



St Vincent
de Paul Society

England and Wales

Turning Concern into Action

Welcoming the stranger: A toolkit for supporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The recent events in Afghanistan have made headlines across the world. People fleeing in despair and hoping to seek safety have been watched in horror by millions of people. Afghans however are far from being the only people who today are fleeing their country. Tragically, over 48 million people around the world are displaced. War, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived millions of their home, employment, family and homeland.

Jesus identifies Himself as a stranger to be welcomed (Matthew 25:35), and Pope Francis has spoken many times about the importance of helping and welcoming migrants and refugees. We believe that it is our responsibility as Catholics and Vincentians to welcome the stranger and support those in need.

Our team has produced this toolkit to provide practical guidance to SVP members and conferences who want to support refugees and asylum seekers. This is also a call to practice the values taught by Catholic Social Teaching, and practice social justice by advocating for the most vulnerable.

Just as faith and service is central to our charter, so too is advocacy. **Advocacy is an essential characteristic of the Society and has its roots in the advocacy of our Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.** He challenged existing doctrines and policies of his time that caused poverty and disadvantage. He sought a society based on what we now refer to as the common good of mankind. Refugees and Asylum seekers are some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in today's world, it is therefore our responsibility to speak out and seek justice for them.

There are 3 things you can do today to help refugees and asylum seekers:

- Learn about the difference between migrants, refugees and asylum seekers
- Advocate for our brothers and sisters and make your voice heard by writing to your MP
- Write to your Local Authority asking them to commit to resettle refugee families in your area



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1. Learn about the difference between migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

We have put together a useful guide on terminology, [read it here](#).

2. Advocate for our brothers and sisters and make your voice heard

This will not be the last crisis we will see affecting people displaced and forced to flee their home. While it's important to respond to immediate need, we also need to look at the bigger picture and remember that the crisis faced by Afghan and other refugees doesn't happen in isolation but needs to be understood in the context of world politics.

We believe that no human being is illegal, and everyone deserves to be helped and welcomed when in need. A just and fair immigration system should be based on values of compassion and dignity.

Currently, there is a bill going through parliament which is likely to affect millions of refugees for years to come. The Nationality and Borders Bill is a proposed new law which would overhaul the UK's asylum system so as to make it as difficult as possible to get asylum in the UK. If this bill becomes law, thousands of people forced to flee their homes and in need of safe haven will not be able to find safety and security in the UK. The Bill would deny many refugees the chance to seek sanctuary in the UK, criminalise many of those who try, isolate refugees in harmful out-of-town institutions, and undermine 70 years of international co-operation under the UN refugee convention. It would drastically cut the overall number we give safety to.

MPs have a chance to influence this bill by proposing amendments, asking questions and voting on this bill. Therefore, **it's important for MPs to know what their constituents think about the bill. MPs are much more likely to listen and respond to their constituents, so your voice matters.**

We've put together an easy to use guide and template you can use to contact your MP, simply follow the steps below:

a) Find you MP

Find out who your MP is, and their contact details [here](#). Just enter your postcode and the name and contact of your MP will show.

b) Write to you MP using the template below



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Using the contact details you found, send an email to your MP. It's important for your letter to be personal and to include our own reasons for opposing this bill. You can use the template below and customise it as you wish. Please let us know if you receive a response from your MP by emailing alessandras@svp.org.uk.

Dear [name of MP],

My name is [insert your name] and I am writing to you as [add reference to any local group or communities in your constituency] to express my/our concern about the government's Nationality and Borders Bill.

I/we believe this Bill will leave many people vulnerable and in desperate situations when they should be given protection. I am concerned these proposals will lead to greater poverty and homelessness for people in need of sanctuary and compassion.

[Add here in your own words why this is important to you as a Christian].

I am/we are therefore requesting two things of you as our MP.

First, please let us know your own views on the Bill and the issues we raise above, we would like to hear your views on this issue.

Second, we are asking you to back our call for a system that shows compassion and empathy for those in need. We want to see people living in dignity and given the support they need to rebuild their lives.

We also ask you to ask the Government to commit to a clear target to resettle at least 10,000 refugees a year through resettlement schemes and to establish safe routes for people to seek asylum.

[I/We] look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your organisation or group of organisations if relevant,]

[Your address and contact details].



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3. Write to your Local Authority asking them to commit to resettle refugee families in your area

The Government asked Local Authorities to step forward and offer housing to resettle Afghan refugees. The deadline to offer places is very soon, and we need as many people as possible to let their local council know they are ready to welcome refugees. **Can you write to your local authority today and ask them to commit to resettling refugees in your area?** Follow the steps below:

- Go to [this](#) website and enter your postcode to find the details of your Local Authority.
- Select “**write to all your councillors**” (on the right-hand side of the page)
- Copy and paste the following message in the box or write in your own words how important it is for you to help Afghans in need and ask the council to commit to resettle Afghans in your area.

My name is [insert your name] and I am a local resident.

I am very concerned about the current situation in Afghanistan and concerned for the people whose life is at risk. I am writing to you to ask to let the Home Office know our council is ready to welcome Afghan refugees through the ARAP and ACRS schemes.

I believe our council should be welcoming refugees and offer hospitality and generosity to those in need.

I am writing to you as your constituent asking you to let the Government know we are ready to welcome refugees in our area.

Thank you.

- Enter your details in the appropriate boxes and send the message.
- Let us know if you receive any responses by emailing alessandras@svp.org.uk.

The SVP has been campaigning for the past year for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. You can read more about our work so far [here](#).