Introduction

During Refugee Week we are encouraged to celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, to give space for their voices to be heard and to encourage each other to work towards making our communities positive and welcoming spaces for those seeking sanctuary.

The information on these pages will hopefully enable you to find ways to reflect on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in your parish or community during Refugee Week, and on World Refugee Day on 20 June.

The resources are divided into four main themes: offering a heartfelt welcome; helping to provide a home and food; promoting inclusion, integration and belonging; and supporting young refugees and children seeking asylum. In each section, we provide some facts and statistics to form the basis of discussion, followed by some issues to pray about and lastly a few examples of the many groups working nationally and within the Diocese of Southwark for whom you might wish to pray in this context.

Bible passages

You may find the following Bible passages helpful as the basis for prayer or discussion during the week:

- **Deuteronomy 10:17-19.** “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
- **Leviticus 19:33-34.** “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 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.”
- **Jeremiah 29:11.** “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”
- **Matthew 25:35.** “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”
- **Luke 3:11.** “In reply, he said to them: ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’”

If you would like more information on how your church can engage with refugees and their needs, contact Joanne McCrone, our Refugee Response Co-ordinator, at joanne.mccrone@southwark.anglican.org
Offering a heartfelt welcome

Facts and statistics
According to the UNHCR, the United Nations’ refugee agency, there are now 68.5 million people worldwide who have been forcibly displaced. Of these, 40 million have not crossed a border to find safety and are internally displaced, 25.4 million are refugees and 3.1 million are asylum seekers. Refugees are people fleeing armed conflicts or persecution, and they are protected by international law; an asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed — not every asylum seeker will be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker. There are also an estimated 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

The picture in the UK
• In 2014, the UK began resettling Syrians under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), with the aim of providing sanctuary to 20,000 by 2020. The current number resettled in the UK is around 15,000.
• In 2018, at least 20,000 people were granted asylum in the UK, including resettled people, according to Home Office migration statistics.
• Asylum seekers made up around 5% of immigrants to the UK in 2018.
• By comparison, around 80,000 Jewish refugees came to the UK between 1933 and 1939, equivalent to around 11,000 per year. Around 27,000 Asian Ugandans were resettled to the UK in 1972 and 1973, or 13,500 per year. Between 17,000 and 22,500 Vietnamese refugees were resettled to the UK between 1979 and 1992, or around 1,400 per year.
• For context, although these numbers are not directly comparable to those above, an average of around 15,000 people have been granted asylum in the UK per year over the past five years. This includes an average of around 4,300 Syrians per year.

Issues to pray for:
• governments around the world to be open and welcome in those seeking refuge
• an increase in groups, including churches and other faith groups, who will get involved in supporting resettlement schemes, especially the Community Sponsorship scheme.
• the end of conflicts that drive people away from their homelands
• the worldwide community to work towards the end of persecution of all kinds
• the many asylum seekers who are escaping unseen and forgotten conflicts.

Groups working on welcome
• The Battersea Welcomes Refugees project, a group of churches in the Battersea area who find properties locally in which Syrian families can settle, and Battersea Deanery, who are planning to welcome another family in the near future.
• The Greenwich Sanctuary Project based at St George, Westcombe Park.
• Herne Hill Welcomes Refugees, a community sponsorship group from South East London working towards resettling refugee families in the area.
• Lewisham Refugee Welcome, a group that has recently been set up to work with refugees in the Borough, drawing together faith groups, members of Lewisham Citizens and other local organisations. The Borough has committed to welcoming 100 families over the next four years.
• Southwark Council, which is beginning to accept families from Syria and the Middle East.
Helping to provide a home and food

Facts and statistics
Destitution and poverty amongst asylum seekers and refugees is common. Asylum seekers are particularly affected whilst they are awaiting an outcome of their claim owing to the fact that they live on very limited means — they are given a stipend called Section 95 support which amounts to £37.75 per week or £147 per month (the standard benefit for Universal Credit is on average £312.00 a month). Asylum seekers who are awaiting the outcome of an appeal can be even worse off.

People who have already obtained refugee status, even though they may be entitled to full benefits, often find it difficult to access services or further benefits and also end up falling into destitution, especially when they have to wait for benefits to come through or have to navigate the system without any support. Asylum seekers are currently not permitted to work, study or volunteer and people with refugee status often find it difficult to find employers who will give them work. Many find it difficult to feed or clothe themselves, ending up in poverty and poor-quality housing.

