

Seeking the Common Good with a Radical Focus on Justice and Kingdom Values

RESPONDING TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

(Leviticus 19:34, NRSV)



INTRODUCTION

Ongoing wars, civil unrest, human right violations, climate change and poverty around the world has caused many to flee in search of sanctuary and the opportunity of a better life. The surge of migrants into mainland Europe has been the by-product of uprising and wars in several countries across the Middle East and North Africa. The conflict in Syria has escalated the refugee crisis since the start of the war in 2011. This has led us to the current crisis, where a large number of migrants are stuck in camps and centres in Turkey, France, Greece and the Balkan states, while others continue to pay large sums of money to people smugglers to attempt the crossing over land and sea to reach European shores.

At the heart of the Christian mandate is to seek justice and the common good for the most vulnerable in our society and world. In light of the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War, churches response to the crisis has combined both prayer and action.

As one of the few institutions at the heart of many communities, the role of churches in alleviating the suffering of those affected by the recent refugee crisis has been pivotal. Many have collected and donated goods and money to those stranded in Calais, Greece and other parts of the continent. Equally, many have partnered with a number of international organisations like Christian Aid, Us, and many more working in war afflicted countries and camps, supporting those forced to flee or internally displaced. As a community of faith, our response is a clear indication that we cannot ignore the plight of these vulnerable people. This booklet sheds light on the crisis, and celebrates the work of churches in the Diocese, as they seek to serve the common good and build God's Kingdom here.

FACTS ABOUT THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS

- 59.5 million people globally have been displaced from their homes as a result of war, civil unrest, human right violations, climate change, and poverty
- This figure includes **19.5 million refugees**
- **38.2 million** Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)
1.8 million Asylum seekers
- **50%** of the world's refugees are **children under 18 years**
- **86%** of refugees are in developing countries. These countries not only host the greatest numbers of refugees, they also produce them.

(Various sources: Including UNHCR and Amnesty International, 2015)

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS?

Heightened media portrayal of the mass movement of people in the continent has blurred the difference between refugees and asylum seekers, branding all as economic migrants. These terms are clearly defined below:

1. **Asylum Seekers:** All refugees are firstly asylum seekers. A pre-requisite for refugee status is that all seeking sanctuary outside of their jurisdictions must make themselves known to the authority in the country of asylum, and must be part of an ongoing legal process.
2. **Refugees:** The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, clearly defines '*who is a refugee*', and sets out the process for granting refugee status.

According to the Convention, refugees are defined as persons who:

'...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country'

The Refugee Convention and its Protocol also clearly sets out the rights and duty of care which host countries must accord refugees, whilst also

setting grounds for which persons do not qualify for refugee status. Persons refused refugee status (or any other subsidiary and humanitarian protection) are refused asylum seekers. In the UK, **those refused asylum have no recourse to public funds**, and thus dependant on the good will of others to support them.

The convention remains at the heart of international response to the refugee crisis, and has been the bedrock of many regionally inspired refugee laws, including the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which all European Union member states must transpose into domestic asylum and immigration policies.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY REFUGEES, AND DO THEY ALL WANT TO COME TO THE UK?

The notion that those in search of sanctuary automatically make their way towards the UK is a myth. 86% of the world's refugees seek asylum in neighbouring developing countries.

Since the uprising in Syria, the majority of those fleeing outside of their jurisdiction are in neighbouring countries. **Turkey**, as one of the first points of land contact, and the transit point to Europe hosts the largest number of refugees. European Commission's (EC) data estimates that there are approximately **3.1 million refugees in Turkey**, of which over 91% are originally from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries, including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Approximately 90% of Syrian refugees in Turkey remain outside of camp settings with limited access to basic services.

Added to this number, **over 1 million** have made their way from Turkey to Greece by sea. While some have been able to move to other Western European countries, a large number remain stranded on Greek islands such as Lesbos and Kos, and others have made it to Athens. Some have been able to move on from Greece to the Balkan countries, but now find themselves stuck there. Amongst those stranded in the Balkan Peninsula, Germany is the preferred destination to seek asylum. This is perhaps because it is the European country that has settled the largest number of refugees. There are also a large number of refugees who have moved by land and sea to Italy, in particular to the islands of Lampedusa, and these generally come from West Africa and the Horn of Africa.

