

CRN BRIEFING PAPER

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CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK (CRN)

CRN is an ecumenical network advocating for fair treatment, dignity and justice for refugees and migrant communities across Britain and Ireland.

UPDATES FROM:

- **Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN)**
- **Community Sponsorship**
 - Irish Context
 - The Afghan Welcome Project
- **Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)**
- **Your Local Pantry**
- **Church of Sanctuary**

CRN Meeting – January 2026

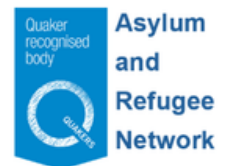
The CRN met on 28 January 2026. The CRN chair, Bishop Rose, oversaw a busy programme that primarily focused on Community Sponsorship and church engagement. However, the meeting also included discussions on several immigration, asylum and refugee matters in Britain and Europe.



The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover

Meeting Discussions

Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN)



Barbara Forbes from QARN

mentioned that QARN has produced an explainer document about the recent British Government proposals for asylum and immigration – 'An End to the Right to Sanctuary, and a Stop to Integration?' QARN emphasises the following points to mention in letters to MPs:

- **The new proposals are divisive and unfair.** The notion that refugees are the unworthiest form of migrant fails to recognise our priority commitment to everybody who seeks protection. The British Government proposals conflate migrants and refugees and there is a bias toward people who can contribute in the way that the British Government deems useful.

- **They show contempt for the rule of law.** In spite of what the British Government says, these proposals break international conventions such as Article 34 of the Geneva Convention which states that people recognised as refugees should be allowed to integrate into the host society without discrimination.
- **Refugees who have already been granted protection can have this changed retroactively.** Recognised refugees will be encouraged to switch to a migrant worker route which will involve paying fees for 20 years, with some time remission for good work, but extra time penalties if they claim benefits. The British Government proposals do

not enable a sense of belonging but rather encourage segregation.

- **The proposals will have a devastating effect on children and families** by abolishing the right of

family reunion, a core element attached to the Geneva Convention.

Children's rights are also undermined in this subordination to the numbers game.

More information about the letter and QARN is available at: www.qarn.org.uk



COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Ben Still, Refugee Response Manager for the Salvation Army UK & Ireland Territory and **Domenica Pecoraro**, National Community Sponsorship Representative for the Church of England (CofE) gave a joint presentation on Community Sponsorship in Britain.

They noted that Community Sponsorship of refugees originated in Canada in 1979 as a response to the Southeast Asian refugee crisis, and was finally adopted in the UK in 2016. It was initially introduced to support Syrian refugees, but more recently the scheme has supported a wide range of sanctuary seekers from many nationalities. In the last year we have also seen the birth of the Afghan Welcome Project, a funded community sponsorship project focused on resettling displaced Afghans.

What makes Community Sponsorship unique is that it's led by civil society – community groups, schools, businesses, and faith organisations – rather than the Government. These groups take on responsibilities such as securing housing, recruiting volunteers, fundraising, and helping refugee families to integrate into their new communities.

Community Sponsorship is a way churches can live out Christ's radical hospitality, and as they do so members experience transformation – both individually and in their wider community. Their experience is that communities see increased empathy, encounter more positive narratives, enhanced intercultural dialogue, and stronger ecumenical and interfaith connections.

While community sponsorship of refugees has its challenges and requires commitment from group members, it is an amazing thing to be a part of and there are people who have done it before who can support you.



More information about Community Sponsorship is available from Domenica Pecoraro, the CofE's Social Justice Network (DPECORARO@diocant.org) or Ben Still from the Salvation Army (ben.still@salvationarmy.org.uk)

THE AFGHAN WELCOME PROJECT (AWP)

The Afghan Welcome Project (AWP) invites churches to lead Community Sponsorship—forming local “sponsor groups” that offer Afghan families a home, practical support and a community to belong to.

Rooted in the Government’s Communities for Afghans programme and delivered with trusted partners, AWP is a community-led route that is both practical and deeply spiritual: courageous encounters and radical love become faith in action, and in serving our new neighbours we deepen our relationship with God.

Please have a look at our video here:
<https://youtu.be/DyRTotCixqc>

What does this look like in practice? Sponsor groups help secure suitable accommodation (with a private front door), ensure access to ESOL, healthcare, schools, and work, and walk alongside families toward independence.

