

Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK
AUTUMN 2025



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“Participation is collaborative: it’s about contributing to something greater than myself, creating a place where everybody can feel valued and included.”

Haris

“We want more than just receiving”

Franck Brou SJ is a young Jesuit scholastic from Ivory Coast. He worked with refugees for five years in Calais, France, then moved to the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2024, where he joined JRS as Education Monitoring Officer.



What does protection mean to you?

At a solidarity festival in Calais, organised by Secours Catholique in 2023, many displaced participants expressed that they did not feel respected, despite receiving necessities like food and toiletries: **“We want more than just receiving - we want to share our thoughts with you.”** This made me think a lot on what protection really means. The humanitarian system offered legal protection and material aid, but many still felt unheard, powerless, and dependent.

What is the context of JRS’ work in CAR?

Since 1960, CAR has experienced intermittent conflicts that have disrupted its social and political fabric. People suffer the consequences of violence between rebels and villagers, as well as between the army and rebels, who both try to occupy territory with rich mines of gold and diamonds. At the root of the conflict and of the displacement of innocent people lies a profound greed to control the country’s mineral resources.

In the past three years, JRS CAR has supported over 20,000 internally displaced people in the regions of Bangui, Bambari, and Bria, offering access to livelihoods, and protection.

What can JRS contribute in the protection of refugees?

The testimony of a young woman who participated in one of JRS’ educational programmes is a good example of how JRS understands protection. When the conflict between Muslims and Christians broke out in 2013, she lost her entire family. She was only 12 years old. “JRS built a genuine and human relationship with me - one that was not artificial, but based on trust and respect, with the goal of helping me rebuild myself.”

When asked *what motivated her to succeed*, she said: **“What gave me the desire to succeed was the sense of safety I felt from the friendship of JRS. I regained a taste for life. I felt safe, protected, and most importantly, treated as a human being in the fullest sense. That helped me hope again.”**

Protection is not just about walls, documents, or aid - it’s about feeling welcomed, respected, and loved.

An African proverb says: “Where fraternity reigns, each person becomes the guardian of the other’s well-being, and work ceases to be a burden and becomes a shared mission.” This is our African wisdom.

Message from the editor



Dear friends,

There are so many challenges facing refugees right now – from the violence we’ve witnessed at asylum hotels to hostile new laws targeting people crossing the channel. But one of the biggest problems is the asylum system itself. From the moment someone seeking sanctuary arrives in the UK, they face a system that is difficult to navigate, shaped by disbelief, and increasingly stacked against them.

On pages 4 and 5, we map out the journey that people seeking asylum navigate once they arrive in the UK: from arrival and initial interviews to refusals, appeals, and fresh claims. It’s a complicated and hostile system, and while no diagram can fully capture people’s experiences, we wanted to try and offer a glimpse into the reality that so many face.

The UK asylum system has become increasingly complex and punitive. With no safe routes for most, rising inadmissibility decisions, and the ongoing crisis in legal aid, many people seeking sanctuary are left in prolonged limbo. The system often seems designed to disbelieve, to delay, and to deny.

Being wrongly refused asylum is not the exception. It’s alarmingly common. The cost is immense: not only the pressure on the courts through appeals, but more importantly the human cost of years spent in destitution. As Cecile shares on page 6: “my refusal was really death”.

Yet, amidst this, hope persists. The theme for this year’s Jubilee of Migrants and Refugees – *Migrants, missionaries of hope* – reminds us that people forced to flee are not only survivors, but bearers of resilience and people hoping in renewal. Their stories, like Haris’ reflection on participation (page 11) or Mimi’s powerful reminder “let this be known: I am still here” (page 10), challenge us to build a society that nurtures people’s gifts and recognises their humanity.

At JRS UK, we continue to walk alongside our refugee friends, offering legal support, accompaniment, and friendship. Our asylum system is not rational or fair, but we believe it can be. We invite you to join us in calling for change – by writing to your MP, by listening to those with lived experience, and by standing in solidarity.

Together, we can build a system that protects, not punishes. A system rooted in justice, shaped by hope.

Warm wishes,

Victoria

From our kitchen to yours!



