

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

Welcome to the SWVG Volunteer Induction package



Introduction

- The initial training programme for SWVG is in two parts.
- **Part 1** is for everyone involved in SWVG, whatever role they hope to take on. It consists of this induction package and a short follow-up meeting with a member of the training team.
- The induction package should take you about two and a half hours to complete. You will need to have access to the internet to view the linked videos and web pages. (If you are using the PowerPoint version, not the PDF, you will need to view the slides *in slideshow mode* in order to view the linked material.)
- After you have completed the package, we will arrange an individual meeting with you to discuss how you found it and answer any questions you may have. We will also talk about which role(s) you might like to take on within SWVG and then put you in contact with the relevant team leader(s).
- **Part 2** is a Training Day, which should be done by everyone, but must be done before people take up roles as visitors, teachers or workers on the helpdesks.
- We also offer trauma training from time to time and we would encourage you to do that too.

Aims of Initial 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 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 may be given refugee status or humanitarian protection. (Note the difference between a *refugee* and a *refugee with status*; see next slide for more detail.)

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). *Please note this video was made in 2016 so the numbers it quotes are out of date, but the rest holds true today.*

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](#) ('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?](#)

The [UNHCR refugee statistics](#) also highlight the fact that two-thirds of all refugees globally come from just 5 countries: Afghanistan, Syria, Venezuela, Sudan and Ukraine.

But more than half of all displaced people remain inside their country's borders and of the remainder two-thirds are in neighbouring countries.

2 The national context in the UK

Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

The [IRC website](#) also points out 5 stark facts about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

1. Refugees make up less than 1 percent of the overall population
2. People seeking asylum do not have the right to work in the UK [*It is possible to apply to work in a restricted number of occupations if you have been waiting for a decision on your application for more than 12 months*]
3. Irregular arrivals – including via small boats – make up a tiny proportion of overall immigration
4. Most people arriving by small boats are given asylum in the UK [*but see next slide*]
5. There is no safe route to seek asylum in the UK [*The govt is proposing to introduce a limited number of 'safe routes' via 'community sponsorship': see slide 17*]

Do any of these surprise you?

Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

The current situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in the UK is very complicated and it is extremely difficult to establish clear and reliable information on key metrics such as the number of successful applications for asylum.

The [summary information](#) published by the House of Commons Library in June 2026 is helpful but even this shows how complex the situation is.

For a more critical take on the latest government data, see the [Refugee Council's analysis](#).

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 argues 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?

Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK: tackling difficult questions

You may or may not agree with the arguments proposed by the City of Sanctuary UK. (Note also that they contain some out of date references, eg to the use of a 'barge' to accommodate people seeking asylum, which is no longer the case.)

But you may well find yourself confronted with difficult questions like the ones they highlight and it's important to think about how you would respond.

The City of Sanctuary UK recognises this and offers a useful [fact sheet](#) on people seeking sanctuary in the UK and some helpful thoughts on how to engage in '[courageous conversations](#)'. **Safe Passage** have also produced this handy [Guide to Navigating Tough Conversations on Refugees](#). And **IMIX** (a charity that promotes the communication of positive stories about migration) has published this excellent [messaging document](#).

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 some 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.

However ...

Asylum in the UK: a broken system?

Legislation introduced by the previous government – principally the [Nationality and Borders Act 2022](#) and the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) – removed these rights and that threw national and international law into conflict. In practice, however, only a few provisions of these Acts were implemented and the current government has introduced its own legislation.

The [Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025](#) completed its passage through parliament in December 2025. While introducing new restrictive measures it also repeals (much of) the Illegal Migration Act.

Many organisations supporting refugees in the UK are critical of the 2025 Act, because they believe that it is overly hostile toward people seeking sanctuary. See, for example, responses from [Right to Remain](#) and [Refugee Action](#).

Asylum in the UK: a broken system?

Meanwhile, in November 2025, the Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, launched a new policy statement – **Restoring Order and Control** – for consultation. See the [Refugee Council's analysis](#) and comments by [Right to Remain](#).

This was followed in May 2026 by the Immigration and Asylum Bill, which proposes a range of (controversial) new measures: see a [critical analysis by Free Movement](#). It is currently working its way through parliament, presumably with the support of the new PM Andy Burnham, as Mahmood has been confirmed in post as Home Secretary.

However, the situation is highly complex and volatile. We await the outcome. In the meantime, thousands of people – many who have received a decision on their application and those who are still waiting – are trapped in a bureaucratic logjam.

For a more detailed discussion of the UK asylum system and its problems, see the recent [report](#) published by the **National Audit Office** in December 2025.

A [briefing](#) by **Free Movement** also offers a detailed analysis of key problems in the current system and how to address them.

The experience of seeking asylum in the UK

As the previous slides show, 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 recommend that you follow the updates and briefings provided by the human rights organization [Right to Remain](#) and the [Migration Observatory](#) at the University of Oxford (eg see their recent [analysis of asylum accommodation](#) in the UK).

