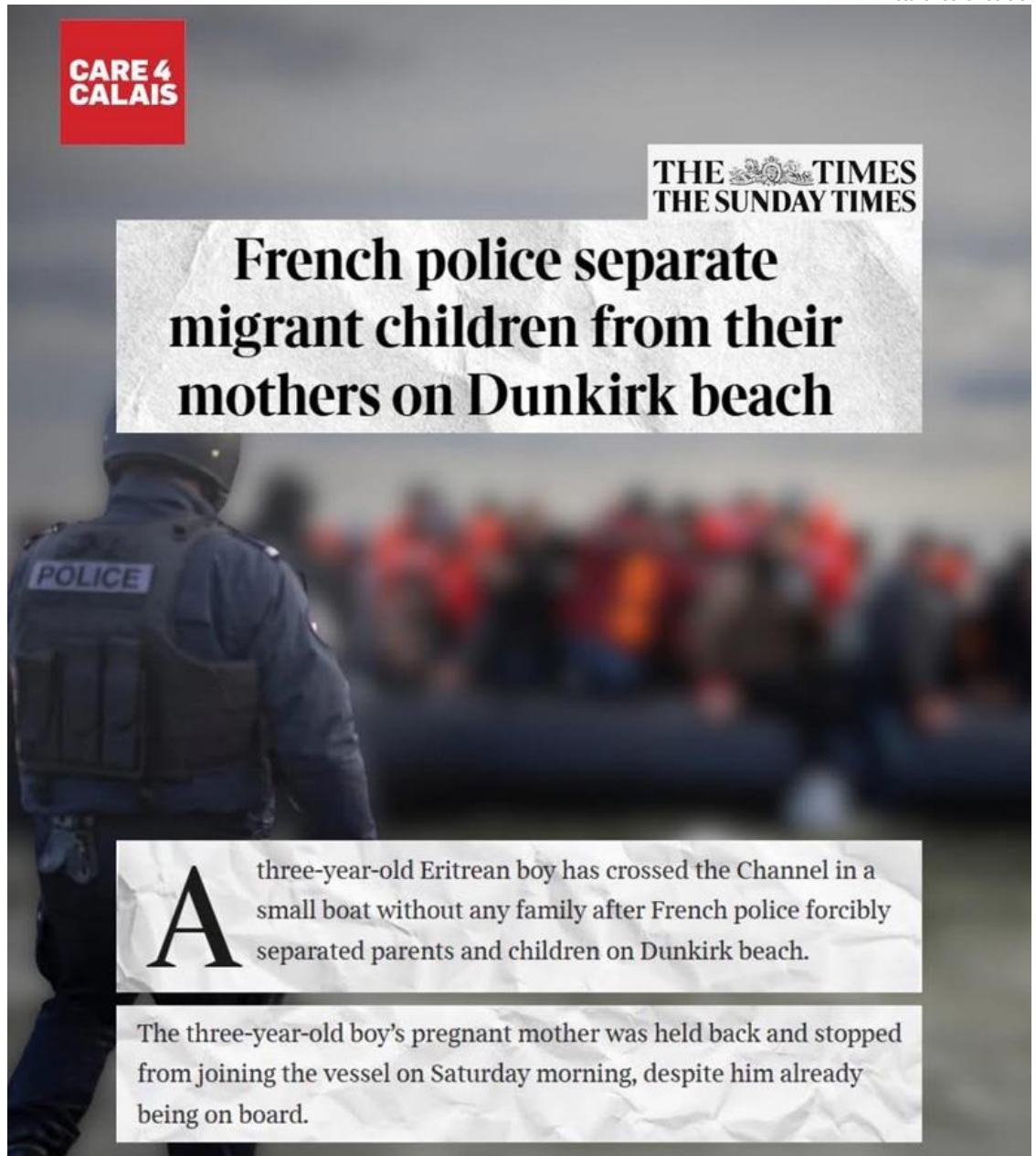
Imran Hussain, of the Refugee Council charity, said dangerous Channel crossings would not be prevented unless the UK opened more safe routes.

