

UPDATE

The Refugee Council
Supporter Magazine

Summer 2023



Compassion

How your support provides hope to refugees like Zulikha



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

Hi, my name is Saki...

I'm a Supporter Care Assistant at the Refugee Council, which means my role acts as a bridge between supporters and our charity. I'm passionate about my job, because we work to help refugees and people seeking asylum - a position I've been in too!

When I came to the UK, I received tremendous support from the Refugee Council, which is why I joined as a volunteer and then became an employee. I was able to get this support, and so are many more refugees, because supporters like you are the foundations of this organisation.

I appreciate your belief in us so much. You really, truly make a difference. You understand our cause. Like me, you see refugees not as a problem but instead as a consequence of what's happening around them - the political situation, conflict, or persecution that means they have to leave their homes, and become separated from their loved ones.

If I could meet you in person, I'd want to hug you, and I would probably feel tearful. The support you give us is of such large magnitude. That you're willing to help in such a selfless, compassionate way is wonderful.

At the end of all my conversations with our supporters, I always like to say thank you but words cannot really convey how grateful I am for the support you give us as an organisation and the way in which you help people who just want to build a new life in safety.

"I always like to say thank you but words cannot really convey how grateful I am."

Saki



Update Magazine Summer Edition

The Government have pushed through new legislation that will make life even more difficult for refugees seeking safety in the UK. Despite fierce opposition, this law will treat many desperate men, women and children inhumanely. The Government's new Illegal Migration Act does not reflect our

values. It takes our country's proud record of providing sanctuary to people in need and tears it up.

Mohanad, a medical student from Sudan who we supported, suffered appalling discrimination because of his ethnic background. He said: *"I wanted to get far away from my country. I couldn't live there."*

People are forced to leave Sudan because of war, because of genocide, and because of ethnic persecution. What's happening now in Sudan is heart-breaking."

It took months for Mohanad to reach the UK, via Libya and by crossing the Mediterranean sea. "The journey was horrific," he says. "Everywhere we moved, someone would die." He says that in France, many refugees were homeless, sleeping on the street, they sometimes couldn't get food, and they faced harassment from the police as well as the public.

"When I came [to the UK], I was near to becoming mad," Mohanad told us.

"In the UK, I was really grateful to have a warm room, a shower and a bed! I found the Refugee Council. They are one of the most wonderful [organisations]. They gave me an opportunity to share my ideas, to speak, to let people know what I'm suffering."

Mohanad came to the UK via an unsafe route. This means that under this new legislation his asylum claim may not have even been heard. He could have been locked up or left destitute on our streets.

Almost 200,000 men, women and children could now face detention or destitution because of the Illegal Migration Act. Under this law, they would be stuck in limbo – unable to be removed, their asylum claims not being processed in the UK, and unable to work or access support. For desperate men,

women and children that are returned, they could be placed in grave danger.

Mohanad explained: "Some people, they're really struggling to get away from their countries. It's not safe for refugees to return them to their home country."

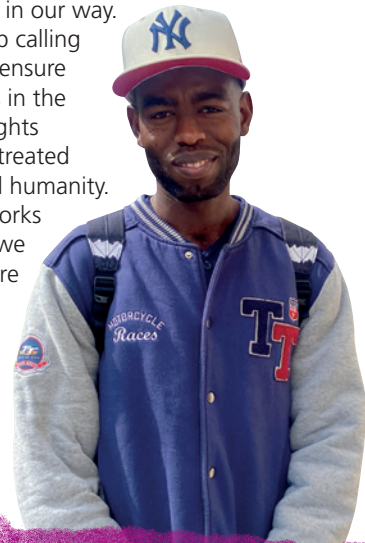
The new law has come into force but it's not the end of our fight. Your unwavering support when the Illegal Migration Act was first proposed meant we were able to secure important amendments that made this horrendous piece of legislation slightly less bad.

We asked you then to donate, to write to your MP and raise your voice for people seeking safety in the UK. Thousands of our supporters responded

and we are so grateful for everything you've done to support our campaigns.

The new law is a setback but we cannot let it get in our way.

