

THE BULLETIN



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



Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the **Churches' Refugee Network's (CRN) Advisory Group's** 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.

Meet the Team

Nadine Daniel BEM is a qualified barrister who is currently Campaigns and Strategy Lead for UK Welcomes Refugees. Prior to her current role she was the Church of England's National Refugee Welcome Coordinator in its Mission & Public Affairs Division. Nadine also carries out a variety of asylum and refugee related work with the church in her native Liverpool.

Barbara Forbes helped to establish the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) in 2006 and has been actively involved ever since.

QARN is mainly concerned with lobbying and education, and have organised several conferences and are represented on Destitution Forum and Rethinking Security. She is also secretary of the committee of Birmingham City of Sanctuary and has recently been very involved with Together With Refugees in their Orange Heart campaign. She also coordinates the Schools of Sanctuary work in Birmingham, involving more than fifty schools and colleges, and is working with a few churches towards their Sanctuary status.

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Jacob Oakes is a Policy and Research Analyst (International Affairs) within the Policy and Research Directorate of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. He has a background of voluntary work in support of refugees and a real passion for this area.

Richard Reddie is the Director of Justice and Inclusion at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). He also coordinates the work of the CRN, liaising with chair, Bishop John Perumbalath, the CRN Steering Group and the overall network.



News, views and information

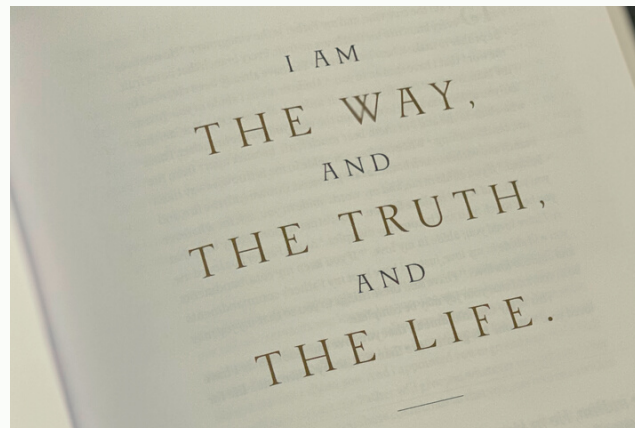
ASYLUM CLAIMS AND CONVERSION

The tragic events in Liverpool in November 2021 involving asylum seeker, Emad al-Swealmeen, saw the issue of asylum and religious conversions placed firmly under the media's microscope. Some sections of the British national press were particularly exercised by the events and alleged that far too many 'asylum seekers were claiming to be Christians in order to improve their chances of remaining in Britain'. There was also an inference that certain Christians/Christian groups were complicit in this deceit.

While there may be instances of this taking place, many of those working with those seeking to make a new life for themselves and their families in Britain and Ireland, who are part of the CRN network, do so out of Christian love and behave with the utmost integrity. Their motivation is from a desire to help those in need, as opposed to foisting their religious views on them, or encouraging them to feign the Christian faith to improve their asylum chances.



There is indeed much confusion about 'conversion' to Christianity in relation to immigration - there is not enough space in this bulletin to list the misconceptions and confusion related to the matter. However, it should be pointed out that all Christians, irrespective of who they are, are 'converts' - no one is born a Christian, one has to 'personally acknowledge one's faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour' and as a result become or convert to Christianity.



'No one is born a Christian, one has to 'personally acknowledge one's faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.'

The advisory group thought it would be useful to showcase a number of individuals who have gone through the British asylum system, and showcase a number of organisations who have supported those who of all faiths and none, to highlight the excellent work taking place. These stories can be found below.

Refugee Stories

Lived experiences from refugees seeking a better life

Niger Delta
Oil Spillages

Chelsy's
Story: A
Bumpy Road

Agnes's
Story

Websites

The websites for these groups who support those seeking asylum



the other side of hope



A view from the pew

BARBARA FORBES PROVIDES HER VIEWS ON THE GOVERNMENT'S BORDERS AND NATIONALITY BILL

In our Christian places of worship, it is now commonplace to refer to the many occasions in the Bible where we are enjoined to "welcome the stranger". We are told to treat refugees and strangers with kindness and compassion, and to remember that we are all strangers here on earth. I find it hard to understand how those who call themselves Christians can support the Nationality and Borders Bill, which has at its heart the determination that people's cases will be considered not on the basis of their need for protection, but on the basis of how they arrived in this country. Those who do not arrive on some kind of "official" route will be deemed to be irregular and their cases will be deemed inadmissible. Those who do make it through to some kind of temporary status will live in constant fear of expulsion from the country and will not be given the right of family reunification. And remember - there are hardly any official routes.

