

# Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

## Welcome to the SWVG Part 1 Training package



### We are SWVG

We are volunteers who befriend asylum seekers and refugees in Southampton and Winchester.

# Introduction

- This training package should take you about two and a half hours to complete.
- This training is for everyone involved in SWVG, whatever role they hope to take. There is further training (Parts 2 and 3) which should be done by everyone, but it must be done before people take up roles as visitors, teachers or workers on the helpdesks. We are also starting to offer trauma training and we would encourage you to do that too.
- You will need to have access to the internet to view the linked videos and web pages. In order to follow these links, view the PowerPoint in slideshow mode.
- After you have completed the package, we will arrange an online meeting with other new volunteers to discuss how you found it and how you might become more involved with the charity, and to enable personal contact with experienced SWVG members.

# Aims of Part 1 Training

The aims of this learning package are to enable you to:

- understand the current global, national and local contexts of the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum;
- discuss why people seek sanctuary and some of the needs of people seeking asylum;
- learn how SWVG started and how we work together with people who are seeking asylum;
- find out about each of the SWVG working groups (such as campaigning and communications);
- explore issues of safeguarding and SWVG policies on this;
- learn about our further training and support programme for potential visitors/befrienders and teachers.

# 1 The global context

# Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

There is considerable confusion around terms that are used to refer to people who move from their country of origin to another country in search of safety. Some definitions are offered on the next slide, but first:

What do you understand by the terms *migrant*, *refugee* and *asylum seeker*?

# Some definitions

**A migrant** is simply someone who moves from one country to another – some do so voluntarily, some are forcibly displaced.

**A refugee** is someone who has had to leave his/her country and who is afraid to return there 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' ([1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)).

**An asylum seeker** is a person who has crossed an international border and is seeking safety or protection in another country. In the UK, asylum seekers are refugees who have claimed asylum and are awaiting a Home Office decision as to whether they can stay here.

**A person granted [Leave to Remain](#)** in the UK by the Home Office may be given refugee status or humanitarian protection. (Note the difference between a *refugee* and a *refugee with status*).

# Refugees and asylum seekers: the global context

For a more detailed overview of what it means to be a refugee and an asylum seeker, watch this short [TedEd video](#) (ca 5 minutes).

The [UNHCR website](#) ('Figures at a glance') provides us with a good overview of the global situation. *What strikes you most about:*

- the overall trend in numbers of displaced people?
- the proportions of these people who are (a) refugees, (b) internally displaced, and (c) asylum seekers?
- the geographical distribution of displaced people?

# Refugees and asylum seekers: the global context

The [UNHCR website](#) ('Ongoing emergencies') also highlights humanitarian crises around the world, where conflict, violence and persecution are currently giving rise to huge numbers of displaced people. [How aware are you of these situations?](#)

According to the [International Rescue Committee](#), over half of all refugees globally come from just 3 countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

But more than half of all displaced people remain inside their country's borders: the greatest number at the moment are in Sudan and neighbouring countries.



## 2 The national context in the UK

# Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

The [IRC website](#) also points out 6 stark facts about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

1. Refugees make up less than half a percent of the overall population
2. The UK is home to just 1% of the refugees who have been forcibly displaced worldwide
3. People seeking asylum do not have the right to work in the UK
4. Irregular arrivals – including via small boats – make up a tiny proportion of overall immigration
5. Most people arriving by small boats are given asylum in the UK
6. There is no safe route to seek asylum in the UK

Do any of these surprise you?

# Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK: some common myths

Given the ill-informed and often wilfully misleading nature of much public (especially media) discourse around refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK, it's not surprising, or entirely unreasonable, that challenging questions are often asked about why people come here and what impact they have on living conditions in this country.

[City of Sanctuary](#) has compiled a [set of 10 such questions](#) and shown that they are based on myths and misconceptions.

**But ...** before you read their explanations, first look at the questions themselves (next slide) and consider how *you* would respond to them.

# Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK: some common myths

1. Why don't people seek asylum in the first safe country they come to?
2. Why are people 'illegally' crossing the channel?
3. Are most people coming here 'economic migrants'?
4. People are housed in hotels: are they not just coming for these benefits?
5. Refugees are a drain on public resources: why don't we use these resources for homeless people?
6. Are refugees taking jobs away from local people?
7. Why are all refugees young men?
8. Does the UK take more refugees than other European countries?
9. Is Britain a soft touch? Isn't it easy to get asylum in the UK?
10. Do refugees go to the top of the council housing list?