We have to keep calling for change and ensure that all refugees in the UK have their rights upheld and are treated with dignity and humanity. Campaigning works – and together we can create a more just society for people fleeing conflict and persecution.



Mohanad, a Sudanese refugee

"Of course, I still miss my home. If there's a choice, I'd go back, but there is no choice." Mohanad

“Providing safe routes is the most humane way to let people come here”

Farzad



The Government’s new Illegal Migration Act could see nearly 200,000 people locked up or forced into destitution. Here, Farzad shares his story and explains from his own personal experience the devastating impact the legislation could have – and why it won’t work:

“I’m from Iran, I left the country due to religious reasons – I wasn’t safe in Iran anymore. The Iranian regime was going after people in neighbouring countries as well.

I decided to go to the UK because I speak English. Our destiny was in the hands of smugglers. It was terrifying, it was like really bad. They forced me and a few other people into a boat. It took us eight hours to finally get picked up by the rescue boat. I claimed asylum on the spot.

I was in a hotel for the first month and they moved me to a shared house with three or four other people.

It’s not an easy situation. You are basically stripped of all your rights. I was ready to work but you’re not allowed. When I was granted asylum after 18 months, it was like getting born again.

Had I been treated differently, I’m not sure life would turn out the way it is now for me.

This is why I think it doesn’t help to put people in detaining camps and tag them, and basically make their lives miserable and hard. We just traumatise them more and make them more vulnerable.

And I don’t think that it is acting as a deterrence, because when people are running, they are more concerned with what they are running from, not what they are running to. They don’t sit down and calculate which country is better to go to.

They are mostly worried about their life, and that’s why they are basically leaving their lives and coming here. So I am hoping that we are prepared to accept these people in the most practical, compassionate way possible.”

Farzad’s story highlights the need for a fair and humane asylum system – which has compassion at its core. Only safe and organised routes to the UK will create genuine hope for people who have been forced to flee, like Farzad.

Refugee Doctors in the NHS: Saad's Story

Originally from Syria, Dr Saad Maida claimed asylum in the UK. Ten years later, he is an obstetrics and gynaecology specialist in the NHS. He has delivered hundreds of babies here, and now trains medical students in his specialism. This is Saad's story.

"Both my parents are teachers. Becoming a doctor was a childhood dream, I always wanted to do it," he says.

"I graduated from medical school at the University of Aleppo in 2009 and did a master's degree at Glasgow University. But I could not go back to Syria afterwards. I'm a Christian and the three closest cities to my hometown were ISIS strongholds. My life would have been at risk."

Getting work in the UK was impossible at first. "I have a lot of potential, but I had no UK experience! This is where the Refugee Council comes in."

"As part of the NHS's Building Bridges programme, the Refugee Council helped with CV writing, job interview skills, and they provided a chance for a clinical attachment, as well as a place on the Clinical Apprenticeship Placement scheme. They bridged that gap for me."

Saad is keen to stress what he calls the "massive unlocked potential."

"So many refugee doctors are not practicing!"

Saad is now training medical students in his specialism.

"It's a win win for everyone if they can work, and build their lives in their community, and for society to benefit from that."

Saad got married at the end of last year.

"I'm grateful to the Refugee Council for everything - not only the skills, but also the much-needed emotional support, at a time that's so challenging."



Together we've achieved so much

Every day, across the UK, the Refugee Council supports adults, families and separated refugee children. We provide emergency essentials, such as clothing and phones, specialist support, training courses, and trauma-based counselling sessions. We give people the support they need to build a new life, and we campaign for change. Our supporters and partners make all this possible.

By standing with refugees and people seeking asylum, last year you supported:



4,057

refugees were supported by our Resettlement Projects.



6,941

separated children were supported by our Children's Services.



2,136

refugees and people seeking asylum received support from our Integration Services.

4,888

refugees and people seeking asylum were supported by our counselling, one to one and group therapy sessions.



Thank you so much for all the support you have given us. The Refugee Council will always be grateful for your compassion.

My View Project

Many refugee children and young people are traumatised by their experience of fleeing their home country and being separated from their parents. The impact this trauma has on their mental health is stark, with many children struggling to sleep, study or settle in the UK.