“A lack of safe routes to the UK has left people feeling they have no other choice to rebuild their lives”, he said.

Safe route schemes are offered people from Hong Kong and Ukrainians, and while others seeking sanctuary need to be physically in the UK to claim it, this will keep the criminal smuggler gangs in business.

The number of people displaced globally is growing rapidly, and the Government must abandon the principle of claiming asylum in the first safe country as a long standing concept.

The Convention of Human rights clearly states that refugees do not need to claim asylum in the first country they reach.



Barbaric treatment of vulnerable migrants by French police — funded by UK taxpayer

JOURNALISTS from *The Times* newspaper witnessed the shocking incident of a distraught pregnant woman being prevented by French police from joining her three-year-old child who was already on a dingy about to cross the English Channel – an example of the actions the UK Government is funding across northern France every day .

In normal times such images would be a catalyst for change.

Political leaders would be held to account, and face end-

less pressure to treat humans with compassion and dignity.

But sadly, today, it doesn’t feel like that pressure exists.

And *The Times* is a good example here – one day they are reporting this story, the next they are giving coverage to Nigel Farage spouting more rhetoric on detention and obsessing over small boat crossings.

But refugee charity Care4Calais says while too many politicians and sections of the media have lost their moral compass, there is still

hope. The charity said: “It comes in the form of our volunteers, and everyone who supports us by making donations or participating in our campaigns.

“All-year round, Care4Calais is providing aid, support and connection for refugees in northern France and the UK.

“When people face injustice, we are on their side. You can be too.”

To support the work of Care4Calais and join its team as a volunteer see: <https://>

When a world is torn apart

A child's journey: from Kabul's dreams to survival in Pakistan

THE walls of exile echo with silence, but inside that silence, hunger, fear, and survival scream loudly. In refugee settlements across Pakistan, hunger gnaws at bellies, shelters are makeshift, and work is a privilege. For Afghan refugees, food, shelter, and dignity are not rights, but distant dreams.

Before fleeing to Pakistan, I was a high school student in Kabul, my heart full of dreams and my future bright with possibility. Living with my family, we had the simple joys of life: food to eat, a home to sleep in, a yard to play in, and the freedom to move without fear. I spent my days laughing with friends, pursuing knowledge in school, and dreaming of becoming a doctor. But beneath the surface, a storm was brewing, and soon our world would be torn apart.

Everything changed in August 2021. When the Taliban took over, my father — the bedrock of our family, the one who made us feel safe and loved — lost his job as a government prosecutor. Because of his position, he was now at grave risk.

Former government employees were seen as enemies, and soon we became targets. Anonymous calls began to reach us, warning us to leave or face severe consequences. The man who had always been our shelter and guide, our everything, was now powerless. Security vanished, and fear

Mehrullah Rahmani is an Afghan author and advocate. His work is published internationally, amplifying the voices of displaced communities and fostering global dialogue on resilience and justice.



crept in, suffocating us. Neighbours whispered of families like ours fleeing — some to Iran, others to Pakistan. Then came the moment that made our decision unavoidable: a direct message warning that our home was being watched. We knew we could not stay.

We had little time to pack. Everything we had taken for granted — our home, our yard, our village — was slipping away. We were not just leaving a country; we were losing a life. We left with hearts heavy, carrying both fear and a fragile hope that across the border, we might find safety - and perhaps a future.

Crossing into Pakistan, I remember every detail: my foot freezing as it crossed the border, stepping into a strange world

where nothing was certain. I could not have imagined how quickly everything would collapse.

We arrived not with hope, but fear, confusion, and emptiness. Survival was our only goal, replacing every opportunity we had dreamed of in Afghanistan.