# Asylum in the UK: a broken system?

Beneath the particular misconceptions identified on the previous slides lurks one fundamental persistent myth: 'they' are illegal and have no right to be here.

Until recently it has been possible to refute this by saying:

- There's no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker. Entry using false documents is recognised as the only way many people can reach a safe country.
- The UK signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees: anyone has the legal right to come here, apply for asylum and remain in the UK until a final decision is made on their application.

# Asylum in the UK: a broken system?

But legislation introduced by the previous government – principally the [Nationality and Borders Act 2022](#) and the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) – has removed these rights and thrown national and international law into conflict.

It remains to be seen what the new government will do to address this impasse. In the meantime, thousands of people – both many who have received a decision on their application and those who are still waiting – are trapped in a bureaucratic logjam.

A [briefing](#) by **Free Movement** analyses 4 key problems in the current system and how to address them.

# The experience of seeking asylum in the UK

Seeking asylum in the UK is a complex and very challenging process. It is also constantly subject to change.

So rather than trying to explain it here in detail, we will ask you to view some short videos that will give you some impression of what it is like from the perspective of the people concerned.

The human rights organisation **Right to Remain** gives up to date, practical information and their [Toolkit](#) (available in many languages) is an invaluable guide.

# The experience of seeking asylum in the UK: some short videos

Please take some time to watch these short videos. Pause after each one and note the most important point(s) you have taken away from it.

**The Long Journey**: the harrowing story of a Syrian family

**Claiming Asylum in the UK**: a short introduction

**Tightening the Screw**: the 'inadmissibility rules' introduced in 2021

**Right to Remain**: legal obstacles someone seeking asylum faces



# 3 The local context: supporting people seeking asylum in Southampton

# Seeking asylum in Southampton: some facts and figures

The [overall resident population](#) of Southampton is estimated to be between 252,000 and 263,000 (depending on the method used for counting).

According to the most recent (2021) [Census data](#), ca 24% of Southampton's population were born outside the UK – an increase of ca 44% since the 2011 Census.

However, the largest numerical increases were of people from Romania, Portugal, Spain and 'other European' countries.

How, then, do refugees and people seeking asylum fit into this picture?

# Seeking asylum in Southampton: some facts and figures

According to the most recent [Home Office data](#) (download 'supporting documents'), at the end of March 2024 there were 319 people seeking asylum in Southampton and receiving support from the city council. This equates to about 13 per 10,000 (0.13%) of the overall population of the city, a little below the national average (16 per 10,000 or 0.16%).

The proportions vary hugely across the country, but to put Southampton into perspective consider 4 cities of comparable size:

Hull	30 people seeking asylum per 10,000 of population
Derby	46
Stoke	46
Wolverhampton	47

# Seeking asylum in Southampton: some facts and figures

To these numbers, we need to add several other categories, such as:

- People who have received Leave to Remain and have stayed in Southampton (many still in temporary accommodation, having had to leave Home Office funded accommodation at short notice; no figures currently available).
- About 275 Ukrainian refugees relocated as part of the [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme.
- 113 Afghan refugees who have moved here under various immigration support schemes (principally [ARCS and ARAP](#)).

**NB the last two figures were taken from Daily Echo! We can't find official numbers.**

# SWVG

Having given an outline of the global, national and local contexts for refugees and people seeking asylum, we'll devote the rest of this package to an overview of the role of SWVG.

Information on everything to do with SWVG can be found on our [website](#) and we encourage you to get into the habit of consulting it for answers to any questions you may have. You could start by reading [this brief account](#) of our history.

We also work closely with other local organisations, especially the [CLEAR project](#) and [Southampton Action](#), as well as the Southampton Sanctuary Network.

# SWVG Core Values

We believe that:

- people seeking asylum have a clear right to protection under the international laws that the UK has signed up to
- everyone seeking asylum deserves respect, dignity and compassion
- all claims should be heard and dealt with promptly, fairly and fully
- no one seeking asylum in the UK should be forced into danger or destitution.

# How we work with people seeking asylum

People seeking asylum have diverse and changing needs. SWVG tries to evolve to respond to these needs.

Our key roles are:

- Empowering and enabling by befriending\*, providing information and signposting
- Teaching English
- Organising activities
- Offering practical help: eg bikes/ phones / IT support

\* We continue to use the traditional term *visitor*, derived from our original work in prison visiting, as it is still used in our title.