Thanks to your support, our My View Project is here to help. Taking place at centres around the UK, we provide one to one and group therapy sessions for separated children, some as young as 11 years old. Sessions are tailored to a child's individual needs, helping them to explore their feelings and begin to heal from the trauma they've been through.



Spotlight on My View East Sussex

East Sussex is one of the areas where our My View teams are working tirelessly to make sure separated children don't have to face their trauma alone.

5 Our psychological therapist holds 5 sessions with young people a day

180

Every year we support 180 separated children to recover from their trauma



Meet Zulikha

In the chaos outside Kabul airport, as thousands of families were desperate to escape the Taliban takeover of their country, 18-year-old Zulikha and her siblings were separated from their parents. Zulikha told soldiers her parents were outside, but they said if she went to find them, she wouldn't get back into the airport.

Zulikha faced an agonising choice; to stay and risk their lives in Afghanistan or to leave and get her brother and sister to safety. With her heart in pieces, she clutched her siblings' hands and boarded a plane. Zulikha's sister was just 8 years old.

For over a year, Zulikha and her siblings lived in hotels in the UK.

Zulikha said *"In the UK, I have taken on the responsibility of looking after my brother and sister. My little sister used to cry in the morning and say that she doesn't want to go to school because she wants her mum and dad. I would reply: 'Don't worry, our mum and dad are coming. One day.'*

"When I see my sister so sad, I can't control myself. She needs her mother, I am not her mother. My brother also wants and needs his parents. It's hard living with such uncertainty.

It is best for my sister and brother to have their mum and dad back. It is best for our future."

Zulikha has recently moved into her own home. She feels safer there than in a hotel but things are still extremely tough:

"I am 19 years old now but I am like a mum to my siblings. I clean the house and cook, but I mostly stay at home and look at people outside. I have started a new course, but how can I focus on my education?"

Zulikha is desperately waiting for a time when she and her younger brother and sister can be reunited with their parents. At the Refugee Council, we support many children from Afghanistan who are here without their parents, as well as refugee children from other parts of the world. We believe the rules need to be changed to allow refugee children to be reunited with their families in safety.

"Please just bring my mum and dad over." Zulikha

Mother's Day: Families Together

Earlier this year we launched our Mother's Day campaign and called on the Government to take action to reunite refugee children.

Hi, my name is Emmeline and I work as the Families Together Coordinator at the Refugee Council.

Earlier this year we created a virtual Mother's Day card to send to the Minister for Immigration, Robert Jenick. We asked many of you to write a message of support so the Government could see how much you care about reuniting families.

The response we received was incredible! We are so grateful to all who took part.

"To experience trauma of war is bad enough but to be separated from one's family is to be doubly traumatised. Everything possible should be done to reunite refugee families ripped apart by conflict." **Mohammed**

"Can you imagine being separated from your closest family members, perhaps forever? I doubt it. Put yourself in the position of refugees in that situation and show compassion." **David**

Families Together

Right now, many refugee children can't sponsor their parents to come to the UK, which means traumatised children are kept separated from their loved ones at the very time they need them the most.

Keeping families apart like this is cruel and has no place in a compassionate society. We urge the Government to change the rules so families can be together again. With your support, we won't rest until they do.

"As a primary school teacher who has supported refugee children and who has seen the trauma has on young and innocent lives, please find your own humanity and support this." **Nicole**

"Please bring refugee families back together. Children and parents have suffered deep trauma and grief already. Let us show powerful, compassionate leadership as a nation committed to serve the common good of all." **Zuri**

Please note, names have been changed to protect identities.



Supporting Ukrainian refugees in the UK: Liliia's story

Liliia remembers the exact time she decided to leave her home in Mauripol, Ukraine. It was 3pm on 24th February 2022, the day Russian forces began shelling her hometown. Like thousands of other people from Ukraine, Liliia came to the UK in search of safety.

Liliia found a new home and community in South Yorkshire, and she credits our support with helping her settle in so well.

