

THE BULLETIN



Latest news, views and information from Churches' Refugee Network (CRN)



WELCOME

Welcome to the fifth edition of the **Churches' Refugee Network's (CRN) 'The Bulletin'**. This bulletin aims to provide those within the CRN's network with the latest information, developments and activities linked to immigration, asylum and refugee issues in a British and Irish context.

ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

The Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) encourages churches in Britain and Ireland to maintain a focus on, and respond to, the latest developments and activities linked to immigration, asylum and refugee issues in a British and Irish context.

Over the course of the year, the CRN has hosted a number of meetings, and a conference with the Church of Sanctaury, exploring these issues and helping to provide action and

networking opportunities for building partnerships and support.

JANUARY MEETING: MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD: CHURCHES, MIGRATION AND THE GENERAL ELECTION

This CRN meeting focused on the UK General Election, and explored what churches and parachurch groups can do regarding the conversations around immigration, asylum and refugee matters.

QUICK LINKS

ANNUAL REPORT MEETING

[January Meeting - Making our voices heard: Churches, migration and the General Election](#)

[April Meeting - Advocacy and Engagement](#)

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A NEW POLITICAL ERA?

[Barbara Forbes shares her views on the new political power](#)

[CRN MEETING, JANUARY 2025](#)

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Different speakers shared their views with the group offering how how churches, congregations and individuals could best respond to the policy issues that would emanate from the general election. We also heard from colleagues from the Irish Council of Churches who explained what the British election meant in an Irish context.

This CRN meeting also welcomed those individuals and groups who were part of the Ukrainian Refugee Roundtable, whose work will now be incorporated into CRN activities.



APRIL MEETING: ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT

The themes of 'advocacy' and 'engagement' were discussed at this CRN meeting which focused on the Church of England's Community Sponsorship activities amongst other topics. CounterPoint Arts, spoke about preparing for Refugee Week which was 17 -23 June 2024 and in response to the controversy

around 'asylum decision-making and conversion to Christianity', Revd Steve Tinning from JPIT, and a Baptist minister, recounted the evidence he gave to the 'Home Affairs Committee's Oral Evidence Session' on 12 March 2024, on this subject. Revd Steve was one of several

prominent church figures to speak about this 'controversy'.

We also heard from the Irish Council of Churches who discussed '[From Every Nation](#)' – a new handbook for congregations in Ireland which addresses diversity, race and equality.

JUNE CONFERENCE THE CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK (CRN) AND CHURCH OF SANCTUARY CONFERENCE

On Saturday 8 June 2024, the CRN and the Church of Sanctuary held its biannual conference at the Church at Carrs Lane, Birmingham. The event brought together churches, parachurch groups and organisations working with asylum seekers, refugees, and those who provide some form of 'hospitality' or 'sanctuary' to those in need.

The day itself saw around 130 delegates attend from Ireland, Wales and England for what was an 'in-person' event. The day sought to showcase the excellent work taking place in Birmingham, the West Midlands, and further afield, to resolve many of the issues impacting people seeking asylum and refuge, and featured some of the keenest minds in the church on this subject. The conference also sought to encourage partnerships and collaboration between various organisations and groups working across this area. [Read the full report online](#)



SUMMER RIOTS

Akin to many, the CRN was appalled by the riots this summer, and it convened a meeting, Chaired by Bishop John, which brought together church ministers, pastors and Christian workers who were active in the community during these appalling events.

These individuals spoke about the impact of the riots on communities, and the work they carried out to bring calm, hope and cohesion.



As a result of the meeting, Bishop John, Chair of the CRN, issued a statement on the riots, and the CRN/CTBI produced a [report](#), both of which can be found on the [CTBI website](#).

PRAYER FOR COMMUNITY



Holy God, our refuge
In whom is our sanctuary,
We pray for all people and places caught up in hate filled violent street disorder.
We hold before you all who perpetrate violence,
All who live in fear of violence,
All who work to bring violence to an end.
We hold before you all who mourn the loss of life and livelihood resulting from violence.
Bring us and the world to always build cultures and communities of humanity, hospitality, healing and hope, where all are welcome, valued, belong equally, and have sanctuary and well-being.
Strengthen us to work with you to bring people together to stand with all who are targets of hatred, to dispel misinformation, hatred and fear, to mend hurts, to keep hope alive, to make all things new, and never to tire of seeking justice and peace.
In the Name of Christ.
Amen

We are grateful to Rev Inderjit Bhogal, the lead for [Church of Sanctuary](#), for this prayer which was shared by CTBI in response to the riots.