As Principal Sponsor, the Social Justice Network equips churches with training (including from the International Rescue Committee), peer support, a dedicated Refugee Welcome Officer, and access to targeted funding to help prepare homes and bridge early costs so volunteers are confident and never alone.

Together with consortium partners, AWP aims to welcome 125 Afghan households across the UK over five years; within this, SJN will support 31 households prioritising Kent, the Diocese of London and the Southeast.

Churches are invited to gather a small core team and explore next steps.



To express interest please use this [form](#) or to request an information session for your PCC/leadership or anyone in your congregation, please contact **Domenica Pecoraro** at dpecoraro@diocant.org.

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP – IRISH CONTEXT



Susan McCarthy from the Migration Department of the Irish Red Cross spoke about Community Sponsorship within an Irish context. She noted the similarities between the way it operated in Britain and Ireland, pointing out that it began in 2015/16 with the Syrian crisis.

Susan suggested that it was the most effective model for welcoming people to Ireland, and argued that this scheme was the best way of resolving the Channel crossing crisis.

For more information, visit:

www.redcross.ie/community-sponsorship-ireland

CHURCHES COMMISSION FOR MIGRANTS IN EUROPE (CCME)



Dr Torsten Moritz, General Secretary of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), provided feedback from the CCME's online, pan-Europe conference on 27 January 2026, which explored the European churches' responses to the rise of the extreme right wing across the continent.

The meeting was attended by church leaders, policy makers and those engaged with work among asylum seekers and refugees.



More information visit: www.ccme.eu



INITIATIVES

YOUR LOCAL PANTRY



Ellie Malhotra, the 'Your Local Pantry' Development Coordinator for Church Action on Poverty spoke about the 'Your Local Pantry' initiative.

She noted that across the UK, churches are responding to rising hunger and hardship among their neighbours, including people seeking asylum who often face these issues on an acute scale. In a context where statutory support is often inadequate, food has become a vital point of connection – not only meeting immediate need, but creating opportunities for welcome, relationship and solidarity. Church Action on Poverty's Your Local Pantry network offers one such response: a growing movement of around 120 Community Food Pantries across all four nations, rooted in partnership with churches, and shaped by the lived experience of poverty.

The Your Local Pantry model is grounded in dignity, choice and relationship rather than typical models of emergency food aid.

Membership is not time-limited, and Pantries consistently become more than food projects: they are shared spaces of hospitality, where neighbours meet, trust is built, and people who have experienced loss, displacement or stigma can start to feel they belong. Many Pantries work closely with people seeking asylum, including those living in hotel accommodation, adapting provision and acting as community hubs for wider support. While Pantries – and churches – cannot resolve the failures of asylum policy, they offer a faithful, practical witness at local level: sharing food, building community, and changing the story from fear to relationship, and strangers to neighbours.

Churches interested in practical, dignity-centred ways of responding to hunger and displacement are encouraged to connect with Ellie Malhotra at Church Action on Poverty to learn more about Your Local Pantry and the support available.

For more information contact Ellie at: ellie@church-poverty.org.uk and the links to the websites are: www.church-poverty.org.uk and www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk

CHURCH OF SANCTUARY

Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal provided an update on the Church of Sanctuary programme.

Inderjit noted the work he is currently carrying out with St James Church, Piccadilly, London (with Revd Lucy Winket), Union Chapel in Islington, London, the Methodist Church across the Isle of Man, Witney Methodist Church, and churches in Salisbury and Sunderland, in England.

He is due to go to Evesham Methodist Church to present their Church of Sanctuary certificate, and is due to carry out a presentation on Church of Sanctuary to the Northampton Methodist District in England. He also wrote a short Media Blog response following violence directed at City of Sanctuary supporters in Kent, England.

Inderjit noted that he was keen to find a way to sustain the Church of Sanctuary's work, and grow the network as there is much appetite across the four nations for Church of Sanctuary.



More information visit: www.churchofsanctuary.org

STAY INFORMED

CRN

Keep up to date with the latest news, developments and upcoming meetings from the Churches' Refugee Network.

Find out more about the work of the CRN by clicking [here](#).



THE BULLETIN | BRIEFING PAPERS

Issues of 'The Bulletin' and Briefing Papers 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 12 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.

Read previous editions [here](#).