Zigni (Ethiopian/Eritrean stew)

“This meal makes me feel like I’m home”
– Meme, Head Chef

Ingredients

- 2 kg of any meat (beef or chicken work well)
- 1 bag of Onen powder (Ethiopian spice mix)

- 1 thumb-sized piece of ginger, grated
- 2–3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup of vegetable oil
- 1 cup of berbere (Ethiopian chilli powder)
- Salt (to taste)
- 1 tbsp black pepper or korarima (Ethiopian black cardamom)
- 1 can of peeled chopped tomatoes

Method

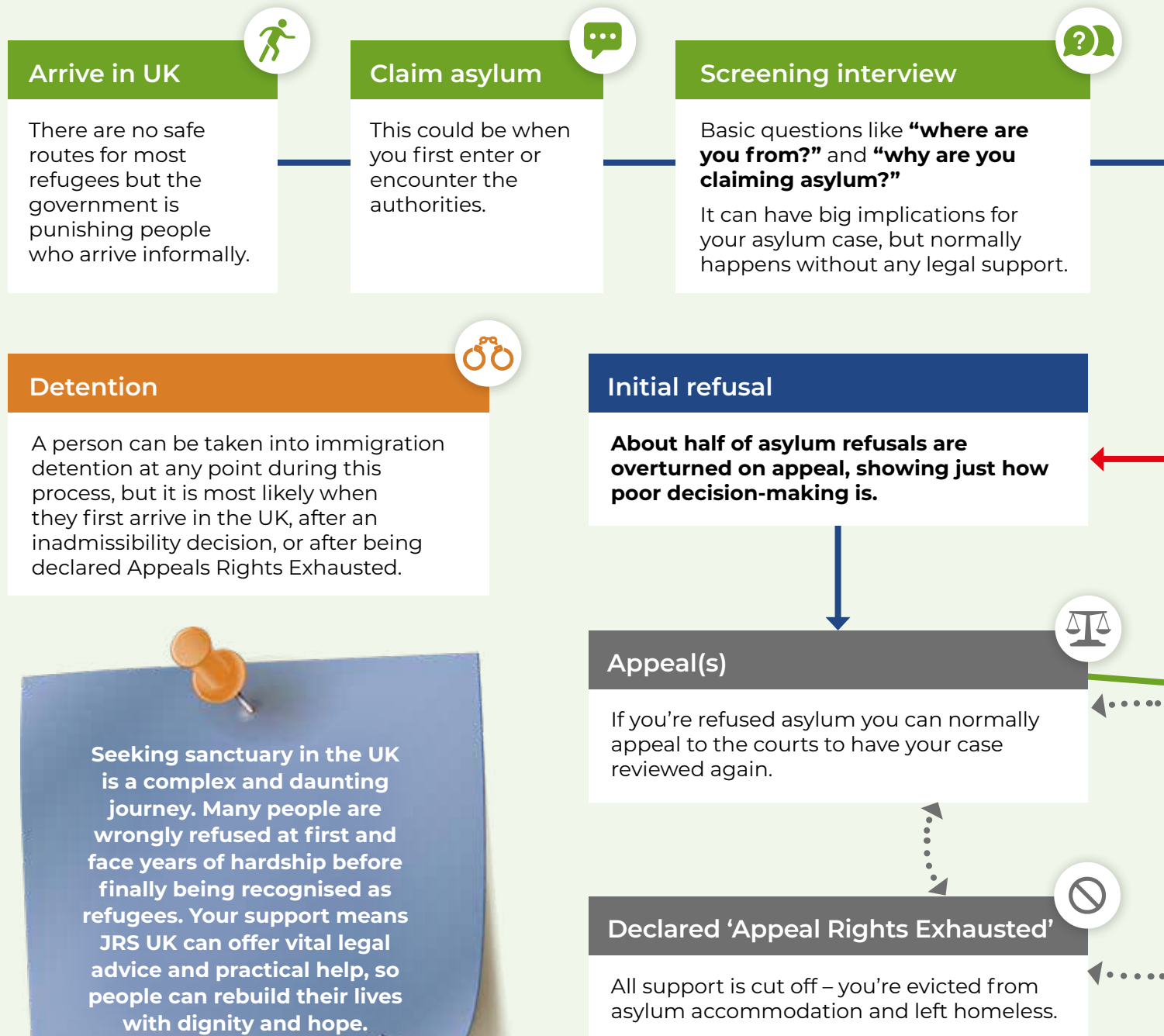
1. In a large pot, dry fry the Onen powder for a few minutes over low heat, stirring continuously so that it doesn’t burn
2. Add the oil and stir well to combine with the toasted Onen powder

3. Add the meat and cook until lightly browned
4. Add the chopped tomatoes and cook for 3 minutes
5. Stir in the berbere and let the mixture simmer for 10 minutes
6. Add the garlic and ginger, mix well, and continue cooking.
7. Simmer for 15–20 minutes, or until the meat is tender
8. Season with salt, black pepper (or korarima), and any additional herbs or spices you like
9. Cook for another 5 minutes, then serve

Best served with injera
— or rice, if you prefer!