What we were living through was not unique. Across Pakistan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees struggle to access basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare.

Echoing this, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlights that Afghan refugees often lack access to essential services, which exacerbates their vulnerability and puts them at risk of food insecurity.

We lived in a small, dark, suffocating room in Rawalpindi, seven of us crowded into one cramped space, where breathing felt heavy with fear and exhaustion. The room felt too tight, leaving us trapped, powerless, and quietly breaking inside.

Time passed only through hunger, a constant, painful ache slowly draining strength and hope.

Many days we had no food, and the emptiness felt deep and unbearable.

Clean water was uncertain, something we waited for with silent worry. Without legal documents, every moment was filled with fear — arrest, being sent back, or losing this fragile shelter that was our only protection.

Life kept getting harder. My two younger brothers worked long hours in a sandal factory, their small hands worn by the labour. They left early in the morning and returned exhausted, earning almost nothing — just enough to survive.

This is not just our story. UNICEF warns refugee children are often forced into labour, losing access to education and the chance for a future.

My brothers were living that reality every day. My father had tried to protect me from that life for as long as he could. He believed in my education — he knew how deeply I wanted to continue my studies and become a doctor, and he held on to that dream for me even when everything else was falling apart.

Continued on next page



A young Mehrullah Rahmani with three of his brothers when they first arrived in Pakistan.



A group of Afghan refugee school pupils in Pakistan.

‘Afghan refugees are not asking for sympathy but for dignity’

Continued from previous page

My younger brothers had started working first to help us survive, while my father still tried to hold onto my future — the one we were slowly losing. But hunger does not wait, and hope cannot survive on emptiness forever. That afternoon, I was sitting quietly with my younger brother, lost in thoughts of what lay ahead. When my father opened the door, something in his face made my chest tighten. He looked at me for a moment, as if searching for the right words, then placed his hand on my right shoulder — his eyes heavy, urgent — and, in a quiet, gentle voice, hesitantly asked me to go outside and find work.

That moment changed everything. It was the moment I felt my childhood slip away. I stepped into a world where survival was no longer a choice, but a duty. I walked those streets afraid and silent, each step heavier than the last, as if I were carrying more than just my own weight.

The heat was unbearable, and everything felt unfamiliar. For hours, I worked beside my brothers, my body weak, my mind numb. That day felt endless. I watched time crawl forward, pain spreading through my body in ways I could not explain. When I returned home empty-handed, reality crushed me — no food, no money, no hope. That night, when my father saw my pale, exhausted face, he sighed deeply and decided I should not go out like that again. For weeks, we lived in uncertainty, sometimes surviving on a sin-

gle meal a day, holding on to the last fragile pieces of hope we had left.

Then, unexpectedly, something changed. Early one morning, as the sun rose, I was still asleep, deep in dreams of food or work. My father’s phone sat on the shelf; a ray of sunlight hit it, and it rang, waking me. When he picked it up, he was called to a meeting by an organisation supporting Afghan refugees. I watched him leave quickly that early morning, carrying a fragile sense of hope.

I lay on the floor, covered by a thin blanket, wondering if anything would ever change. When he returned, I lifted my head, my eyes fixed on his hands — small bags of rice, oil, and beans — but more than that, he carried the hope I had been waiting for since I left Afghanistan.

He set them down on the floor and knelt beside me, gently resting his hand on my forehead, and spoke softly: “My son, there may be an opportunity for you at a pharmacy, because of your abilities.”

In that instant, something inside me broke open. I exhaled and tears welled in my eyes. After such darkness, even a small light was overwhelming. I stood, kissed his hand, and stepped outside, unable to believe what I had just heard.

For the first time since fleeing Afghanistan, I felt something I had almost forgotten: hope. Across Pakistan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports Afghan refugee children are deprived of essential services and protection. The

IOM reports that since 2023, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been forced to return, pushing already vulnerable families deeper into poverty.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch emphasises that many refugees live under constant fear of arrest, with limited access to work, housing, and basic safety.

