

# Responding to the government's plans for asylum



**A quick guide to JRS's proposals for a reformed asylum system**

A plan rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and refugee experience

JRS UK has accompanied and served people in the asylum system for decades. Refugees have told us that the current asylum system needs reform: it frequently retraumatizes and creates insurmountable barriers to accessing the protection they deserve. It approaches them with suspicion and greets them with a hostile environment, subjecting many to years of destitution, punctuated by periods of detention.



*My refusal was really death. I could see death. The letter came two weeks later. I had to get someone to translate it. The letter said that they didn't believe my story. I told myself they'd deport me back to my country. I was so afraid. My blood pressure went up. I couldn't even eat... It really just came down to the fact that the dates I gave were not exact, and the Home Office held that against me.*

Cecile

Refugees express a desire for a new approach – for an asylum determination system that hears their story and strives to offer them protection; for an asylum system that allows them to flourish and rebuild their lives.

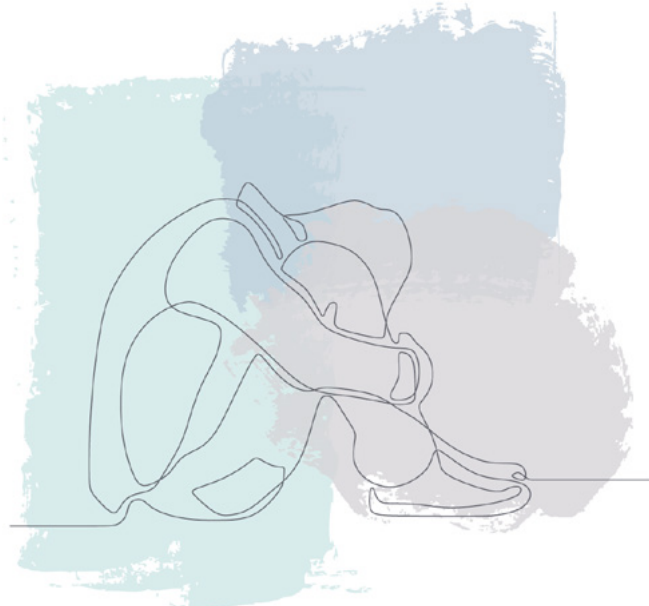
### The Government's 'New Plan for Immigration'

Government proposals for asylum reform, by contrast, abandon the principle of international protection and start from a position of disbelief. Under these plans, how worthy of protection someone is will depend on how they got to the UK – despite the fact that most refugees have no choice in how they travel. The plans are more concerned with refusing asylum claims and removing claimants than with ensuring that people in need of sanctuary are offered protection and a chance to rebuild their lives. They would deny the chance of permanent settlement to large numbers of refugees whose claims are processed in the UK, and force asylum claimants to live in detention or in ghetto-like reception centres whilst awaiting an outcome on their claims. These latest proposals take the most unjust elements of the current system as a foundation for imagining further cruelty. They go further, fundamentally undermining refugees' right to seek asylum.



# A person-centred approach: four core principles

Our report, *Being Human in the Asylum System*, envisages a just and person-centred asylum system by bringing refugee experience and policy analysis into conversation with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST offers principles that can give a fresh perspective and help us imagine a reformed system based on justice. It challenges us to reorient our thinking about border management around common humanity and human need that transcends national boundaries. It requires us to protect and nurture human dignity; and reminds us that the common good can only be achieved if we all participate and the most marginalised are included. It also calls us to create structures with and for others in solidarity with the most marginalised.



Want to read more? Download the full report – or order a printed copy – at [www.jrsuk.net/being-human](http://www.jrsuk.net/being-human)

Drawing together these principles and reflections from refugees and asylum seekers, we recommend a new set of core principles for a radically reformed asylum system: one founded on justice, designed for the welfare of refugees and not for their harm. We argue a newly reformed asylum should aim to:

**1 Enshrine protection and transparency at the heart of the asylum determination process, in a culture where asylum claimants are seen and heard.**

CST suggests we need social structures and systems where we encounter each other as equal human persons. The asylum system must prioritise extending protection to those who need it, and foster a culture of openness and justice.

**2 Provide borders which are open to those in need of protection.**

CST suggests that the earth's resources are for everyone, and that, to be just, migration management must account for this. This moves us away from a defensive approach to migrants and refugees, which pits 'our' good against 'theirs' and urges us instead to think about common humanity and human need. An asylum policy with this core principle will not be shaped by concerns about immigration control.

**3 Support asylum claimants and refugees to live in dignity, and participate fully in wider social, economic, and political life.**

Repeatedly, we heard from refugees a desire for community, recognition of their humanity, and for the chance to spend time well. This reflects the central importance of participation in CST, and the convictions that people are made for and flourish in community.

**4 Foster a society that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates those seeking sanctuary as our neighbours.**

The current asylum system greets asylum seekers and migrants with hostility: enforced destitution and detention are antithetical to the welcome, protection, promotion, and integration of refugees called for by the Church. We call for a society that responds to refugees as our neighbours.

## What you can do



*The asylum process traumatised me. I'm not the same person now.*



If you share JRS' concerns about the proposed changes to the asylum system, the best thing you can do is share these concerns with others.

**Together we can make positive change happen.**



### Contact your MP

Your MP is elected to represent you and all their constituents, and are usually happy to help if they can. By hearing from you, you might even highlight an issue they are already interested in.

Be kind, polite and respectful – MPs are human beings like the rest of us. You may disagree: listen to them, and allow them to listen to you.

Write to your MP – use the talking points over the page, or download our template letter: [www.jrsuk.net/contact-your-mp](http://www.jrsuk.net/contact-your-mp)

### Speak up

Sharing the good news, and the gifts, refugees bring to our communities is the most powerful thing we can do. Speak up in conversations with friends, with family, in your workplace, and on social media.

If you see a news article which celebrates the gifts refugees bring to your community – share it! If you tag JRS UK on social media, we'll help amplify it too.

## Key talking points

JRS UK has many concerns about the *New Plan for Immigration*.

Five key areas of concern are:

- **The asylum system should never penalise people for how they arrived in the UK.** Refugees rarely have a choice of how they travel.
- **Asylum claimants should have safe and dignified accommodation within British communities.** The plan for out-of-town 'reception centres' is bad for integration.
- **Asylum claims should not be processed in detention.** We are very worried the new proposals suggest a return to unfair Detention Fast Track, which the High Court previously ruled to be illegal.
- **The *New Plan for Immigration* formalises a culture of disbelief within the asylum system that is dehumanising; undermining decision-makers' ability to truly understand.** This comes from the same culture of refusal and disbelief that led to lives of 'Windrush' citizens being destroyed. We need a culture in which asylum claimants are seen and heard.
- **The *New Plan for Immigration* makes an already complex system even more complex for asylum seekers.** It makes it substantially harder for people to make their case and explain the reason why they are afraid of returning to their home country. People, understandably, struggle to disclose traumatic events during their asylum interview, and articulate their need for international protection.

Learn more: visit [www.jrsuk.net/advoacte](http://www.jrsuk.net/advoacte) or contact us on [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net)



*Migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person. Hence they ought to be 'agents in their own redemption'. No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human. For Christians, this way of thinking and acting is unacceptable, since it sets certain political preferences above deep convictions of our faith: the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion, and the supreme law of fraternal love.*

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, #39



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