*"Being in Doncaster, it was difficult to decide to stay here. I arrived alone, and I felt lonely here, but Charlotte at the Refugee Council gave me huge support. **I feel their love and friendliness**, and at the Ukrainian Centre as well, I feel this support from our community. It keeps me going.*

Charlotte enabled me to enrol at college, and my life became bright and colourful. The Refugee Council's events and tours, like the one to Bradford Hall, helped open my eyes and after that I can't shut my heart off.

For now, I want to make my home here. Our President, Zelensky, came here to England, and I saw the huge friendship between Britain and Ukraine. It's astonishing how British people have opened their houses and gave us love, they opened their soul for us.

I want peace and I want everyone to be happy. I love life very much, that's why I decided to stay here."

How we help refugees from Ukraine

- **Therapeutic support** – our therapy sessions help people recover from the trauma of war.
- **Regular social events** – our trips and socials help refugees, like Liliia, to meet new people.
- **Advice and support** – We provide crisis advice, mental health counselling and practical support to help people settle and integrate into their new community.
- **Infoline** – our volunteer-led phoneline helps connect people with the information and services they need to avoid or reduce crisis and destitution.

Over
208,000

people from Ukraine were granted visas in 2022.

Of the Visa's granted to Ukrainian Refugees,

26,300

were given permission to extend stay in the UK.

The Refugee Council supported

1,486

refugees from Ukraine last year.



“Liliia’s passion for life is a great testament of the strength of the Ukrainian community.”

Charlotte from the Refugee Council, Resettlement Coordinator, Homes for Ukraine, Doncaster

Compassion through football

Football changed the lives of an amazing group of young women from Afghanistan - in ways that none of them could have predicted.

Najma and Narges started playing football as teenagers in Afghanistan. The sport gave them friendship, confidence, and new opportunities – which inspired them to share with other girls. *“When we play football, we are free,”* Narges explains. *“We used football as a tool for empowering women and girls.”*

When the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021, all this came to an end. Suddenly they could no longer study, play sport, or work in many jobs. The girls were at risk both as female footballers, and as members of the Hazara ethnic minority.

“We didn’t know what would happen next for us,” Najma explains. *“It was very frightening.”*

“It was a very difficult situation, with bullets and explosions. Lots of us had problems with our mental health because of that,” Narges says.

The team could not get onto the last flights out of Kabul and instead, escaped over the

border where their supporters managed to arrange another flight to the UK. Since they arrived here, the Refugee Council has been working to help them rebuild their lives.

The girls are studying, and still playing as a team - but they can’t forget their homeland.

“We moved to the UK, we realised we’ve got another chance to start again, to still play football and fight for our dreams. Here is another hope for us. We can raise our voice for our sisters, we still can do it here, for other women back in Afghanistan,”

“I just want to thank the people who helped us to come here, and the Refugee Council, who are helping us still,” says Narges.

“My biggest wish is that one day peace will come in my country,”

“When we play football, we are free”

Narges



Creating a community for women refugees

In Barnsley, South Yorkshire, our Women's Group is helping women refugees to come together, make friends and build themselves a support network.

"I absolutely love the Women's Group. We learn from each other – our different cultures and backgrounds."

Christine runs a Refugee Council group for women in Barnsley, South Yorkshire.

Long waiting times in the asylum system, uncertainty, and financial hardship add to the other pressures for women who have had to flee their homes.

And sadly, Christine explains, refugees don't always get a warm welcome. *"There is more hate crime, with people hurling abuse at individuals – bullying has been a real problem, especially in secondary schools."*

That's what makes finding a support network so important. *"The Women's Group has been going for five years,"* Christine explains. *"We have different social activities each week and we'll invite different services (like a mental health nurse, or a domestic abuse service) to give a talk and give out information."*



The group has grown fast, and some of the women bring their children. "So it can be full of fun and activity!"

"It's very diverse. We'll have women from Syria, Kuwait, Turkey El Salvador, Iran, Iraq, the Kurdish community, Albania and more. On an average week we can have between 15-20 women, but when there are specific events, for instance International Women's Day, we can have up to 30. For the coronation, we set up the room to be like a street party, with rows of tables, tablecloths, serviettes, cups and plates and had little treats out."

"People want to feel part of a community instead of being on the outside."

We'd love to get to know you!

