

STANDING WITH REFUGEES THIS PESACH



in a time of record displacement

With a record 84 million people now forcibly displaced worldwide, and Europe seeing the **fastest growing refugee crisis** since the Second World War, Pesach in 2022 feels particularly poignant.

Recent events in Ukraine, Afghanistan, and many other countries worldwide **draw ever stronger connections** between our original journey to freedom from Egypt, and the experiences of those fleeing present day tyrants.

Many within our community have a family history of displacement: **as British Jews, we know what it means to be refugees.** With refugee rights in the UK coming under serious threat, reflecting on connections between our own historical or personal history of displacement, and the challenges facing present day refugees, is more important than ever.

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”

Using our Seders in 2022 to recommit to defending refugee rights:

- **When we read of our forty years in the desert**, remember also that a record number of refugees are now trapped in the wilderness of the UK’s asylum system. These people remain stuck in limbo and enforced poverty, as they face long delays on their asylum applications.
- **When we tell of our journey to safety through the Red Sea**, consider how desperate refugees, who in absence of safe passage, are forced into taking such dangerous journeys to sanctuary across the Channel, would be criminalized by the government’s Nationality and Borders Bill.
- **And as we open our door to Elijah**, reflect that all too often, our governments do not offer the same welcome to refugees. Amidst overwhelming public solidarity, it cannot be right that vulnerable Ukrainian refugees are facing lengthy delays to reach this country.

Our ancestors escaping Egypt did not require visas and extensive paperwork to reach sanctuary: neither should refugees fleeing war and persecution today.

Ten plagues of the UK's refugee policy and asylum system

1. Absence of safe routes

While the government rightly introduced resettlement routes for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, these are not accessible to all. Without safe routes, refugees seeking sanctuary in the UK are forced into undertaking dangerous journeys, with often perilous results.

2. Differential treatment

Despite fleeing from the same conflicts and threats, refugees arriving in the UK irregularly are treated differently to their compatriots resettled through official schemes, and face long waits for decisions on their asylum claims.

3. Cruel and regressive legislation

Appallingly, proposals under the Nationality and Borders Bill would make this two-tier system even more severe, undermining the automatic right to asylum. Those entering the UK irregularly could potentially be criminalized, subject to offshore asylum processing and granted limited family reunion rights.

4. Disregard for the UN Refugee Convention

Disturbingly, such plans, alongside the government's increasing tendency to use 'bespoke' resettlement schemes, form part of a wider pattern of disregard for the Refugee Convention. The government must respect its obligations under international law, and ensure that all in need of sanctuary can access the UK's asylum system, rather than picking and choosing which nationalities it is willing to support.

5. Limited refugee family reunion rights

Worryingly, those being resettled through such schemes are often being granted with leave to remain, rather than full refugee status – this has major consequences for family reunification rights, which are much

greater for those with refugee status. Furthermore, while the government rightly broadened family reunion criteria for Ukrainian refugees, this must be widened so that refugees of all nationalities can reunite with extended family members in the UK.

6. Failure to act for child refugees

In recent years, the government has shamefully consistently voted down amendments which would create routes to the UK for child refugees: MPs must act, to prevent vulnerable children from being forced into dangerous journeys and exploitation.

7. Poverty and destitution

Amidst a cost of living crisis, the government's failure to lift the ban on asylum seekers' right to work is further enforcing poverty. Asylum seekers in the UK are granted just £40.85 a week – could you survive on under £6 a day?

8. Slow decision making

Delays in asylum claim processing have further exacerbated this impact, with the latest figures showing that over 61,000 people have been left in limbo and been waiting longer than six months for an initial decision.

9. Provision of unacceptable accommodation

Accommodation provided to asylum seekers is often cramped, unhygienic and in poor quality. Appalling, victims of war and conflict are still being housed behind barbed wire fences at Napier Barracks, and 12,000 resettled Afghan refugees remain stuck in hotels.

10. Use of detention

The UK is the only country in Europe without an upper-time limit on immigration detention length. In 2020, 65% of those entering detention had sought asylum at some point in their immigration process.

Four additional questions to consider at our Seders

- *Politicians often speak of this country's 'proud history' of welcoming refugees. But has this always been enough?*
- *How can we best utilize our community's refugee experience and history to stand up for those in need today?*
- *What can we do to reinvigorate our communities work in combatting the bitterness of racism and prejudice towards asylum seekers and other marginalised groups?*
- *What can we do as a society to ensure all refugees are treated fairly and equally, without creating division and tensions between groups?*

Jews Together With Refugees: Take action to support displaced people this Passover!

Call for justice, and use our [template letter](#) to write to your MP, urging them to vote in favour of amendments to the Nationality and Borders Bill

Join with others in your community, to ensure refugees are welcomed to your local area.

Share these messages within your synagogue, family and friends, to spread awareness of contemporary refugee issues, and how these relate to our own history and experience.