Seeking safety in a complex system

An overview of the UK asylum process. Behind every stage is a unique, deeply human story of resilience, fear, and hope. No two journeys are the same.



Searching for a lawyer

It is almost impossible to navigate the asylum system without a lawyer, but the crisis in legal aid means it is often impossible to find one.



Sent to asylum accommodation

At this stage you receive basic shelter and minimal financial support.



Inadmissibility decision

If you've travelled through another country to get to the UK, your asylum case may never be considered.



Substantive (main) interview

This stage is gruelling and involves telling strangers in detail about traumatic events. You might be asked about things that took place years ago and minor mistakes or inconsistencies can be used against you.



Recognition of refugee status

Once recognised as a refugee, you can work, live in the UK and start to rebuild your life.

Fresh claim

To continue seeking protection, you need to submit new evidence. This is a complex process and overstretched legal aid providers are reluctant to take on fresh claims.



Every year, thousands of people initially refused asylum and made destitute are eventually recognised as refugees. Many have had to go through the fresh claims process multiple times.



Why are people wrongfully refused asylum?

Being refused asylum doesn't mean someone isn't in need of sanctuary.

People who are wrongly refused must first appeal, but now must often do so without a lawyer. If they are refused by the court as well, they must navigate a lengthy, complex fresh claims process to resolve their case, needlessly subjected to years of destitution and isolation.

Why does this happen?

1. The asylum system should focus on protecting people seeking refuge, but decisions are shaped by a culture of disbelief.

Small inconsistencies in asylum interviews - like dates or details of incidents - can be used to undermine a person's credibility.

"During my asylum interview, I thought everything went well... I explained everything to them. I told them about all the ordeals that I had been through.

The letter came two weeks later... The letter said that they didn't believe my story... It came down to the fact that the dates I gave were not exact."

Cecile

2. Even the way someone enters the UK can be held against them. If they travel through a "safe" country or don't claim asylum immediately, it may be assumed they aren't truly in danger. But this ignores the reality of how people flee – often in chaos and then plunged into a fresh limbo as they try to find somewhere to rebuild their lives.



3. Some refusals are based on Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004. This lists behaviours that may be used to cast doubt on someone's 'credibility', such as using false documents or destroying papers.

But these actions are often the only way someone can escape danger: there may be no time to obtain legitimate travel documents, or under oppressive governments it may be impossible to obtain the right paperwork.

4. At the same time, we've also met people who have been refused for using legal documents: *"If you were afraid of your government, you wouldn't have used your passport."*

5. Cuts to legal aid have made it much harder for people seeking asylum. Without effective legal support, refugees are far more likely to have their cases wrongly refused.

How JRS UK's Legal Team Helps

We work from a place of trust, which is vital when a climate of disbelief can deny people protection for years.

We carefully review decision-making in people's original asylum case: looking for mistakes; gathering new evidence; and verifying details to support the person's story.

We met Dean in 2019. He had been refused asylum because his nationality was disputed, and he lived in destitution for several years. Though he had arrived as a minor, his age wasn't accepted until after he turned 18, denying him access to the protection and support that should be available to children.

When we first spoke to Dean, he had a legal aid representative to help with his case. We worked with them to gather evidence about his nationality, accompanied Dean to embassies, and regularly discussed his case with him – including his frustration at the lack of progress.

Last year, Dean reached out to our team again. He had been dropped by his lawyer once he couldn't pay.

We looked at the case and were unhappy about how it had been prepared previously.

Working on some of the fresh evidence that the previous lawyer had submitted, we set out the case properly and took on his appeal ourselves.

Ultimately, the appeal was allowed and Dean's future in the UK is now resolved.

A fair system protects – not punishes.

We're calling for a system rooted in justice and hope, shaped by the voices of those who've experienced it. This means:

- Involving people with lived experience in shaping policy
- Replacing arbitrary targets with a focus on protection
- Rational and fair credibility assessments
- Better Home Office training
- Access to legal support at every stage
- Clear, simple routes to status
- A shift in public understanding: being refused asylum doesn't mean someone isn't in need of protection

Visit www.jrsuk.net/autumn2025 to find a message you can send to your MP and join us in advocating for a fairer asylum system.



