

Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK
AUTUMN
2026

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“ Welcoming the stranger in need
with a generous heart means that
our society will be richer, not poorer,
for their presence among us.”

Sr Patricia

The right of asylum: A sacred duty and a legal obligation

People have always moved in search of safety, fleeing persecution, violence, and conflict. Seventy-five years ago, the 1951 Refugee Convention transformed the ancient principle of sanctuary into a binding legal obligation. Yet the duty to offer refuge long predates modern states and international treaties. It is deeply rooted in religious and ethical traditions across the world.



To welcome the stranger is to welcome Christ himself (Matthew 25:35)
© Jesuit Refugee Service

In the Christian tradition, the duty to welcome people seeking refuge runs throughout Scripture and early Church practice. The Old Testament repeatedly calls the Hebrews to welcome the stranger, remembering their own experience of exile. In the early Church, this commitment found practical expression in the practice of sanctuary, with churches offering protection to people fleeing persecution.

In the New Testament, this call is also embodied in Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan, where mercy is expressed through concrete acts of assistance towards a person in need. Significantly, it is the Samaritan, a figure viewed with suspicion by many of Jesus' listeners, who stops to help a wounded stranger. During his visit to Lampedusa earlier this year, Pope Leo XIV recalled the Good Samaritan as a lens through which to read the challenges of our time. "There is no love of God, without love of neighbour, and there is no neighbour, if I do not draw near."

His message highlights the need for responses grounded in human dignity and policies of welcome, protection, promotion, and integration. This theme is echoed in his 2026 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 'even just

one of these children, where he reminds us that every displaced child, woman, and man possesses an infinite dignity, whose story demands both compassion and concrete action.

Christianity is not alone in this tradition. Within Islam, asylum is recognised as a right of anyone seeking protection, emphasising the dignity of humankind that is bestowed upon them from God. Judaism likewise places great importance on welcoming and protecting the stranger, and The Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud emphasise the responsibility to assist refugees, enabling them to rebuild their lives in dignity.

Despite their differences, these traditions share a common principle: the recognition of the inherent dignity of every person and the responsibility to welcome and protect people seeking safety.

Safeguarding the right to asylum means recognising its dual nature as both a moral imperative and a legal obligation. It requires sustained advocacy to ensure that governments do not weaken the international protection framework but strengthen their commitment and solidarity to uphold protection and expand solutions.

Message from the editor



Dear friends,

This year, on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Leo XIV invites us to focus on the experiences of children on the move. By placing the most vulnerable at the centre of our attention, he challenges us to consider how our policies and attitudes affect all people seeking safety, regardless of age: “deaths along migration routes, trafficking and exploitation, the recruitment of minors for use in armed conflicts, sexual violence, forced marriages” and concludes that “their dignity is trampled upon in countless ways.”

This emphasis on the dignity of migrants and refugees has been a consistent theme throughout Pope Leo's pontificate, continuing a long tradition within Catholic Social Teaching, which recognises the right of people to seek safety and the means to live with dignity when this cannot be found in their homeland.

Across the work you make possible, whether in the practical support we offer refugee friends, our creative and wellbeing activities, our work with schools and parishes, or our legal and expert casework, we see the damage that occurs when people are reduced to case numbers rather than recognised as human beings made in the image of God.

We especially see the dangers of this in our outreach to immigration detention, where people are held in poor conditions, with no time limit and limited access to support. Years of evidence demonstrate the severe impact detention can have on physical and mental health. Alarming, a growing number of children are being detained under the government's 'one-in-one-out' scheme, and there are plans to expand the use of detention in the asylum system.

Pope Leo's call echoes throughout this newsletter. You will read numerous stories of hope: people offering companionship in detention (Sr Patricia's reflection on page 5), caseworkers helping individuals navigate complex systems (Seb's work with children on pages 6-7), students learning through service (page 11), and refugees finding support and community (page 10).

Again and again, we see that dignity is restored through relationship. Whether through a listening ear in detention, practical support after release, or advocacy for juster policies, small acts of solidarity remind people that they are not forgotten.

At a time when migration continues to be debated in political terms, our faith calls us to begin with the person before us. Thank you for helping JRS UK stand alongside people seeking safety, ensuring that each person is seen, heard, and welcomed as our neighbour.

With gratitude,

Victoria

From our kitchen to yours!

Ntela's Puff Puff Recipe

Ingredients

- 500g self-raising flour
- 500g sugar
- 1.5L of warm water
- 1 tsp salt
- 20ml vanilla extract
- 1L oil (for deep-frying)

Method

1. In a large bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, salt, and vanilla extract. Slowly add in the 1.5 litres of warm water.
2. Continue mixing together until it is one large dough.