The churches need to speak out loud and clear: There is no such thing as an "illegal immigrant". The human rights to which the UK has committed itself in international law apply to everybody. Properly informed and with the support of each other, church leaders and members of congregations will be able to provide a clear voice calling for a sea-change in this country's attitude and approach to the human beings who come to our shores looking for sanctuary - often as a result of desperate situations caused by actions taken by western governments.

“Welcome the Stranger”

BIRMINGHAM CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS SHOW THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES



Birmingham has officially been a City of Sanctuary since 2015. Our work in schools began even before that, with our first School of Sanctuary receiving the Award in July 2014. This was the inner-city school St Chad's RC Primary - and over the years it has been followed by many more!

A School of Sanctuary is one which promotes the vision of a country which offers hospitality rather than hostility to those who come here in search of safety. As well as being a place of welcome and safety for all, the school has an added commitment to showing solidarity for asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. In some schools, this will mean offering practical support to children and families from all over the world; in other schools, it will mean educating children (and through the children, their parents) about the situation of asylum-seekers and showing their solidarity by practical acts of caring and by engaging in lobbying activities when encouraged to do so.

Birmingham now has a network of over fifty such schools, around twenty of which have received the Sanctuary Award (with quite a few more lining up with the necessary evidence all in place!)

What has surprised us over the last couple of years is the way in which the Sanctuary work has taken off in Catholic primary schools, which now make up almost half of all the schools in the network and half of the awarded primary schools.

This can possibly be explained by the close networking between these schools and also the support of the Catholic Primary Partnership. But it is also clearly because this work fits in seamlessly with Catholic Social Teaching and the termly focus the schools give themselves as part of their Catholic Life programme. In some schools, the work is organised through the chaplaincy team (which is also the case in the Catholic secondary school St Thomas Aquinas) or the Liturgical Leaders team. All our recent Award Assemblies have been pupil-led, with the children stating their commitment to supporting asylum-seekers and refugees and sharing what they have done.

And what have they done? Well, the principles of City of Sanctuary are Learn – Embed – Share. The schools have provided opportunities to learn about the situation of refugees, have embedded this in the curriculum in various ways, and shared their work with parents, other schools, their local parishes, local media, and on their websites. They have read stories, written poems and prayers, imagined what it would be like to be a refugee, watched videos, produced wall displays, put together Christmas shoe-boxes, supported local charities with donations of clothes and other necessary items. Most recently, they have joined enthusiastically in welcoming the giant puppet Little Amal to Birmingham and in

writing to their MPs about the Nationality and Borders Bill as part of the Together With Refugees Orange Heart campaign.

All of this of course is being done by the other non-religious schools too, and many of these schools are just as passionate about the work. However what is striking in the Catholic schools is the consistently high level of commitment, compassion and warmth shown by the staff and the pupils across the board. They are true ambassadors for their faith!



Key to pictures

1. Wall display in the entrance hall of Abbey RC Primary, showing Little Amal and her journey.
2. St Francis RC Primary receives the award with the lead learning mentor in front of a display commemorating all those who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean.
3. The children at St Dunstan's RC Primary have written messages of love and support to asylum-seeking children.
4. Several RC Primary Schools joined in an event at the Library of Birmingham to show their opposition to the Nationality and Borders Bill.

Speaking my language

NEW GUIDANCE ON LANGUAGE SUPPORT

In London, City Hall has just produced newly published guidance on language support for those seeking to resettle in the capital and its environs. The document titled, 'English Language (ESOL) for Resettlement', is primarily aimed at local authority refugee resettlement coordinators, Community Sponsorship Groups and ESOL providers in London who are supporting people who have arrived in Britain via the UKRS, ACRS, ARAP, Operation Pitting (British nationals), Hong Kong BN(O) Scheme and Community Sponsorship Scheme. However, it also includes information which will be useful to a much wider audience, including organisations supporting people seeking asylum and refugees arriving via other routes.

The guidance document provides an overview of UK Resettlement Schemes and relevant immigration routes; an overview of ESOL, key terms and considerations; the main ESOL funding streams in London, general eligibility criteria, as well as information on full and co-funding; details on the bespoke funding for ESOL from the Home Office and DLUHC; an extensive section on how to go about securing ESOL for people with English language needs, including catering for childcare needs and utilising bespoke funding, and funding available for the English language needs of children and young people. Finally, there are several interesting case studies alongside an extensive resources page.

Find out more