I did not need reports to understand this reality — I was living it. Researchers such as Mansor Fazli have observed Afghan refugee communities face long-term deprivation, where survival becomes the only priority and basic human rights remain out of reach.

Behind every statistic is a real story — like mine: a child forced into labour, a family struggling for food, a household surviving on one meal a day. A future shaped not by choice, but by necessity.

Khaled Hosseini, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, once wrote: “It always strikes me how fragile a childhood can be, especially when basic rights — food, shelter, freedom — become luxuries beyond reach.”

Afghan refugees are not asking for sympathy; they are asking for dignity. They are asking for protection, for human rights.

We do not wait for charity; we wait for justice — so that no child has to trade education for survival again. And even in exile, even in silence, sometimes it only takes one voice to remind us: our future is not over — and no child’s dream should be lost to survival.

Helping families to settle

New community programme is about connection and belonging

Picture: Photo by Nick Fewings on Unsplash

‘COMMUNITIES for Afghans’ is a new community sponsorship pathway that enables groups of local residents to support an Afghan household as they settle into life in the UK.

This means being able to support them through their resettlement journey by helping them find their feet, navigate services, build friendships, practice English and feel part of their new local community.

The introduction of a community sponsorship element to Afghan resettlement recognises that resettlement is about more than practical help. It’s about connection, dignity and belonging.

For families arriving after conflict and displacement, being welcomed by a group of committed local volunteers can make a profound difference, turning an unfamiliar place into a community where they feel they belong. The Refugee Council is working alongside other principal sponsor organisations to support community groups who want to welcome and support an Afghan household to rebuild their lives in the UK.

There is guidance, training and ongoing support available to sponsor groups available throughout the welcoming process.

The scheme is looking for people who wish to take part in welcoming an Afghan family to the UK, which will include:

- Supporting a group of at least six adults
- Helping to identify a property



- Providing support to the family to help them settle into their new community

Unlike the traditional community sponsorship pathway, which has been around since 2016, Communities for Afghans has no fundraising requirement, and instead sponsor groups can access funding to sup-

port the resettlement of an Afghan household, including funding for housing related costs and other ongoing expenses, such as interpreters.

For more details and a video about groups who participated in the Community Sponsorship resettlement scheme see: <https://www.csan.org.uk/story/stories-of-community-sponsorship/>

Government shuts scheme for those at risk of Taliban reprisals

THE UK government closed Afghan resettlement schemes to all new applicants from July 2025.

Afghan citizens were given asylum in the UK, primarily due to risks of Taliban reprisals and specifically for those who worked with British armed forces. Those supporting women’s rights, journalists, and government representatives were also at risk following the 2021 Tali-

ban takeover.

Schemes, such as ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy) helped provide legal routes for some 38,000 Afghan nationals to settle, and those arriving through these routes often received indefinite leave to remain.

Those Afghans arriving in the UK by small boats are also facing profound restrictions as a repercussion of the UK Gov-

ernment’s change of policy and closure of resettlement schemes.

Up until July 2025, the resettlement schemes helped approximately 35,000 people, but since then the UK has become less likely to grant protection to Afghans than many other European countries.

The UK currently ranks seventh globally by numbers of hosted Afghans. Steve Smith,

CEO of the charity Care for Calais, said: “The UK government has clearly changed their position, and I would suggest it has changed not because the Taliban’s threat has reduced, but rather because Afghan nationals were the nationality most likely to cross the channel in pursuit of sanctuary in the UK.”

Jean-Marc Hall
(additional info; The Independent and Care for Calais)

Peace march sends out clear message of love over hatred

EXODUS project co-ordinator Jean-Marc Hall joined up to a million protestors in March on a demonstration in central London against the rise of the far right.