To alleviate the pressure on Turkey and EU Member States inundated with migrants, the EC announced that Europe as a collective (including non-EU Member States) will offer resettlement places to an additional 160,000 (added to plans to settle 40,000) of the most vulnerable migrants. In addition to this, the EC has also pledged to provide Turkey with €3 billion for the provision of humanitarian and development refugee focused projects throughout 2016 and 2017.

WHY IS THE CURRENT FOCUS MAINLY ON SYRIA?

The Syrian civil war has notably become the worst humanitarian crisis of our time.

- Approximately **11 million people** have either been killed or forced to flee, seeking refuge outside of their jurisdiction
- **1 in 4** of the world's refugees are Syrians.
- **95% of Syrian refugees are hosted in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq**, where UNHCR has established camps.
- Many are risking their lives on dangerous journeys through the Mediterranean to get to Europe, with the hope of finding acceptance and opportunity.
- Over **3,500 have died** making this journey.
- Approximately **1.1million** refugees have entered Europe, with many stranded in the Balkan Peninsula.
- Turkey remains the biggest refugee hosting country in the world, providing sanctuary to over 2 million Syrian refugees.

(Various sources: Including UNHCR and European Commission, 2015)

WHAT IS THE UK'S RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS?

In September 2015, the world awoke to the tragic photograph of a deceased Syrian toddler on a Turkish beach. The image touched a cord in many in the UK, and evoked an immediate response from governments, charities, churches and individuals, all wanting to do something to help. There was a public outcry to offer resettlement opportunities for Syrians.

In response, the UK government, though opting out of the EC's resettlement quota, **pledged to settle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrians directly from UNHCR camps by 2020**. The criteria includes those who have suffered physical and sexual abuse, people with disabilities and special consideration for women and children. This settlement pledge will be met via the expansion of the government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme. In addition to this, the government has further announced an initiative to settle an undisclosed number of unaccompanied refugee children from camps in the continent. It has to be noted that the UK government is the second largest bilateral donor to the Syrian refugee crisis, and thus far have provided £1.1 billion to support those internally displaced, and to modify the impact of the conflict on neighbouring host countries.

HOW WILL THE UK MEET ITS PLEDGE?

The precise logistics of how the government will settle 20,000 refugees and unaccompanied minors in the UK remains ambiguous. The newly formed Home Office Syrian Resettlement Team (HOSRT) works alongside UNHCR, and has overall responsibility for the identification and settlement of new arrivals. It is expected that HOSRT will work with local authorities and external organisations interested in becoming community sponsors of incoming refugees. Individual organisations like churches, can apply to become sponsors meeting all the requirements set out by the HOSRT. It is compulsory for community sponsors to seek the approval of their local authority, as they have overall responsibility for devising how best to meet the needs of new arrivals, and the impact that this will have on schooling and public services.

WHAT LEGAL PROTECTION WILL THE NEW ARRIVALS BE GIVEN?

All settled refugees will be given five years humanitarian protection, which does not guarantee the same level of protection as accredited refugee status, and comes with some restrictions. However, New arrivals can after five years, apply to remain in the country, providing they meet the set criteria. Funding is available from the international aid budget and the European Union to facilitate the settlement of refugees within the first year.

HOW HAVE CHURCHES IN THE DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK RESPONDED TO THE CRISIS?

*“Never forget the boy on the beach, never forget the man on the cross - God has not forgotten them, for both of them are God’s sons.”
(The Dean of Southwark, the Very Revd Andrew Nunn)*

In 2015, 84 Anglican Church leaders (including all four Bishops in the Diocese) signed a letter, calling on the government to expand its resettlement scheme to accept a minimum of 50,000 refugees. They pledged the support of Anglican churches in helping to settle the new arrivals. Though the government dismissed their plea, churches remain committed to supporting the government in meeting its initial pledge. The response of churches throughout this Diocese has been compassionate and generous. At a local level, many have formed ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, lobbying local authorities to accept refugees.

In addition to this, churches and clergy within this Diocese are actively involved in supporting those within our congregations faced with immigration issues. Churches and schools have been involved in offering foodbank facilities, writing character references for denied asylum claims, offering financial support to those struggling financially due to their situation, and also to refuse asylum seekers. Some have also been actively involved in sourcing housing for this group of people. The actions of churches thus far reinforce the statement, made by the Bishop of Southwark that:

“This is a time when actions speak louder than words”.

