

Local Election Briefing:

Migration, asylum and refugees



England edition

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Migration, asylum and refugee issues briefing

Background

Questions around migration and asylum have become issues right at the forefront of political discussion over the last year. The continuing impact of leaving the European Union and the humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine have been brought into sharper focus as the UK Government advances its 'Nationality and Borders Bill' which would place tougher restrictions on how people can legally enter the country.

Whilst policy is set at a national level, its implementation is overseen by local government. Councils work to support and deliver the many programmes for refugees and asylum seekers currently in operation. Councils seek to work with central government to find sustainable solutions that minimise the pressures on local authorities, their communities and vulnerable individuals. It is often up to the discretion of local authorities whether they opt into national schemes such as the Afghan Resettlement Scheme. Local authorities also have a responsibility to administrate and ensure the smooth and safe running of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, for which they receive national funding.

Asylum seekers and refugees

People who originally came to the UK to seek asylum made up an estimated 5% of the UK's foreign-born population and 0.6% of the UK's total resident population in 2019. So, they make up a small yet significant and growing minority in the UK.

Since 2015, a new refugee resettlement programme has been operating, which brings refugees directly from emergency situations to the UK. Every region has offered sanctuary to refugees in this way over the past few years. Most people have come from Syria or the wider Middle East and North Africa region. However, not all local authorities engage with all programmes. For instance, as of September, two-thirds of local authorities across the UK had taken no refugees through the Afghan Resettlement Scheme.

Local authorities are in many instances responsible for the integration of migrants and refugees that they house – this includes measures such as healthcare, education access, housing advice and connections with community organisations. Local authorities, therefore, have an important role to play in fostering community cohesion.

Welcoming the stranger

As Christians, we hold the conviction that all people are equally created in God's image. At JPIT, we believe firmly that our country should offer sanctuary to refugees and that we must seek to foster a culture of inclusion to all, regardless of their background or nationality. We take inspiration from the Bible, such as the instructions in Leviticus 19 to love 'foreigners' as oneself and native-born people, or Jesus' story in Matthew 5 regarding welcoming a stranger as if we are welcoming Jesus himself.

Churches are well placed to provide community and care for those who have lost homes and family and are recovering from trauma. Churches are also playing a role in connecting sponsors with asylum seekers as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Therefore, good relationships

between churches and local authorities can significantly enhance our neighbourhoods.

Globally, the number of people displaced from their homes is at an all-time high; conflict, human rights abuses, climate change and poverty can all contribute. How local communities adapt to the reality of increased migration – and more importantly develop an effective strategy to welcome the stranger – will remain important in the years to come.

Questions for candidates

1. How would you ensure our region plays its part in welcoming Afghan refugees/asylum seekers as part of the Afghan Resettlement Scheme?
2. What role do you see the council playing in welcoming and integrating asylum seekers and refugees, including Ukrainian asylum seekers?

Document prepared by Ryan McMahon, April 2022

Information correct at time of writing.