He was inspired to pen the following poem about his experience:

*When we march with a million,
The message is clear.
We stand together,
With those with no fear.*

*We are the society,
Of this modern world.
We hear the sounds,
And watch flags unfurl.*

*Our immigrant voices,
Share and embrace.*

*Not indignant,
Or resentful of each race.*

*Our immigrant nation,
Holds no indigenous right.
To allow one race,
Sanctimonious might.*

*We give what we have,
And take what we can.
Sow seeds for our future,
And enrich a new land.*

Jean-Marc Hall



UK is island of solidarity, not an island of strangers

Labour's pivot to right in search of votes will trap people in limbo

WHILE the Labour Government is adopting popular or right-wing positions in a bid to attract support and votes at the ballot box, it is paramount to act with compassion toward those seeking sanctuary.

People looking for asylum and refugee status often go on to make significant and positive contributions in their new communities.

They may not be the great pioneering entrepreneurs creating jobs for thousands. They are simple working-class people who have chosen the UK as a home that offers safety and a chance to rebuild their lives.

They put resources, energy and money into the UK economy and strengthen a multi-cultural and diverse society that should hold no barrier to the chance of a better life.

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood has said the UK government will stop issuing study visas to people from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan, as well as stopping skilled work visas to those from Afghanistan.

The government has already an-

nounced changes to ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain), and applications for citizenship by doubling the standing waiting time from five to ten years.

Denying ILR to people, who have established a need for protection or cannot return to their country of origin, results in severe long-term suffering and also creates a social and financial burden on the UK, raising the questions of why the Home Secretary is obsessed with following controversial policies adopted by Denmark and the USA and rejected by the majority of the UK population.

Akbar and his wife Sanobar, refugees from Uzbekistan, launched a successful Asian street food business, sharing their culture and winning grants to scale their operations to festivals.

Ali Hayel, from Syria, established an organic vegetable business that supplies restaurants and shops.

Plan, from Ukraine, found a job with her local council supporting Ukrainian refugees with housing and job applications, and Razieh, from Iran, founded a ceramics

brand and now teaches pottery, using art to adapt to her new life.

Shabana Mahmood has stated that she was 'refusing visas for those nationals seeking to exploit our generosity' and that 'I will restore order and control to our borders'.

Placing people in 'limbo' and trapping them without the ability to integrate, study or work will put pressure on public services, forcing many of them to rely on charitable support.

The proliferation of global conflicts, instability and climate change has meant that economic desperation and human rights violations continue to drive forced migration, particularly from the Middle East and Africa.

The blatant attack on Iran by Israel and the USA risks a massive outpouring of refugees seeking safety and sanctuary around the world.

We are a nation built on community, empathy and collective care.

An island of solidarity, not one of strangers.



International medics call for a level playing field

Refugee health workers ask for transparency in recruitment

AS INTERNATIONAL medical graduates working and training in the UK, many of us have growing concerns regarding the fairness, transparency, and consistency of the systems used to assess and recruit overseas doctors.

Reading about the work of psychiatrist Aggrey Burke, the first black consultant psychiatrist appointed by the NHS, who exposed racial bias in medical school admissions decades ago, raises an important question for many of us today: have these inequalities truly disappeared, or have they simply changed form?

Many international doctors experience repeated barriers throughout the process – from English language examinations such as OET (Occupational English Test) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System), to PLAB (Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board) examinations, portfolio scoring, recruitment systems, and specialty applications.

Despite years of medical education,

clinical experience, and sacrifice, many feel systematically disadvantaged, constantly forced to ‘prove’ themselves to a higher standard than others.

We are not asking for unfair advantage. We are asking for transparency, accountability, and equal treatment.

A growing number of international doctors report:

- inconsistent scoring systems
- lack of transparency in recruitment
- disproportionate failure rates
- excessive financial burdens
- limited support despite NHS workforce shortages

These are experiences that leave many feeling excluded, undervalued, and psychologically exhausted.