Churches throughout the Diocese have honoured the Bishop’s call for action in various ways.

Southwark Cathedral

Southwark Cathedral initiated the Diocesan response to the crisis, following Bishop Christopher's call to action. £2,500 was given spontaneously by the congregation to support the work of the Anglican Church in Athens, who have been at the heart of alleviating the suffering of refugees in Greece. The Cathedral then donated much needed language specific Bibles to Christian refugees worshipping in St Michael's Church in the 'Jungle camp' in Calais. A team of individuals from the Diocese, and Cathedral, including the Bishop of Southwark delivered and worshipped with refugees in St Michael's Church.



The Diocesan team taking Bibles and worshipping at St Michael's Church in Calais

Woolwich Episcopal Area

Following the initial response by the Cathedral, churches and school throughout the Woolwich Episcopal Area have been active in finding innovative ways to support the crisis, both in the UK, Europe and beyond.

The Good Shepherd and St Peter's Lee, collected and donated their harvest goods to refugees. **St Anthony with St Silas, Nunhead** visited Calais and have partnered with the charity Migrant Organise and Help Refugees, offering goods and financial gifts to refugees in Calais and Dunkirk. **Churches Together in South London** were involved in working alongside the civil society campaigning group Citizens UK to collect, and donate goods to Syrian refugees, and participated in the prayer vigil for refugees. Churches have also been active in supporting asylum seekers, particularly those whose claim to asylum has been denied and are destitute.



St Saviour (Copleston Centre), Peckham is home to **Southwark Asylum and Refugee Day Centre**, which provides a wide range of holistic services to support, promote and secure the rights of asylum seekers and migrants/refugees in the London Borough of Southwark. Through general advice and help, they facilitate access to a range of mainstream services, with particular emphasis on health, housing, employment, training, education and asylum issues.

St John, Peckham, have supported destitute families with emergency supplies, financial support, advice and access to legal services. In addition to this, the church also financially supports the charity **Intervene**, which offers help to those detained, or those facing detention and represent them in the areas of law that are no longer funded by the Legal Aid Agency.

Kingston Episcopal Area

A cluster of churches in Balham, and Tooting, in partnership with other local faith groups, and voluntary sector organisations, joined the campaign challenging the negative stereotypes and images of refugees, with positive stories. St Andrew, South Wimbledon amongst others were at the forefront in establishing a support group for Syrians in Merton.

They have joined with the Merton and Wandsworth Asylum Welcome (formerly **South London Refugee Association**) to persuade the London Borough of Wandsworth to welcome Syrian refugees, to co-ordinate the responses of local residents, organisations and businesses, and share information about ways in which people can support refugees and asylum seekers in Wandsworth and abroad.

Other churches, including St Luke, Wimbledon Park and Putney Parish donated money through the Samaritan's Purse and Christian Aid.



#Refugees Welcome

As long standing members of the campaigning groups Citizens UK, St John the Divine, Kennington and St John the Evangelist, Angell Town have both been at the heart of the Citizens campaign calling on the government to expand its VPR scheme quota, and lobbying for local authorities to welcome refugees. These churches act out of their commitment to social justice, and have extended this commitment to their Church schools, who also work alongside Citizens Organisers.

Students of St Gabriel's College, and pupils of St John's Primary School have led a unique campaign called 'Refugees Welcome Schools'. Alongside other interfaith South London Citizen member institutions, they have successfully lobbied Lambeth Council to offer resettlement places to 20 Syrian families via the VPR scheme. They acted out of their concerns about the vulnerability of refugees.



These schools have incorporated education about the plight of refugees into their curriculum, and have prepared children and young people to offer support to refugee children in their schools.

Croydon Episcopal Area

Croydon is home to the Home Office Visa and Immigration Department, and the place where many asylum seekers go to make their claim for asylum.

At the heart of the reception given to asylum seekers is the work of Croydon Refugee Day Centre (CRDC). Established 19 years ago by Churches Together in Croydon, the CRDC project provides a welcoming environment for all asylum seekers, with ecumenical chaplains at hand to offer spiritual support. All new arrivals at the day centre are given a basic welcome pack, consisting of toiletries, and food to help them through the first 72 hours in their new environment. Volunteers are also at hand to help signpost people to professional advice. A hot meal is offered to all at lunch-time, and bibles and New Testaments in various languages freely available.