Right to Remain also maintains a [Toolkit](#) (available in many languages), which is an invaluable guide to the asylum process. It is designed for people who don't have access to legal support (a major problem, due to the lack of funding for legal aid lawyers). All volunteers should be familiar with it and encourage people they support to make full use of it.

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

A lot of information on the asylum process is complex and quite dry. It's obviously important for us never to forget that it is all about individual people and how their experience of it impacts on their lives.

So at this point we ask you to view a few short videos that will give you some impression of what the migration journey and the asylum process are like from the perspective of the people concerned. Some of the videos were produced some time ago and some details are not up to date but they are all still relevant today.

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.

[Claiming Asylum in the UK](#): a short introduction to the process

[Right to Remain](#): legal obstacles someone seeking asylum faces

[The Long Journey](#): the harrowing story of a Syrian family

[We Journey Together](#): 3 short films illustrating personal experiences

3 The local context: supporting people seeking asylum in Southampton and Winchester

Seeking asylum in Southampton and Winchester: some facts and figures

The [overall resident population](#) of Southampton is estimated to be about 260,000. The [figure](#) for Winchester is about 135,000.

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 (scroll up on this webpage to see the country of birth data).

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 and Winchester: some facts and figures

According to the most recent [Home Office data](#) (download 'supporting documents'), at the end of March 2026 there were 330 people seeking asylum in Southampton and receiving support from the Home Office. This equates to about 13 per 10,000 (0.13%) of the overall population of the city, a little below the national average (14 per 10,000 or 0.14%). In Winchester, there were 70 (5.2 per 10,000).

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

Hull	22 people seeking asylum per 10,000 of population
Derby	40
Stoke	44
Wolverhampton	39

Seeking asylum in Southampton and Winchester: some facts and figures

Unlike Southampton, Winchester is not formally a dispersal city and therefore has even more limited resources to support people seeking asylum. However, according to Home Office data there are 70 people seeking asylum living in Winchester and a further 48 seeking sanctuary there via resettlement routes. Actual figures are higher and rising.

To the numbers of people seeking asylum in Southampton and Winchester, we need to add several other categories, such as:

- People who have received Leave to Remain and have stayed in Southampton and Winchester (many still in temporary accommodation, having had to leave Home Office funded accommodation at short notice; no figures currently available).
- About 350 Ukrainian refugees relocated to Southampton as part of the [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme – and over 600 to Winchester.
- 146 people resettled here under various other schemes, including 104 Afghan refugees who have moved here under immigration support schemes such as [ACRS and ARAP](#).
- People also arrive in the UK under the Hong Kong and Syrian resettlement programmes and substantial numbers have been resettled in Southampton and Winchester but we are unable to find exact figures.

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](#).

In Winchester, St Peter's Sanctuary Welcome Hub offers sanctuary space, support, English Teaching and signposting information to people seeking sanctuary in the city, including people seeking asylum, and is supported by SWVG volunteers (see next slide for further information).



St. Peter's

Sanctuary Welcome Hub

A space for meeting, talking, listening and sharing information and knowledge.

St. Peter's welcomes all seeking sanctuary, and their families and friends.

Come along to our weekly
Wednesday morning
gatherings and enjoy a
cup of coffee or tea.

Open every Wednesday
from 10.00 a.m.

Location:
St. Peter's Church Campus,
Jewry Street, Winchester SO23
8RY

The Hub will offer the
opportunity to network,
build friendships and learn
from each other.

We can provide support by
offering a befriending
service, English
conversation groups and
by directing you to relevant
organisations and useful
resources.

**You all will be very
welcome.**



SWVG in a nutshell

- We work in Southampton and Winchester
- We only work with adults
- We support people seeking sanctuary, primarily through asylum but also through other routes, especially in Winchester. (The hub that SWVG operates out of in Winchester was originally set up in response to the Ukrainian crisis and thus continues to offer support to everyone seeking sanctuary.)
- We never ask why or how people have come to this country
- We provide support and information, and can advise on the asylum process, but we do not advise on how to put an asylum claim together

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:

- Providing information and practical support in navigating the asylum process at the weekly helpdesk at the AMC (Avenue Multicultural Centre) and at the Welcome Hub in Winchester
- Empowering and enabling individuals by linking them with a 'visitor', who will meet with them on a regular basis and provide ongoing support through the asylum process
- Teaching English
- Organising activities: eg Cooking with Friends, theatre visits, walks in the New Forest
- Offering practical help: eg bikes/ phones / IT support

Other ways we try to support people seeking asylum

In addition to working directly with people seeking asylum in Southampton and Winchester, 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 (including on social media) 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? (Southampton)

Activity/group	Activity/group coordinator email address
Visiting	juliet.offner@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Teaching	hope.sherwin@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Work on the AMC help desk	william.brook-hart@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Reporting support group (Totton police station – Monday mornings)	catherine.hartley@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Outreach activities	hamid.beheshti@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Schools outreach	jane.waller@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Organising social activities (esp. weekends & Christmas)	Vacant; contact hazel.inskip@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Bike hub	keirenphelan@sky.com
Cooking for Friends (Saturday evenings)	mary.bithell@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Conversation and culture group (Wednesday mornings)	susanmiddleton906@gmail.com