3. Cover the bowl and leave it for at least three hours (or leave overnight).
4. Separate the dough into small balls.
5. In a large pot, add all the oil at a medium heat. Fully submerge the dough to deep fry it in the oil.
6. Once the balls turn brown, it's ready!

5 things to know about immigration detention

1 Immigration detention feels like prison

Immigration detention is the holding of people in prison-like conditions for administrative purposes, usually to facilitate removal or resolve someone's immigration status.

Detention centres are heavily securitised, behind high walls and barbed wire. People's movements are tightly controlled, and they can be locked in their rooms for significant periods of time.

2 People seeking safety can be detained

Anyone subject to immigration control can be detained, including people seeking safety while their case is still being resolved. Many are eventually recognised as refugees.

Others are detained when they fall through the cracks of our complex immigration system or after completing custodial sentences. Some have spent all or most of their lives in Britain, and face removal to somewhere where they have no connections.

3 There is no time limit

Under UK law, detention should only be used for short periods to facilitate removal or resolve immigration status.

However, the UK has no time limit on detention. This means that in practice some people are detained for long periods of time with no set release date. Home Office records show that, in one extreme case, a person was held for more than 1,300 days in a single period of detention.

While even short periods in detention are traumatic, prolonged detention is particularly harmful.

4 Detention causes profound harm

Many people in detention came to the UK seeking sanctuary after experiencing torture, persecution or other forms of violence. Detention frequently retraumatises people and can have severe consequences for both mental and physical health.

In our work in detention centres and first-hand research, we have heard time and again from survivors of torture that detention feels like being tortured all over again.

5 It is incredibly difficult to access legal advice

Years of cuts to legal aid, alongside problems with the Detained Duty Advice Scheme, have made accessing legal advice in detention increasingly difficult.

Without quality legal advice, people can miss appeal deadlines, are forced to spend extended periods in detention, and are at risk of wrongful removal. They may be removed to places where they would be in danger.

Immigration detention is largely hidden from public view, yet it has a profound impact on thousands of people every year. Despite the well-documented harms of detention, the government plans to expand its use. Unless this changes, more people seeking safety will be exposed to a system that causes lasting harm.

With your help, our volunteer & staff team accompanies people in detention, and advocates for policies that respect dignity, justice, and human rights.

Find out more and write to your MP at www.jrsuk.net/detention

“Even just one of these children”

Sister Patricia reflects on her visits to Harmondsworth, where listening to people in detention reveals both profound suffering and remarkable human dignity

I have been volunteering with JRS UK for several years now, first as a social visitor to people who have been detained at Harmondsworth detention centre, and more recently as part of the chaplaincy team.

One of the most important things I have learned is the value of listening. Often there is nothing I can do for the people I meet but listen and sit with them. That they are seen and acknowledged as fellow human beings hopefully helps them to recognise their own inherent dignity – which is too often denied.

Over recent months, an unusually high number of children (aged between 16 or 17) have been detained. Despite being children, they are detained, sometimes for months, until their age is accepted by Social Services and the Home Office. Some children are released into care, but others are declared adults and deported to France, where they are at risk of homelessness and exploitation.

Many have fled conflict, violence, persecution, or forced military recruitment. Their journeys, which eventually bring them to Harmondsworth, where I meet them, are fraught with danger and some children are badly harmed by their experiences. Some have been physically and sexually abused.

Some of the children I meet do not speak English and thus find it harder to express their needs. However, I find there's never a problem finding



Our volunteer and staff teams provide pastoral, emotional, and spiritual care to people held in immigration detention

a person to translate for me: someone always materialises to translate as soon as they see me with a young person. The kindness I see people offer to each other and to myself, even in this most difficult of places, never fails to touch me.

Listening to these stories often causes me to reflect on what it means to be forced to leave your home and family in search of safety, and how we are called to respond as Christians.

I believe the answer begins with recognising the dignity of each person. Our response to people seeking safety demands faith, compassion, kindness, welcoming, inclusion, and, very importantly, generosity. These values can only be expressed when we are willing to put ourselves in community with others.

We have heard it said, ‘God is never outdone in generosity’. If we are generous as a society, our generosity will be repaid again and again. Welcoming the stranger in need with a generous heart means that our society will be richer, not poorer, for their presence among us.

Read the full version of Sr Patricia's reflections at www.jrsuk.net/blog

Detained: children caught in the system

Every week, in my role as a Detention Outreach Caseworker, I meet people who have been detained: cut off from their communities, support network, and sense of dignity.