(Croydon Refugee Day Centre)

Other churches, including St Stephen, Norbury and Thornton Heath have collected and donated goods to the CRDC. Christ Church South Nuffield donated money to the British Red Cross, St Francis, Selsdon collected and donated goods through a visit to Calais, whilst St Peter, Limpsfield donated £5,000 to Athens through Southwark Cathedral's appeal.

Ecumenical Work and Night Shelters

Churches in all three Episcopal Areas are actively involved in hosting winter night shelters. In the Woolwich and Kingston Episcopal Areas, many have partnered with the ecumenical charity Robes to provide shelter and hospitality to homeless guests in the coldest winter months, many of whom are destitute asylum seekers, particularly those appealing to overturn a denied asylum claim, and those who have exhausted their appeal and finding ways they can legally remain in the UK.

Similarly, Churches in the Lewisham and Greenwich area have also been actively involved with Greenwich winter Night Shelter, equally offering shelter and hospitality often to asylum seekers. Other churches in this Episcopal Area have collected and donated goods, as well as offering financial support to organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees.

Croydon Churches' Floating Shelter has been in operation since 2004, as an ecumenical response to the problem of homelessness. In addition, St Mildred's in Bingham Road runs a Sunday afternoon drop-in centre all year round (except during August), offering hot drinks, snacks, clothing and showers for the homeless and those who have recently moved into accommodation. This is clearly of benefit to recent refugee arrivals.



A CTSL event at Trinity House, May 2016

Churches are also involved in working with Churches Together in South London (CTSL) to gain information on how to respond locally and through their own organisations.

Some Resources on Refugees/Asylum Seekers:

1. Refugee Council: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>
2. Citizens UK: <http://www.citizensuk.org>
3. GoodFaith Partnership:
<http://www.formigrants/refugees.uk/the-need>
4. Housing Justice: <http://www.housingjustice.org.uk>
5. Southwark Day Centre For Refugees: <http://www.sdccas.org.uk>
6. Aid for the Church in Need: <http://www.acnuk.org>
7. Migrants Organise (formerly Migrants and Refugees Community Forum): <http://www.migrantsorganise.org>
8. Faith in Affordable Housing:
<http://www.housingjustice.org.uk/pages/fiah.html>
9. London Hosting: <https://londonhosting.wordpress.com>
10. Focus on Refugees: <http://www.refugeefocus.org>
11. Women for Refugee Women: <http://www.refugeewomen.co.uk>
12. Southwark Law Centre: <http://www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk>
13. Action for Refugees in Lewisham: <http://www.afril.org.uk/en>
14. Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network: <http://lrnmn.org.uk>
15. Plumstead Law Centre: <http://www.pclc.org.uk>
16. Croydon Refugee Day Centre:
<http://www.croydonrefugeedaycentre.co.uk>
17. The Refugee and Migrant Network Sutton : www.rmns.org.uk
18. South London Refugee Association: <http://www.slr-a.org.uk>

Some useful references

- <http://blog.amnestyusa.org/europe/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>
- <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>
https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/CEPS%20PB332%20Refugee%20Crisis%20in%20EU_0.pdf
- http://gulfmigration.eu/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2015_11.pdf
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911>

WHO WE ARE

DEPARTMENTAL OBJECTIVE: To advise, support and resource our Diocesan Bishops and parishes on issues of social concern facing our communities, parishes, clergy and lay people.

DEPARTMENTAL VISION: Seeking the Common Good with a Radical Focus on Justice and Kingdom Values.

WORK PLAN: Throughout 2016 our focus is on the Jubilee Year of Mercy, with four thematic focused areas:

1. January - March: Housing Justice and Homelessness.
2. April - June: Migration, Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers
3. July - September: Poverty
4. October - December: Imprisonment and Detention

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM US:

- ✚ Research and resources for reflection and action on each thematic area
- ✚ A newsletter sharing and celebrating churches and parishes engagement in projects and activities on each area
- ✚ Advice and signposting for parishes to external organisations offering expert advice on each thematic area
- ✚ Events for groups and encourage them to get involved.

If your church is engaging with any of these issues and would like to feature in our 'Good News Booklet', please let us know.

**If on the other hand you are interested in hosting an event on any of our focused areas and would like help in organising this, or you are looking for funding, please contact us.
We can offer small grants from £100 - £500.**

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