So what can *you* do? (Winchester)

Activity	Activity coordinator email
Visiting	lesley.sheldonbrowning@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Teaching	ginny.allain@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Work at the Winchester help desk	sarah.howells@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Leave to Remain support	jane.wheeler@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Outreach	lesley.sheldonbrowning@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Schools outreach	lesley.sheldonbrowning@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Organising social activities	stewart.roberts@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Organising volunteering activities	catherine.kickham@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Bike hub	stewart.roberts@swvg-refugees.org.uk

So what can *you* do? (Southampton and Winchester)

Activity	Activity coordinator email
Campaigning	william.brook-hart@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Communications	katie.gearing@swvg-refugees.org.uk
IT support	dominic.hartley@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Grant fundraising	hazel.inskip@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Organising fundraising events	anne.leeming@swvg-refugees.org.uk

... and when?

Following your induction (completing this initial training package and having a 1-to-1 conversation with a member of the training team) you can join and participate in any of the groups and do anything except being a visitor, teaching independently and being rostered on the AMC Help Desk and at the Winchester Hub.

Following the Training Day (the second stage of the 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 and at the Hub requires considerable experience and knowledge. However, we encourage new volunteers to visit AMC or the Hub so that they can see for themselves what kind of work is involved.

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: Issues and Actions

This short video, produced by Hampshire Safeguarding Adults Board, will help you to be aware of the kinds of issue that may arise: [Adult Safeguarding: Overview](#)

The London Borough of Haringey has produced this series of short videos to give a more detailed understanding of safeguarding, covering a broader range of issues. While specific reference is made to Haringey, these issues are relevant everywhere.

- [Understanding Safeguarding 1: What is Safeguarding?](#)
- [Understanding Safeguarding 2: Abuse Part 1](#)
- [Understanding Safeguarding 3: Abuse Part 2](#)
- [Understanding Safeguarding 4: Signs and Indicators](#)
- [Understanding Safeguarding 5: Taking Action](#)

NB If you have a concern at any stage, then you should contact **SWVG's Safeguarding Team** (see contact details on the final slide). In an emergency, ring 999.

Safeguarding: Keeping ourselves safe

It's important to remember that your own safety matters too. We recommend that you follow these guidelines:

- When you are visiting a person you're supporting, tell someone where you are
- Don't be in a room with a person you're supporting, or visit their home, on your own
- Transport people in your car on your own only if you are confident that it is safe to do so and your insurance covers this
- Keep your social media private
- Report anything that makes you feel uncomfortable
- Don't give out your phone number/ address unless you really want to
- Always use your SWVG email address for all communications to do with your role as a volunteer

Safeguarding: SWVG Policy

SWVG has a robust safeguarding policy on its website (currently being updated), which you can read [here](#) together with an incident reporting form (Appendix 1).

All volunteers must be familiar with these: please make sure you read them carefully now so that you know what to be watching out for and how to act if you are concerned about a situation.

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

Training to be a volunteer with SWVG: summary

The first part of our training (Induction) consists of this initial training package and a 1-to-1 conversation with a member of the training team to explore what you have learnt from this package and discuss the various roles listed on slides 28 and 29.

The second part (Training Day) builds on and expands what you have learnt in the Induction.

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 visitor, 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
- how to manage difficult/challenging conversations.

We also offer training sessions on Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP), which all volunteers are encouraged to attend.

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 your 1-to-1 conversation with a member of the training team, 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 the Induction, you will hopefully have some thoughts on what role(s) you might like to take on as a volunteer with SWVG.

Once you have decided what areas you'd like to work in, the SWVG induction team will put you in touch with the relevant group/team leader (see slides 30-32) who will then discuss the work with you.

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

You might also like to read our latest [Newsletter](#) (Spring 2026), which is full of examples of the many things going on within SWVG and a wonderful impression of its sense of community.

Key Contacts

- SWVG secretary: Lea Hayes secretary@swvg-refugees.org.uk
- SWVG administrator: Leila Hashemi leila.hashemi@swvg-refugees.org.uk
- Safeguarding: A new team is currently being formed; for the time being, please contact either Catherine Hartley catherine.Hartley@swvg-refugees.org.uk or Hazel Inskip hazel.inskip@swvg-refugees.org.uk
- Training: Ruth Carr: ruth.carr@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Hazel Inskip: hazel.inskip@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Lesley Sheldon-Browning: lesley.sheldonbrowning@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Patrick Stevenson: patrick.stevenson@swvg-refugees.org.uk
- Support groups coordinator: Jane Smith jane.smith@swvg-refugees.org.uk
- Trustees: Co-chairs Catherine Hartley catherine.Hartley@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Hazel Inskip: hazel.Inskip@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Deputy Chair Chris Stephens chris.stephens@swvg-refugees.org.uk