Many have already suffered serious violence and persecution, including sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and other forms of modern slavery. Immigration detention often causes re-traumatisation, and the healthcare service delivered inside detention cannot adequately address this trauma.

Detention is harmful for everyone. But in recent months, I have been especially concerned by the growing number of children we are meeting in detention.

Under the so-called 'one-in-one-out' scheme, more and more people are being detained with a view to removal to France.

Once in detention, children face significant barriers to being recognised and protected.

We've changed the names of the children we've encountered here, but their stories reflect what I'm seeing each week: vulnerable children caught in a system of disbelief.

Within a week, he was detained

Rashid* is 16 years old. He came to the UK seeking safety from Kuwait. He was initially taken to asylum accommodation, but within a week he was detained. Rashid always said he was a child, but his date of birth was recorded incorrectly. He does not know how this happened.

Rashid is Kuwaiti Bidoon (meaning 'without nationality' in Arabic), a stateless minority group. Bidoon people face barriers to education,



The Detention Outreach Team provides practical help, emotional support, and casework to people held at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centres near Heathrow Airport

healthcare, and employment; are often unable to access documentation, such as a birth certificate. An absence of documentation makes it harder for people to prove their age when the Home Office disputes it.

When I met Rashid in Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre, the Home Office had already issued written confirmation acknowledging he was age-disputed and legally would be treated as a child until a final decision was made in relation to his age. Despite this, he remained in detention for a further 8 days.

We contacted the local authority Children's Services, and secured a lawyer for Rashid who made legal representations on his behalf due to the severe delay in releasing him into care. Eventually his age was accepted, and he was released into care.

Rashid spent a total of 13 days in detention.

After his release from detention, we referred Rashid for specialist support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and he is now getting appropriate support.

"JRS gave me hope and a second chance"

Tayeb* is also 16 years old. He came to the UK seeking safety from Sudan. He was detained on arrival after his age was recorded incorrectly during his asylum screening interview.

Tayeb doesn't know why his age was recorded incorrectly. He speaks English, and the interview

was conducted in English. However, the transcript mistakenly says the interview was conducted in Arabic.

Before reaching the UK, Tayeb had spent time in Libya, including several months of brutal captivity by traffickers. He shared with me the psychological abuse he had experienced there and spoke about how he was afraid of his detention here in the UK.

When we met Tayeb at Harmondsworth, he was trying to understand why he had been placed there at all. We referred Tayeb to the local authority for an age assessment. He also had an age assessment by the Home Office, who gave notice that he should be treated as a child until a final decision was made.

Despite ostensibly being “treated as a child”, Tayeb was not released in a timely manner. The local authority visited Tayeb but left him in detention, returning later to conduct a fuller assessment. Two days later, he was released into care.

In total, Tayeb was kept in detention for 5 days following the Home Office’s instructions to treat him as a child.

Tayeb is now attending school and doing well. He recently shared a message with me:

“Dear JRS,

I share these words with a heart full of gratitude. When I was in detention, I felt lost, but JRS gave me hope and a second chance.

Your support not only helped me to gain my freedom, but it also opened a new door for the future. Because of you, I’m starting a new journey full of purpose and determination.

Thank you for helping me, and the lives you continue to save and change. I’m forever grateful.”

Short of breath because of the heat

Nasir* came to the UK from Somalia and was detained on his arrival. During his screening interview, he gave the wrong date of birth because he was scared and confused. He was asked to point to his date of birth from a list, and not understanding what was happening, selected one similar to the dates he saw others choosing before him.

Nasir is a victim of modern slavery, having been forced to work in exploitative conditions before he fled to the UK.

During a recent heatwave, conditions in Harmondsworth were dangerous – temperatures were high and there was little ventilation. A group of people were protesting about not being allowed outside or able to access fresh air.

The group pushed open a door which leads outside, but had pushed Nasir to the front of the group so that he was the one who was punished. He was handcuffed and taken away by guards, crying. The scene was so distressing that someone who witnessed the event contacted JRS UK on behalf of Nasir, as they knew we were already working with him.

Our team raised the age dispute with the Home Office, helped Nasir find legal representation, and followed up on safeguarding concerns until he was released.

In total, Nasir was detained for over a month, and was ultimately accepted to be a 17-year-old child.

Detention harms everyone

Detention is harmful. It isolates people, worsens trauma, and places people in an environment of fear and uncertainty. Years of research have demonstrated again and again the terrible damage it can do to physical and mental health.

The impact on children is especially harmful and traumatic.