Migrants: Missionaries of hope

Fran Murphy, Editor of Thinking Faith, ran the London Marathon for JRS UK in April. In this reflection, she calls us to recognise migrants and refugees not as recipients of hope, but as its bearers – urging a just society where their gifts are welcomed, nurtured, and allowed to flourish.

Only a few weeks before his death, Pope Francis announced the focus for the Jubilee of Migrants and Refugees: **'Migrants, missionaries of hope'**.

If we have never found ourselves in the circumstances that refugees and migrants face, it is tempting to think of them as people in hope-less situations who need to *receive* a gift from others. But as Pope Francis aptly and subtly observed with his chosen theme, the opposite can also be true: refugee friends are often the source, the bringers, the embodiment of hope.

It is a message echoed in the words of Mark Raper SJ, a former Director of JRS International, 25 years ago:

Do we bring hope [to refugee camps], or do we find it there? The richness of human spirit that we discover among refugees, including a vibrant hope, is always a surprise ... The challenge for the pastoral worker is to search for and find the seeds of hope and to allow them to grow, to fan the feeble spark into flame.



This hope is just one of the many and various virtues that each person who has been forced to flee their home brings with them on their journey, and whenever a refugee friend finds themselves refused welcome, their gifts are not allowed to flourish. **The seed of hope that could thrive if watered within society, the feeble spark that could ignite a whole community – it is all of us who lose out if we live in a system that chooses not to recognise and nurture these gifts.**

Our refugee friends do not just need us to give them hope. They need the rights, the foundations, and the opportunities – all of which we so often take for granted – to fulfil the hopes that they already have. And so, we do not do them justice by stripping them of hope, in our thinking, or in our action, but by building a society in which the promise of David is met for all: 'Hope in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and you will be looked after with its wealth.' (Psalm 37:3)

Explore JRS UK's parish Jubilee resources, including intercessory prayers, activities, and reflections, at www.jrsuk.net/jubilee

Walking with Hope

Fr Michael Holman SJ, Chair of the JRS UK Governance Committee, is a Jesuit priest and educator. In this reflection, he shares how the Jesuit mission of accompaniment and justice is lived out through JRS UK's work – especially in this Jubilee year.

It has been my pleasure to be associated with JRS UK over many years. In the past three years, since becoming Chair of the Governance Committee, I have come to know our work more deeply: the challenges, the opportunities, and the commitment to hope and justice. These are the very themes we celebrate in this Jubilee Year.

As a Jesuit priest, I see JRS as central to our mission. In 1537, while on his way to Rome to present himself and his companions to the Pope, Ignatius Loyola, our founder, entered a wayside chapel. There, he felt a deep assurance that a grace he had long prayed for had been given: to be placed by the Father alongside his son, Jesus. From that moment, Ignatius and his companions committed themselves to sharing in Jesus's mission: carrying his cross in the world today. With that conviction, the Society of Jesus was born.

This experience of Ignatius was enormously important to Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ (Superior General from 1965 to 1983) who founded JRS in 1980. He understood that all Jesuits (and our many partners in mission) share in the mission of Jesus: serving those who have least.

Today, that mission continues in many forms at JRS UK: including our legal work supporting people who have been wrongly refused asylum. In walking alongside our refugee friends



through a complex, and often unjust and irrational system, we live out the call to hope and justice that lies at the heart of the Gospel and the Jubilee tradition.

The JRS UK Governance Committee meets formally three times a year. We review the progress of our work, secure support for staff, and ensure wise stewardship of donations from the Jesuits and other generous benefactors. We are committed to ensuring that resources are used effectively and wisely for the benefit of the people who matter to us most of all: our refugee friends.

We are also deeply committed to promoting the Jesuit character of our work. David Ryall has spent a good deal of time (since becoming Director in May) building strong ties with Jesuit communities and sharing JRS UK's mission widely. We are also collaborating closely with JRS offices in Rome and Brussels to ensure we contribute to our worldwide and European mission priorities.

It is most of all the mission of befriending, of accompanying refugee friends, that remains the key Jesuit characteristic of JRS UK: one so well promoted by our partners and volunteers and made possible by you, our amazing supporters.