# Other ways we try to support people seeking asylum

In addition to working directly with people seeking asylum in Southampton, SWVG also engages with the asylum system in other ways:

- We work with national groups to campaign and advocate for the rights of people seeking asylum
- We have a communications group that produces newsletters and other material publicising our activities
- We run fundraising events
- We apply for grants for funding
- We have an outreach group that holds talks and workshops in schools



# So what can *you* do?

Become a befriender / visitor

Join the information Helpdesk at Avenue Multicultural Centre (AMC)

Join the teaching team

Join the reporting support group

Help to organise activities, such as walks in the New Forest and theatre visits

Help at the SWVG allotment

Join the bike hub, refurbishing donated bikes

Join in with Cooking with Friends

Become a member of the communications team

Get involved in campaigning

Take part in outreach activities

Provide IT support

Prepare grant applications

Organise fundraising events

## ... and when?

Following Part 1 training you can join and participate in any of the groups and do anything except befriending / teaching independently and being rostered on the Help Desk.

Following Parts 2 / 3 training you can volunteer on a 1:1 basis with someone seeking asylum. Face-to-face work alone requires a DBS check.

Working on the Help Desk requires considerable experience and knowledge. However, we encourage new volunteers to visit AMC so that they can see for themselves what kind of work is involved.

A list of current contacts for each group/team is at the end of this package.

# Safeguarding

By definition, all the people we support have experienced terrible, often traumatic, things and they remain vulnerable even in their relative security here.

Safeguarding is everyone's duty and the safety and welfare of the people we support is paramount in all that we do. Each of us has a role to play in keeping both them and ourselves safe and passing on any concerns that we may have. It's been well documented that new migrants, people seeking asylum and those recently granted leave to remain are in the highest category of those who might be at risk.

SWVG is required by the Charities Commission to ensure that all volunteers, whatever their remit, are fully up to date with safeguarding and are aware of possible signs of various types of abuse.

# Safeguarding

SWVG has a robust safeguarding policy on the website, which you can read [here](#) together with an incident reporting form. All volunteers must be familiar with these.

Recognising signs that radicalisation may be taking place is an important part of safeguarding and [Southampton City Council](#) offers its own, short e-learning module and a link to a longer one provided by the Government Prevent programme.

Please complete the Council's e-learning module (it should only take ca 15 minutes). Note that if you have a concern at any stage, then **SWVG's Safeguarding Lead, Judith Evans** (see contact details on the final slide) should be contacted (not the Council).

# How we support our volunteers / each other

While much of our work is focused on supporting others, we recognise that as volunteers working with vulnerable people we also need support ourselves.

We seek to do this in various ways:

- Initial and on-going training
- Support groups
- Experienced members who have particular areas of expertise
- Regular general meetings
- Weekly briefings
- Regular newsletters
- WhatsApp Groups

# Further training

**Part 1** is a short online discussion arranged with other potential volunteers, to explore what you have learnt from this package.

**Parts 2 and 3** build on and expand what you have learnt in Part 1 and are offered as a full-day face-to-face session combining both parts 2 and 3.

It aims to enable you to:

- understand the needs of people seeking asylum
- develop a more detailed awareness of the legal system governing asylum and support systems in the UK
- clarify the roles of befriender, teacher and help desk support
- understand the importance of the SWVG support systems for volunteers (especially those who have direct contact with people seeking asylum)
- discuss and practise skills of communication, active listening and assertiveness appropriate to working with people from different cultural backgrounds.

**Trauma training** is also being offered from time to time

# Thank you!

We hope you are now able to:

- discuss why people seek asylum and some of their needs
- explain the current environment in terms of the global, national and local contexts
- explain how SWVG started and how we work together with people who are seeking asylum
- discuss aspects of safeguarding and show an awareness of the SWVG policy
- describe the SWVG training and support programme for potential volunteers.

To prepare for the online discussion, please write down at least one comment or question you would like to raise, based on what has struck you most about the contents of this package.

## Next steps

After completing Part 1, you will hopefully have some thoughts on what role(s) you might like to take on as a volunteer with SWVG.

We'll write to you shortly after the online meeting and invite you to let us know which role(s) you would be interested in. We can then put you in touch with the relevant group/team leader (see next slide), so that you can discuss possibilities with them.

We would also like to give you an early opportunity to visit AMC and we will arrange a day and time for you to do this.



**ADMINISTRATION**

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**TRUSTEE BOARD**

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## SWVG Group Contacts

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**SOUTHAMPTON EVENTS  
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vacancy