Our new supporter survey is the perfect way for us to get to know you better.

We rely on supporters like you to continue our work with refugees and people seeking asylum. That's why we have created a survey to find out more about your motivations for supporting the Refugee Council and how you'd like to get in involved with our work.

The survey comprises of 8 short questions and shouldn't take more than a few minutes to complete. The answers will help us better plan how we communicate with our supporters.

Your responses are anonymous and we welcome all comments and feedback.

You can complete the survey now by scanning the QR code. We also have a printed version you can fill out and return to us by post. If you received Update Magazine by post, you can find the survey enclosed in the pack. We look forward to reading your responses.



Scan now to complete the survey



SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING REFUGEES

We want to learn more about you

Together we can support refugees

This survey comprises of 8 short questions and shouldn't take more than a few minutes to complete. The answers will help us better plan how we communicate with our supporters. Please fill out the below so we can take your feedback into consideration!

1. Why did you first give to our charity?

- I believe that everyone has the right to seek safety
- I have a friend or a loved one who is a refugee
- I disagree with how the Government treats refugees
- Other, if ticked please fill the box below:

2. Why does this cause matter to you? Why now in particular?

3. There are various ways people like to support the Refugee Council. Please tick which other methods of supporting you would be interesting in hearing more about in the future.

- A regular donation by direct debit
- A gift in your Will
- Fundraising by you
- Campaigning
- Volunteering
- Other, if ticked please fill the box below

4. Which content do you like reading about the most?

- Information about how the Refugee Council supports refugees
- Stories from refugees we have supported
- Updates on our campaigning work for refugee rights and ways you can have your voice heard
- Other ways you can support refugees and make a difference

Thank you to our community of supporters!

The Refugee Council is very proud of our supporters who commit their time to go above and beyond to raise vital funds for our work. We couldn't do this without you all. Here are three amazing stories we couldn't wait to share with you!

My 50 Mile Hike

Rachel Black challenged herself to complete the Long Mynd Hike, and was happy to say it was a complete success! Rachel raised an incredible £332 for the Refugee Council.

"It was an absolute pleasure to fundraise for everyone who is helped by the Refugee Council".

Singing for Refugees

Andover Museum Loft Singers performed a concert raising funds for refugees, partly as a tribute to their beloved director, Paul, who sadly passed away last year. One song performed was Harbour, which was arranged for the choir by Anna Tabbush. Following Anna's wishes, a £100 donation was made to the Refugee Council from this event.



Supporting Refugees with Music

We are so grateful to the band Dodgy, who chose to fundraise on behalf of the Refugee Council as part of their UK tour this year. Dodgy raised an incredible £2,789 and we would like to say a big thanks to the band, as well as to their fans who donated!



Do you see yourself as a Tough Mudder? Or maybe you're more of a baker?

There are hundreds of ways you can fundraise for us at home, at work, at school and in community groups. Scan the QR code to download our Fundraising Toolkit for tips and information to get you started on your fundraising journey. If you have any questions along the way, don't hesitate to contact us at fundraising@refugeecouncil.org.uk



Make compassion your legacy

Your compassion for refugees and people seeking asylum changes hearts and minds, policy and perceptions. And by leaving a gift in your Will to the Refugee Council, you could help transform the lives of people fleeing war and persecution in the future.

We have a helpful guide to leaving a gift in your Will for you to download. The guide takes you through everything you need to know about leaving us a gift in your Will.

Drafting a Will is an intensely personal matter, and we know you will want to take care of your friends and family first, but even a small gift could make a huge difference after you're gone.

Every penny you leave us in your Will could help people who have been forced to flee their homes find peace, safety and stability, as they rebuild their life in the UK. What a wonderful legacy that would be.

In our guide you can find Will writing support, FAQ's, as well as more information about how a gift in your Will can change the future for refugees and people seeking asylum. If you have any questions, please do get in touch with our Legacy Manager on **0207 346 1205** or email **legacies@refugeecouncil.org.uk** They would love to hear from you.

Our partner Farewill could help you make a Will for FREE today. Visit farewill.com/refugeecouncil-21-eg to get started.

Download your legacy guide now:



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