Issues to pray for:
• Refugee Action’s campaign to “Lift the ban” on asylum seekers being able to work. If the ban were lifted, many would have the legal right to work, enabling them to find the means to feed and clothe themselves (see www.refugee-action.org.uk/lift-the-ban for more information)
• more legal aid to be made available for rejected asylum seekers to be able to appeal their cases. Many cases have to be put on hold whilst the applicant seeks legal aid, which can be hard to access
• more housing to be released for the use of asylum seekers and refugees
• a more compassionate system. In the period 2010-2014, on average only 32% of claims were granted on first application. After appeals, that number rose to 46%
• the process to be speeded up so that people are not left for such a long time in limbo, unable to work and surviving on very limited means. The average wait for a claim to be processed is two years.

Groups working to provide food and homes
• The Refugee Council, which helps refugees who are destitute.
• The Southwark Day Centre for Refugees (SDCA) working from the Copleston Centre in Peckham. SDCA also runs an advice project at St Mary’s Newington.
• Housing Justice, a charity which helps provide accommodation for otherwise homeless asylum seekers.
• The London Churches Refugee Network (LCRN), which raises money to help asylum seekers.
• The Helping Hands Foodbank based at St Peter’s, Lee, which offers help to asylum seekers.
• LEWCAS (Lewisham Churches for Asylum Seekers), an ecumenical group in the Borough of Lewisham which has been running services for destitute asylum seekers for more than 20 years.
• The Croydon Refugee Day Centre.
Promoting inclusion, integration and belonging

**Facts and statistics**
It takes a few years for someone to feel at home in a new country. Many asylum seekers and refugees have found it very difficult to integrate into wider society, partly because of having to learn new cultural practices and norms, and partly because of the language barrier. Many non-English-speaking asylum seekers struggle to feel accepted. Even when they have a basic level of English, they often feel misunderstood and fearful.

Cuts in services, especially advice services and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) provision, have resulted in many asylum seekers becoming isolated in the country in which they are trying to build a new life. It can cost on average £150 per term to learn English through a local authority provider. Free classes are only accessible to people who can claim benefits and asylum seekers are not in that category.

The so-called “hostile environment” can also lead to refugees becoming fearful and isolated. To counteract this, the charity City of Sanctuary supports groups across the UK that want to create a culture within their communities of welcome and hospitality for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. A number of boroughs in our Diocese are working towards Sanctuary status.

**Issues to pray for:**
- an increase in the number of ESOL classes for refugees and also for asylum seekers who have no recourse to public funds
- the organisations working towards getting the Boroughs of Southwark and Lewisham to change the way they treat migrants, committing to becoming Sanctuary Boroughs
- a change in the mood of our nation towards migrants, and a lessening of the hostile environment and its impact on those who are seeking sanctuary in the UK
- English conversation groups for isolated migrant women and asylum seekers to start up in the Diocese.

**Groups working to promote inclusion, integration and belonging**
- Parishes which run English classes for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants:
  - St Michael and All Angels, Camberwell
  - St Catherine, Hatcham
  - St Margaret, Lee
  - Holy Trinity, Clapham
  - Emmanuel, Croydon.
- The Mothers’ Union in Southwark, which has launched a new programme, “English for Women”.

Reflections and prayer resources for Refugee Week, 17-23 June 2019
Supporting young refugees and children seeking asylum

Facts and statistics
According to the Children's Society, more than half of all refugees are children, and more than 20,000 unaccompanied refugee children arrived in Europe last year. In 2017, unaccompanied children made up 10% of all asylum seekers arriving in this country.

Many young refugees are not given support to process their claims for asylum and many find themselves facing deportation because they were not given the right advice. Many end up in the care system. In addition, young people with no one to turn to for help, and who may not speak English, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Issues to pray for:
• many more foster families who can help young refugees
• an increase in funding so that more organisations can support young refugees
• the many young asylum seekers who have felt bereaved, traumatised and lost, and for more services for these young people
• young refugees who are trapped in Calais as they are now being refused entry to the UK
• young refugees to settle and feel welcome in schools, and make up for the lost years of education that some will have experienced
• young refugees to be kept safe from criminals who want to harm or exploit them.

Groups working with young refugees and asylum seekers
• The Children's Society.
• Greenwich Community College.
• Safe Passage, a campaigning group and network that exists to help unaccompanied child refugees and vulnerable adults find safe, legal routes to sanctuary.
• The Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers and its work with Barry House, a hostel for refugees and asylum seekers in Peckham run by the Home Office, about a third of residents being children.

Refugee Week this year has expanded in focus by the addition of Windrush Day on 22 June and Sanctuary Sunday on 23 June. A new website has been prepared to encourage churches to become Churches of Sanctuary. This website is being launched on 23 June at events and services across the UK and Ireland, coordinated by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). However, although not yet fully launched, it is now live and can be accessed here: churchofsanctuary.org

Other resources for Refugee Week are also available here: refugeeweek.org.uk