When large groups of highly trained doctors repeatedly express the same concerns, these deserve independent review – not dismissal.

The NHS depends heavily on international medical graduates. Yet many of us feel trapped in systems that continuously delay progression, damage morale, and push talented doctors away from the profession or out of the UK entirely.

We believe there should be:

- independent investigation into differential attainment and recruitment outcomes
- transparent publication of scoring and assessment data
- fairer support systems for international doctors
- accountability regarding possible structural bias within medical training and recruitment pathways.

Questioning a system is not an act of hostility. It is an attempt to improve it.

We are drawing media attention to the same story that happened to Aggrey Burke many years ago, when he revealed this unfair system.

Watchdog clears charity over Valentine's complaint

Claims about schools project 'misleading' and 'unsubstantiated'

CITY of Sanctuary UK, a national charity that has spent the last 20 years building welcome, support and opportunity for people seeking sanctuary, has been fully cleared by the Charity Commission following a formal compliance case.

The Commission opened its case in August 2025 following a complaint alleging inappropriate political activity relating to the charity's Schools of Sanctuary programme, specifically regarding a Valentine's Day craft activity.

The allegations, which circulated online and were reported in the media, were found by the Commission to be misleading and unsubstantiated, with no evidence of wrongdoing.

Concerns were raised over the charity's activities in schools, including the claim children were being encouraged to send Valentine's Day cards to adult asylum seekers. This allegation had been circulating online and was also reported in the media.

But after a detailed review and a meeting with the charity's trustees, the regulator did not find evidence to support these allegations.

The regulator examined specific concerns about the charity's educational resources, its use of language and its activities – particularly in relation to the allegation around the Valentine's Day card activity.

Heart-shaped general messages of welcome to refugees were displayed in schools, with some sent to a separate charity supporting refugees for display in its premises. The trustees explained that at no point did



Picture: Emmanuel Anderson on Unsplash

children write cards to individual adult asylum seekers or refugees. The Commission found no evidence of inappropriate political activity by the charity, or activity that falls outside of its purposes.

The charity's criticism of aspects of Government policy was permissible under charity law in the context of the charity's registered purpose of supporting refugees and asylum seekers and did not amount to a breach of charities' obligation to remain independent of party-political bias.

The trustees explained that politicians from different parties support its work and local authorities of various political compositions help deliver its programmes.

More generally, the Com-

mission found the charity's approach to educational activities permissible under charity law, noting educational material does not need to be completely value-free, and in this case could reflect the charity's viewpoint that people seeking sanctuary should be welcomed and supported. The Commission is concerned that City of Sanctuary UK faced a misinformation campaign, including threats to charity trustees and staff, in relation to the Valentine's Day card allegations.

Helen Earner, director of regulatory services at the Charity Commission, said: "The Commission speaks out when charities fall short of their legal responsibilities, but we also have a role in affirming the right of charities to further their purpos-

es within the law, even where some may strongly disagree with their views.

"Charities have operated in contested areas of social policy for centuries, and as such, need to accept that not everyone will agree with their position or be supportive of their cause, and that they may be subject to criticism.

"In this case, however, concerns about the charity's work were fuelled by online misinformation, something charities are increasingly subject to and a concern for us as regulator.

"After examining the available evidence, we found the claims to be misleading, and that the Schools of Sanctuary programme is within the charity's purposes and complies with our guidance on campaigning and political activity. We are satisfied the trustees understand their regulatory obligations."

A spokesperson for City of Sanctuary UK said: "The Charity Commission's thorough review confirms that we have acted appropriately and in line with our charitable objectives. While it is disappointing that our integrity was called into question, we welcome this clear outcome and are pleased the case is now closed."

"The misinformation campaign we were subject to had a real impact on our team and the schools we work with, and we are grateful that the Commission recognised this as part of its review.

"We know we are not alone – a number of other organisations working in this field have faced similar experiences."

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