NOVEMBER MEETING CRN ANNUAL MEETING

The Churches' Refugee Network(CRN) Annual Meeting was an opportunity to hear more about the CRN's work over the last year, as well as its planned activities over the coming one.



PRESENTATIONS

We are very grateful to our speakers that led insightful and thought provoking discussions at this Annual Meeting of the CRN.



Simeon Mitchell, JPIT Team Leader presented on '*The new government's approach to immigration and asylum issues*'.

[Find the full presentation here.](#)



Dr Gary Carville, Executive Secretary, Commission for Social Issues & International Affairs, Irish Episcopal Conference, presented: *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes? "Exploring what hospitality for migrant people means in contemporary Ireland"*.

[Find the full presentation here.](#)



George Lapshynov, Researcher from Theos has written a summery on the latest research on how the churches are responding to asylum matters on these shores.

The Church and the Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK

Theos is undertaking a major research project examining the role of churches in the UK as providers of support and integration for refugees and asylum seekers. Based on over 60 interviews with church leaders, local authorities and refugee sector experts in England, Scotland and Wales, this research highlights the distinctive contribution of churches to this vulnerable population. Our ongoing research explores how churches and church-related organisations provide both practical and pastoral support, often stepping in where state and third sector organisations fall short. As trusted pillars of the community, they provide not only essentials such as food and shelter, but also foster social bonds and a sense of belonging.

We find that churches' work with refugees is characterised by a holistic and flexible approach. Unlike many charitable and statutory organisations bound by formal structures and funding cycles, churches and church-related organisations are motivated by a theological commitment to human dignity and compassion. This commitment transcends the bureaucratic constraints that often characterise refugee services and enables churches to provide both physical aid and emotional support in ways that truly respond to the complex, evolving needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

Our preliminary findings show that churches and church-related organisations often serve as places of spiritual and emotional comfort for people of all faiths, allowing refugees to experience stability and resilience in their often difficult journeys. As we prepare our full report, due for publication in early 2025, we expect to provide insights that can encourage churches, policy makers and civil society to recognise and strengthen the unique role of the church in the integration of refugees in the UK.

You can find out more about this ongoing project on the Theos website [here](#).

A NEW POLITICAL ERA?

Barbara Forbes, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN), Secretary of the Committee of Birmingham City of Sanctuary shares her views on the new political party that has recently come into power.



On 2nd May 1997, the morning after Tony Blair's Labour landslide, the late comedian Jeremy Hardy went on Radio 4 and said something along the lines of: "Let's enjoy this moment. We know they'll betray us in the end, but let's just enjoy the moment now".

How many of us are feeling a bit betrayed by our new government? Did we – in order to preserve our sanity in the run-up to the July election – cling naively to the belief that the Labour Party would introduce a more humane asylum system, in spite of visible signs that this would not be the case? Did we – those of us whose politics are rooted in the vision of social justice and human rights, or whose faith beliefs are rooted in the Social Gospel or Catholic Social Teaching – hope that, once in power, a Labour government would embrace the view that we should follow the Golden Rule or the Sermon on the Mount?

The new government got off to a good start by reversing some of the most vicious policies of the previous government. They announced an immediate end to the plan to move asylum-seekers to Rwanda, and started processing the asylum claims which had, under the previous legislation, been deemed "inadmissible".

However, neither the Illegal Migration Act nor the Nationality and Borders Act have been repealed – they are still on the statute books, which means that any government could put them into effect, including the ban on seeking asylum. The government has not committed to scrapping all large-scale detention sites and is even planning to re-open some – this in spite of the fact that when in opposition, the current Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, consistently criticised the quality of asylum-seeker accommodation. Today, she is using hard-line rhetoric about removing people "who

shouldn't be here", even though in a debate on the Illegal Migration Bill in March 2023 she said the Bill wouldn't create controlled, managed safe alternatives systems but "it will rip up our long-standing commitment to international law, it will lock up children, remove support and safe refugees for woman who have been trafficked and deny citizenship to people like Mo Farrah."

