



SUPPORTING AND  
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REFUGEES

# General Election 2019: Will your future MP care about refugees?



## Talking to your parliamentary candidates about refugees

During an election, candidates will often want to talk to voters about what is important to them. This could be when they go door-to-door to speak to residents, at public events, or just when they are campaigning in the local area.

You can talk to candidates about any issue that is important to you, and at the Refugee Council we are very keen to ensure that issues related to refugee protection are heard. Candidates are often used to hearing about particular local issues like housing or employment, but are often less likely to hear much about refugee issues, or know much about refugee policy.

This booklet sets out the background to changes that are needed if we want a country that is truly welcoming to, and supportive of, refugees and people seeking asylum. However, it might not always be possible to have a conversation with this level of detail, or the candidate may not be in a position to give a fully-informed view.

If that is the case, it's important to make sure you are clear that refugee protection in a general sense should be a priority for them, and that you will be contacting them if they are elected to raise these issues in more detail. Try to get a campaign email address from them, so that you can immediately follow up the conversation in writing.

You may want to first ask your candidate what their general view on refugee policy is. You could ask general questions, e.g.

- Will you be a voice for refugee protection in parliament?
- Will you speak out against dehumanising and inaccurate rhetoric around refugees and people seeking asylum?

If you would like to speak to candidates about specific refugee issues, please read on for background information and suggested questions. Even if they are unable to make a commitment, or you don't have time to fully outline the issues, it is useful to raise these issues where you can.

If you have an interesting conversation with one of your candidates about refugees, then feel free to let us know by emailing [GE2019@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:GE2019@refugeecouncil.org.uk)

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## Resettlement

The last Government has committed to resettling 5,000 refugees from around the world to the UK next year, providing them with support to integrate and move on with their lives. At the moment, we don't know what will happen or how many will be resettled in later years, starting in 2021.

While this commitment is important, people working with refugees believe that the UK, one of the richest countries in the world, can and should do more. Across the world, there are more refugees than at any time since the end of the Second World War, yet we only take a tiny proportion.

We believe that the UK should commit to resettling 10,000 refugees every year, on an ongoing basis.

- **Question: If elected, will you press for the Government to show leadership in its response to the global refugee crisis by increasing the number of refugees resettled in the UK?**

## Refugee Family Reunion

Once someone has been recognised as a refugee in the UK, there are rules that allow them to bring family members to live with them here. This is crucial in allowing refugees to rebuild their lives, without worrying about loved ones, and allowing them to integrate into their new communities. This also allows families to be reunited without having to take dangerous journeys and relying on smugglers to get to the UK.

Unfortunately, the UK's rules on refugee family reunion are too restrictive. Unaccompanied child refugees are unable to bring any close family members to join them in the UK, a government policy that differs from almost every other country in Europe. Adult refugees aren't allowed to bring their parents, siblings, or their children who are over 18, even though these are very close family members.

- **Question: If you are elected, will you make the case for changing the rules on refugee family reunion, so that more refugees can be reunited with their family members?**

## Homelessness and destitution amongst newly-recognised refugees

New refugees who have had their asylum claim accepted by the UK government still face incredible challenges when starting their new lives in the UK. From the point at which they acquire refugee status, they are given only 28 days to access welfare benefits, housing, and employment.

This is not a fair or realistic timescale, and it means that many refugees are left homeless and destitute, at the very point they have been granted protection by the government.

Alongside this, there are other specific policies that make things more difficult for new refugees. Universal Credit has a five-week waiting period, and though refugees can access advance payments, this puts them into debt which they then have to pay for over future months.

- **Question: If you become my next MP, will you commit to looking at the system for new refugees, and argue for better support mechanisms for this vulnerable group?**
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Furthermore, many refugees have no savings, and no financial support networks, yet are often expected to find a home in the private rented sector, where landlords usually expect a deposit and rent up-front. This is financially out of their reach, yet there is limited support from government to ensure these new refugees are safely and securely housed.

- **Question: If you are elected, will you look at how to support refugees into the private rental sector, and pledge to find ways to prevent refugee homelessness?**

## Reforming our asylum system

When people arrive in the UK and make a claim for asylum, their experience of the system is often poor or distressing. Too many people are not believed first time, but are then found to be refugees after they appeal this decision (around 40% of appeals are successful). This is a waste of time and money and causes significant distress for people seeking protection.

- **Question: If elected, will you seek to ensure asylum decision-making is improved, and that more decisions are made correctly first-time?**
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Those who are waiting for a decision on their asylum claim have to live on a little over £5 per day for all their living costs, and most people seeking asylum cannot work, meaning they struggle to get by.

- **Question: Will you make the case for better financial support for people seeking asylum, including supporting their right to work, so they can support themselves during their asylum claim?**

The UK locks up around 24,700 people every year for immigration reasons. Around half of these have applied for asylum at some point. There is no maximum time limit on how long someone can be detained for, unless they are pregnant or families with children.

This means people in immigration detention have no idea when they will be released. The UK still detains some children seeking asylum.

Immigration detention can be deeply damaging for people's mental health, and is unnecessary in most circumstances. It should be replaced by a system where people can live in the community and are monitored there.

- **Question: As a parliamentary candidate, will you support the campaign to end indefinite immigration detention?**

## Support for integration

Many refugees arrive in the UK (whether resettled or through the asylum system) with limited English language skills. Although we all understand and agree that learning English is a vital first step for someone to move forward in the UK, funding for English language teaching is limited, and means that many struggle to access the classes they need.

People in the asylum system should have access to free English language classes while their claim is ongoing. Research shows that the sooner refugees are allowed to learn English the sooner they are able to participate in society and start rebuilding their lives.

- **Question: If you are elected, will you push government to put in place funding for guaranteed English language teaching for all new refugees?**
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