Earlier this year, JRS UK and Humans for Rights Network published a joint report revealing a growing number of unaccompanied children detained under the ‘one-in-one-out’ scheme.

Children are frequently misidentified as adults during rushed initial screenings conducted shortly after arrival. These interviews are often late at night, with poor interpretation, and with little opportunity for the children to explain what happened to them.

In detention, there is a profound deterioration in mental health, inadequate access to healthcare, and sometimes, use of force.

Immigration detention must end. I hope you’ll join us as we continue to support people in detention.

Warm regards,

Seb

p.s. Read more about children in detention, and write to your MP at www.jrsuk.net/detention

Children wrongly detained under 'one-in-one-out'

Through our work supporting people in detention, JRS UK and Humans for Rights Network are seeing a deeply concerning pattern: children seeking safety in the UK are being wrongly identified as adults and detained under the controversial 'one-in-one-out' scheme.

Since it started in August 2025, the scheme – whereby people seeking safety are traded between the UK and France – has been wrought with systematic failures in screening and safeguarding, leading to extremely vulnerable people routinely being detained.

In a scheme based on detention and forced removal, human beings go unseen and unheard. The detention – and in some cases, removal – of children is a glaring example of this.

This is all happening despite the fact that children are officially excluded from the scheme, and government policy is meant to limit immigration detention of unaccompanied children to 24 hours.

How is this happening?

Border age assessments are often rushed and inaccurate

Flawed age assessments at the UK border are a growing problem.

The Home Office records age during initial screening processes shortly after someone arrives in the UK, when young people are typically exhausted, hungry, and extremely disoriented. Sometimes, they are conducted by phone, so the interviewer may not even see the young person. There are also often problems with interpreting, for example the interpreter might speak the wrong dialect.



Our joint briefing with Humans for Rights Network revealed at least 141 age-disputed young people were wrongly designated adults and detained during the first 10 months of the 'one-in-one-out' scheme

By June 2026, JRS UK and Humans for Rights Network had identified 174 age-disputed young people detained under the scheme. Of these, 77 were later recognised as children, or were in their care pending further inquiries, and 25 had been removed to France. These figures show serious failures in the government's safeguarding processes.

JRS UK has supported children who explain that they told the Home Office their actual age, but were recorded as aged over 18 on Home Office documents.

Pressured by smugglers to say they are adults

Many young people we have encountered on the scheme explain that they initially told the Home Office they were adults on the advice of smugglers.

Humans for Rights Network has documented clear coercion by smugglers: children are told not to disclose their true age because doing so could lead to removal from the UK. We are concerned this coercion may be linked to ongoing exploitation after arrival, made easier by the absence of safeguarding, when children are wrongly identified as adults.

Barriers to challenging incorrect decisions

Once in detention, children face huge barriers to challenging their designation as an 'adult'. To do so, they need to have their age re-assessed.

We regularly encounter the most cursory Home Office assessments. After a quick assessment, people are routinely judged to be 'significantly over 18', stopping any further age assessment and relevant safeguarding measures.

In these situations, the intervention of charities is essential. Where JRS UK or other organisations have secured a fuller assessment by social services, young people are often recognised to be children. Without this intervention, many risk remaining in detention or being removed before their age is properly considered.

What is the impact on children?

Being detained is hugely harmful for children, and those we are supporting on the 'one-in-one-out' scheme routinely suffer a serious decline in mental health over their time in detention, withdrawing and struggling with self-harm and even suicidal ideation. Those removed to France can't easily access protection there. Instead, they are at renewed risk of destitution, exploitation, and onward removal to the very place they fled.

Even once a young person is referred to the local authority, they can remain in detention for a long time waiting for a full age assessment, sometimes without the removal action against them being paused. When they are later recognised as children, this means that their detention was unlawful, but by this point the harm caused by detention cannot be undone.

Conducting age assessments in detention makes it harder to gather evidence needed – such as documents from relatives – because there are multiple communication barriers, such as limited phone credit and internet access. The trauma of being detained also makes it hard for children to engage with the process. Partly because of this, we are very concerned that local authorities are also sometimes assessing children to be adults.

What now?

Recent media reports have cited French government sources saying that the 'one-in-one-out' scheme – which is currently a pilot – will end this Autumn. If so, this will be long overdue, and too late for many of the children whose lives have been crushed by the policy. But in a context where government policy increasingly relies on rapid detention and removal, schemes like this are likely to remain part of the UK's asylum system.