The government's focus on increasing enforcement on the south coast is underpinned by the previous government's un-repealed Nationality and Border Act which introduced criminal penalties for people arriving to claim asylum and for "facilitating", where that could mean a vulnerable asylum-seeker having been forced just to hold a tiller by somebody in the "smuggling gang" which the government claims to be targeting but who are in all likelihood going to be able to vanish and continue their evil elsewhere.

In September 2024, the government published a contract offering to pay NGOs in the UK and abroad millions of pounds to help it take people away from their communities and remove them from the UK.

Over 30 major British NGOs issued an open letter calling this contract unethical, and refusing to have anything to do with it.

The government's goal is to achieve "the highest rate of removals of those with no right to be here" since 2018, and they have already been active: in the first six weeks after the election, nine return flights took place, including one carrying over 200 people.

The use of language here is important – we know that many initial negative decisions are flawed and overturned on appeal, often asylum-seekers need time to gather evidence, the Home Office is known for making mistakes and losing documents – and the decision on who has "the right to be here" can often hang on a thread.

After a meeting in 2018 with people supported by the charity Freedom From Torture, one of those our current Home Secretary (then in opposition) spoke to said: "I am glad to have talked with Yvette Cooper and especially pleased that she wanted not just to hear our problems but our ideas for improvement and change at the Home Office. Survivors Speak OUT will look forward to working with her and the Home Affairs Committee in the future." Has she forgotten this meeting, and other similar encounters?



In opposition, Yvette Cooper voted consistently against a stricter asylum system and against stricter enforcement. In 2015 she voted against restricting support available to people whose asylum claims had been rejected, and also against extending the power to deport an individual before considering an appeal on human rights grounds. In 2022 she voted to explicitly require that no refugees will be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom as a result of the operation of new asylum laws.

However, there were always other indicators – for example, in 2002 she voted in favour of putting asylum-seekers in accommodation centres even if there were no school places for dependent children; and also to refuse appeals against rejected asylum claims from within the UK if the claim is unfounded.

There is nothing unusual or shameful about being inconsistent, but we are entitled to hold holders of high office to a higher standard.

On the positive side, the government has said that it will take the Windrush report seriously, and has already (to an extent) shown a willingness to engage with NGOs in the asylum sector.

But one very urgent task for us all is to convince the government to turn away from its current rhetoric which will only serve to harden barriers and encourage extremism.

Simone Weil, writing just after her return from the Spanish Civil War, argued that the capacity to use words with measure and proportion had been lost, and that empty words, used as a banner or a slogan, are illusory: “Corresponding to each empty abstraction there is an actual human group...”

We need to remind our politicians that their rhetoric, their actions and their decisions affect other human beings, and that every policy they propose should be weighed against the effect that it would have on the most vulnerable.



Article by Barbara Forbes

Submitted October 2024

ZOOM MEETING

CRN MEETING

23 JANUARY 2025
2.00-4:00 PM



This year promises to be a challenging one regarding asylum and immigration, but it is not without its opportunities.

Join us at our forthcoming meeting where we will hear more about this from Together with Refugees, with an update on the Campaign Organising Network, a new network working to unlock the energy, commitment and power of local people to take action to win a fair new plan for refugees.

We will also be hearing from Welcome Churches on their new focus to strategically prioritise ministry amongst refugees and people seeking asylum, their Welcome Network, and the work it has carried out over the last few years. Equally, we will receive an update from colleagues within the Catholic Church, and their work in 2025, especially an anniversary pilgrimage to support refugees.

Finally, we will have updates regarding the churches' work across the four nations, as well as an opportunity to hear from others in the Network about their work.

Register below to take part in these discussions.

REGISTER NOW

STAY INFORMED

CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK

Keep up to date with the latest news, developments and upcoming meetings
Contact crn@ctbi.org.uk if you would like to find out more about the CRN.



THE BULLETIN

Issues of 'The Bulletin' will be published on the CTBI website, featuring news, updates and resources from the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN).

Read previous editions [here](#).

CTBI MAGAZINE, EDITION 10

Edition 10 of the CTBI Magazine, Autumn Edition is out now.

Find the latest information and resources from CTBI and its networks, including an overview of work of the CRN.



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