As we walk with our friends and each other, we walk with Jesus – especially in the moments of struggle and resilience, trusting in the God who walks with all who seek justice. May he continue to bless the work begun and carried forward in his name.

Wherever you come from, and however you pray, thank you for walking with us in this mission of hope.

Locks at Both Ends

By Mimi

You live in my head rent—free, but at what cost?
Such delight in denial, each decision a misstep lost.
Why do you echo thoughts I never had sought?
Turning silence into statistics and dreams into drought.

I fight for a place they keep shifting away.
The rules rewritten each hour of each day.
Policies sharpened like knives in the dead of night
No blood in sight, yet they strip me of my rights.

They say justice is blind, but I know it can see;
It just turns its back when it's someone like me.
No papers in order, no lawyers to spare,
Just forms lost in systems that pretend to care.

I wait in a limbo you built, brick by brick,
Delays by design, each moment makes me sick.
From shouting for fairness in rooms built for 'No.'
Profits from my pain; this system is cold.

How much more must I endure? How long must I ache?
I'm stuck in a queue with locks at both ends.
If healing is slow and justice unclear,
Then let this be known: I am still here

Mimi wrote this poem to express what it feels like to live in a system that is constantly working against people seeking sanctuary and protection, to express the emotional and mental struggle of dealing with changing policies, endless delays, and the sense that no one is truly listening.

The poem captures her frustration of being stuck in limbo, silenced by a system that claims to be fair but isn't. The poem also speaks to her strength and her choice to keep going, even when every step feels like a battle. Mimi is not just talking about survival. She's asking to be seen, valued, and truly heard.

A ray of hope

Haris shares what participating in community means to him.

Last year, I reached out to JRS UK when my asylum case was refused and I became destitute. I started visiting the centre to access support, and I found people who listened, cared, and treated me with respect.

Over time, the culture and people at JRS UK helped me move from simply being present to *actively participating in and contributing to* life at the centre.

I believe participation is possible when we start feeling heard and respected, and when you know your actions matter. It's about showing up with empathy and openness – supporting others while also allowing myself to be supported. Like accompaniment, one of JRS' core values, participation is collaborative: it's about contributing to something greater than myself, creating a place where everybody can feel valued and included.

Recently, a group of us knitted 'twiddle muffs' for a hospice in Hackney. These muffs are good for people with dementia: they provide a comforting source of visual and sensory stimulation.

Fidgeting and playing with the buttons, ribbons, and beads sewn on to the wool can apparently help to reduce anxiety and restlessness.

Many of us had never knitted before. I found myself drawing on my past skills as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine when applying surgical sutures: gently and with care. **I felt a deep satisfaction, knowing that I was using my skills to contribute to a noble cause.** I'm grateful to our knitting teacher and friends who learnt alongside me.

Before I was forced to flee my country, I also worked with people in multi-cultural environments, helping people affected by natural and manmade disasters in a culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, and gender-sensitive manner.

Now living in a situation I never thought I'd find myself in, these professional experiences help me understand how people feel and act when they are destitute and in a state of limbo. While I wait to be able to work again, I feel happy to say that at the very least, I can provide others with moments of joy, a little laugh to help them pass through the difficult phases of life.

Every day, JRS UK helps people seeking sanctuary to shape and contribute to our community. When you feel alone and your whole world turns upside down, joining a community gives you hope and helps you start valuing yourself again. **For me, participation helps me remember I can still be helpful to others, and above all, is a ray of hope and brings meaning to my life.**



Legal support rooted in compassion, listening, and expertise

JRS UK's Legal Team offers free, specialist legal support to refugee friends navigating the UK's complex asylum system.

From one-to-one guidance and representation, to workshops and holistic support, we help people understand their rights and move forward with dignity.

By supporting JRS UK this Jubilee of Migrants and Refugees, you make help people seeking sanctuary find much needed legal support – bringing them one step closer to being able to rebuild their lives.



Donate and find out more: www.jrsuk.net/jubilee

The Jesuit Refugee Service works in more than 50 countries around the world.

JRS UK is made up of staff and many volunteers who work to accompany, serve and advocate for destitute and detained refugees in the UK, of all faiths and none.

If you can, please consider donating to JRS UK. With your support JRS UK can continue to accompany destitute and detained refugees in a spirit of hospitality, welcome and love.

Donate today

Visit www.jrsuk.net/donate

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Mail your cheque/postal order made payable to Jesuit Refugee Service to the address on the right.



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