From decades of working in detention, we know all too well the devastating impact it has. Detention should have no place in our asylum system, and the growing number of children who are now also being detained is a further scandal. JRS UK will continue to stand alongside people affected by these policies and call for an asylum system that treats people with dignity and compassion. The immense harm of the 'one-in-one-out' scheme, on children and other people seeking sanctuary, must never be repeated.

p.s. Read more about the surge in children detained under the 'one-in-one-out' scheme: www.jrsuk.net/publications



Initial Home Office assessments frequently misclassify children as adults.

Combining casework and companionship to support people in detention and beyond

When we met Jacob in detention earlier this year, his asylum claim had been refused and he had been detained, but he was missing many of his Home Office papers. Despite repeatedly trying to obtain information, he was unable to access the documents he needed to understand what was happening in his case. This was taking a serious toll on his wellbeing.

Jacob had experienced torture in his home country because of his sexuality.

Our team helped Jacob piece together the information he needed and arranged for a social visitor volunteer to spend time with him. These regular visits helped reduce his stress and gave him the confidence to engage with his case.

Thankfully, Jacob was able to find a lawyer through the Detained Duty Advice Scheme, but still struggled to send documents and communicate with his solicitor. JRS UK helped bridge the gap between him and his legal representative.

Eventually, Jacob was released, but with no accommodation and facing immediate homelessness. We worked urgently to secure emergency accommodation, ensuring he had somewhere safe to stay that night.

Jacob is now working with another organisation to resolve his asylum case. He sent us these words to share with you:

Despite guidance that survivors of torture should generally not be detained, JRS UK regularly meets people in detention who have experienced torture.

Our team provides practical support and casework advice including help to contact solicitors and navigate complex legal processes, walking alongside people in the uncertainty and distress of detention.

“I met JRS while detained at Harmondsworth IRC. The members of JRS helped me with my case while still making me feel like family at a time I had no one. May the good Lord protect and bless the whole JRS team”

As Jacob story shows, legal representation alone cannot address all the challenges people face in detention. Many people need help understanding complex legal processes, navigating practical obstacles, and coping with the emotional impact of detention itself.

Through casework, social visiting, and accompaniment, JRS UK helps people navigate detention and rebuild their lives after release. Thanks to our supporters, people facing some of the most difficult moments of their lives can find hope, dignity, and a path forward.

Accessing legal advice in detention: becoming an impossibility

From research with people in detention in 2025, we found:

- Only 38% of people surveyed in Harmondsworth IRC had legal representation
- Many people signed up for legal advice but never heard from a lawyer
- Others struggled to understand what happened during consultations or whether a lawyer had taken on their case at all

Read more: www.jrsuk.net/detention

Learning through service

Earlier this summer, JRS UK welcomed four students through the Ursuline Links volunteering programme. Sponsored by the Ursuline Sisters, the programme offers opportunities for young people to serve in the UK and abroad while developing valuable skills and experience.

During their week-long placement, the students played an active role in the daily life of the JRS UK community and learned more about the realities faced by people seeking asylum.

The students supported the JRS UK Shop, where refugee friends can choose from a range of healthy fresh food, clothes, and toiletries free of charge. They also supported community-building activities, including our gardening project and fortnightly social drop-in, which offers homemade meals, a welcoming space, and connection.

The students shared reflections on their experience:

"I believe young people should get involved as not only does it build a strong community with the people around us but it also helps us to understand the different aspects of other people's lives. Working at JRS UK helped me to gain knowledge and understanding of how people come to the UK and manage to live here with little to nothing and still have the motivation to be strong"

"Voluntary work helps me to develop myself. It builds skills of communication, improving, and empathy. This experience has changed my perspective on my life. It helps me to realise how grateful I am for the life I can live!"



"Volunteering at JRS UK was an extremely fulfilling and enriching experience. I learnt new things about the state of the world and the experiences of refugees and how we can help them. This week, I embraced my creativity skills and increased my work ethic via resilience, determination and independence amongst teamwork"

"JRS UK is an amazing institution that I think all young people should experience. You're able to make a direct, immediate impact to our community and witness the fruits of our labour in real time. It prepares you for the real world and makes a real difference"

This was the second year JRS UK hosted young volunteers through the programme, and we look forward to welcoming many more in the years ahead.

Together NEWS FROM JRS UK SPRING 2026

Run for refugees

Whether you're a seasoned runner or taking on your first event, every mile you run helps people seeking safety find friendship, advice and hope.

Sign up for one of our challenge events and raise funds to support refugees and people in immigration detention.

Find your next challenge:
www.jrsuk.net/challenge-events



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
Email uk@jrs.net

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



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