

## Other Support Groups

The refugee-led **NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)** offers advice to people in the asylum system, organises events, and supports the integration of those who receive leave to remain here.  
**Tel: 028 9024 6699** or E-mail: [nicras@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nicras@hotmail.co.uk)

The **Red Cross** also helps people to adjust to life here and can assist in tracing relatives. Contact Services Manager Neil McKittrick, **Tel: 028 9073 5350** or E-mail [nmckittrick@redcross.org.uk](mailto:nmckittrick@redcross.org.uk)

The **Homeplus** drop in centre at **113 University Street** is open seven days a week, 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday (11.30am to 2pm at weekends), and provides a safe communal venue and a range of support services including hot meals; clothes, blankets, sleeping bags, showering facilities; healthcare clinics; advocacy; and practical, emotional and social support for those who are destitute and in the asylum process. **Tel: 028 9031 1836**

**City of Sanctuary** is a movement to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. [www.cityofsanctuary.org](http://www.cityofsanctuary.org)

For other information and campaigns see the **EMBRACE web pages**  
[www.embraceni.org/category/information/asylum/](http://www.embraceni.org/category/information/asylum/)

## What Can We Do?

NICRAS welcomes volunteers who assist with activities such as English classes, doing research for information packs, helping at social events, lobbying and advocacy. Volunteers with Red Cross migration services in Belfast can assist, for example, in helping to trace relatives. See above for contact details of NICRAS and Red Cross.

## EMBRACE Emergency Fund

We welcome contributions to our **Emergency Fund**, some of which is used to help refugees in crisis situations or, for example, to help with transport costs for travel to school or college. Contact details below.

*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 food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

**EMBRACE NI**  
Building a Welcoming Community

Web: [www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org)



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## Refugee Issues

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## What is it like to be a Refugee?

Throughout history people have been forced to flee from their homes because of persecution and the threat of violence.

*...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt...*

Matthew 2: 13-14

## Q Who is an asylum seeker?

**A** A person who is looking for a safe place outside her/his own country. People seek asylum if they fear persecution in their own country because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, social group or political opinion. They have every right to be here while their applications are considered.

## Q Who is a refugee?

**A** Someone who applies for asylum, and is successful in being granted permission to stay. 'Refugee' is also used as a general term for people who have been displaced from their homes through persecution, civil unrest and war.

During 2012 over 3,000 people per day became refugees and by the end of the year some 45.2 million people were considered as forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence and human right violations. Of these only a tiny number seek asylum in Northern Ireland. (The Home Office say that only 240 people applied for asylum in Northern Ireland in 2012. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-27674001](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-27674001)) They come from a variety of countries, including China, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Sudan and Somalia. Most have no idea they are coming here. They are at the mercy of people who transport them.

*'I didn't want to come to the UK. I was working. I had a nice house in Zimbabwe and my own business. I was involved with the church. I never had a plan to leave.'*

A woman from Zimbabwe, Refugee Council research

## Challenges for People Seeking Sanctuary Here

**The Application Process:** The process includes anxiety, delays, and translation difficulties. Most people are turned down when they first apply. It is hard to back up your case with evidence.

'When you're watching your village burn to the ground, getting proof isn't the first thing on your mind.'

'Being raped didn't hurt as much as being told it never happened.'

Medical Justice Network booklet, 2007

**Fear:** People who have fled in fear dread being forced to return to their home country.

**Language:** The language barrier is a problem in the application process and in developing a normal social life. People seeking asylum are usually unable to afford to pay for English classes.

**Isolation:** Many have lost all contact with friends and family and a way of life where they had jobs and a place in society. People here may not understand their culture.

**Enforced Idleness:** People feel shame at living off the state, because most are not allowed to work during the asylum application process. Inactivity adds to anxiety.

**Poverty:** Most people arrive with only the clothes they are wearing. They are allocated accommodation in the private rental sector but their basic weekly allowance is small (£36.62 for a single adult in 2014).

**Destitution:** At different stages of the process some people get no support at all and are forced to rely on charity or the sacrificial kindness of other refugees.

**Negative attitudes:** Most people will experience verbal abuse either on racial grounds, or because of the stigma attached to being 'an asylum seeker'.

'I am made to feel as if I smell and there is zero tolerance for the non-existent smell of an asylum seeker. I escaped from Kenya because I wanted to live, but in Middlesbrough all I can think about is how much I want to die.'

Kamwaura Nygothi, a Kenyan business woman, Guardian 8 July 2004

**Health, Stress and Depression:** All these challenges can have negative consequences on health, including mental health. Isolation, humiliation, destitution or racist attacks can lead to suicidal despair.

## The Importance of Welcome

'...when people flee persecution, the flight to safety is only the first part of their journey. The second stage - rebuilding life in a strange land - is equally important. Sometimes settling here can be as hard or harder than the original flight from tyranny. Integration is not about 'fitting in', or about refugees becoming 'more like us'. It is, rather, about equality and inclusion, and ensuring that refugees have equal chances to live full, safe and productive lives.'

Donna Covey, Refugee Council, 2009

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/eventsAndtraining/integconfreport09.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/eventsAndtraining/integconfreport09.pdf)

These are some of the things that refugees in Birmingham felt were most important for them to settle in. Some are very practical:

Having a job	Speaking English
Going to school or university	Having accommodation and money
Health care	Obeying laws
Having a national insurance number	

Others are about belonging, acceptance and equality:

Mixing with local people	Feeling accepted
Feeling safe	Staying in the same place
Knowing how to do things	Living a 'normal' life
Being listened to	Being the same as British people
Having the same opportunities as British people	
Having the same status as British people	

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/researchreports/Integrationresearchreport.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/researchreports/Integrationresearchreport.pdf)

'People from the church were influential in us settling in. It sounds a bit of a cliché, but they were a Godsend. They came and gave us clothes and whatever we needed. We didn't have anything and it was an empty house. My dad used to play table tennis with some of the men at the church and it provided a social network and some good friends.'

Dr Phuoc-Tan Diep whose family fled to England from Vietnam in the 1970s

## Where can I direct someone for help?

If someone has a well-founded fear of persecution in their own country they may be able to claim asylum / sanctuary here. They should be advised to go, as soon as possible, to **Migrant Help / Bryson Intercultural**, 123 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 1SH, who will process the initial application for asylum. **Tel: 028 9244 8448**, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.30pm. Outside these hours, people should be referred to the **PSNI** who can arrange emergency accommodation.