*“When Nasrin was born we didn’t know that she had heart trouble. Luckily, we came to the UK… I still cannot believe that Nasrin is now growing and going to school and learning…For my children to grow up and study here [in the U.K.], they’ll have many opportunities. That's what gives me hope to keep going”.*

Maasom, a Kurdish-Syrian refugee

**CONTEXT**

More people than ever before – [over 100 million](https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118772) – have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, oppression and other economic, social, or climatic shocks. Over 50 million are now displaced within their countries of origin, while over 30 million have fled across an international border, mostly as refugees or asylum seekers.

However, as increasing numbers of refugees flee conflict, violence, and persecution in their home countries, wealthier countries are not playing their part. Low- and middle-income countries continue to host [over 80 percent](https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021) of refugees, and the situation in several countries of origin and asylum has become increasingly challenging.

**CHALLENGES**

**Rising numbers of conflicts globally, are driving an increase in the numbers of refugees.** At present, [there are more active conflicts](https://www.rescue-uk.org/report/2022-emergency-watchlist) than at any time since World War II, driven by an unprecedented growth in international internal conflicts. This in turn is driving an unprecedented number of people fleeing their homes.

**Global hardening of asylum policies.** As we have seen recently, many wealthy countries and drafters of the Refugee Convention are [closing routes to claim asylum](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/uk-immigration-and-asylum-plans-some-questions-answered-by-unhcr.html#:~:text=The%20key%20document%20in%20international,passed%20through%20another%20safe%20country). Across Europe and the US, the protection of refugees has been eroded in recent years, with a growing number of states resorting to detention, deterrence, and the denial of the right to asylum, including through illegal pushbacks.

**Global resettlement is not only not keeping pace with need but moving in the wrong direction.** UNHCR was able to resettle just [39,266 people](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/resettlement-data.html) in 2021, down 70% from nearly 127,000 in 2016. Over the same period the number of refugees under [UNHCR's mandate](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html) increased by 25% from 17 million to nearly 21 million.

**Refugees face multiple problems in their host countries that impede successful integration.** Under resourced services such as health and housing, lack of sufficient language lessons, inability to work during asylum process and long processing times for asylum and resettlement processes all make it difficult for refugees and asylum seekers to integrate successfully into their new communities.

**THE UK GOVERNMENT’S CURRENT RESPONSE**

**Safe and Legal Pathways**

Overall, the [UK hosts fewer refugees and asylum seekers than most other European](https://fullfact.org/immigration/sajid-javid-refugee-resettlement-scheme/) countries. In [2021 the UK resettled only 1,587 refugees](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html), and its Global Refugee Forum pledge made in 2019, to resettle 5000 refugees under the new UK Resettlement Scheme in 2020, was unmet.

Recently, both the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine have demanded largescale humanitarian assistance, including the need to respond to refugees from both countries. For Ukraine, the Home Office response has centred on a managed migration route (the family visa scheme) and generating a community response (Homes for Ukraine) as means of providing protection.

In the case of Afghanistan, we saw the evacuation of individuals under Operation Pitting, the protection of some local employees through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) Scheme, and the setting up of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). Whilst these efforts were welcome initial steps, the schemes have struggled to deliver protection on the scale needed.

These bespoke schemes are not a substitute for a robust refugee protection system. The Government needs to invest in a comprehensive and robust system of refugee protection, that upholds the principles of the Geneva Convention and strengthens durable solutions such as resettlement.

**Asylum**

Parliament has recently passed the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, a wide-ranging overhaul of the UK’s immigration and asylum laws. Unfortunately, the Act undermines the right to seek asylum in several ways and creates a two-tier system for refugee protection. UNHCR has said that some provisions are in breach of the Refugee Convention and provisions around inadmissibility, externalisation, and criminalisation are of particular cause for concern.

**Integration**

[Since 2011](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/APPG_on_Refugees_-_Refugees_Welcome_report.pdf), the UK Government has offered differing levels of integration support to asylum seekers and resettled refugees. The most recent reforms continue this trend. The placing of asylum seekers in the proposed [reception centres](https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2022/04/14/factsheet-linton-asylum-accommodation/), while preventing them from working, will only impede integration prospects. From IRC’s experience in other contexts, we know that refugees have so much to offer their new communities socially, culturally, and economically. Providing integration services from day one to both resettled refugees and asylum seekers would ensure they are equipped to enter the labour market successfully and contribute to their new communities.

**WHAT MORE CAN THE UK GOVERNMENT DO?**

1. **Expand and strengthen resettlement**

* Through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), commit to resettling 10,000 refugees in the UK each year in line with UNHCR’s global resettlement needs.
* Through the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, the UK should deliver 20,000 new places in the next 12 months.
* Urgent delivery of places under the ACRS’ ‘category 3’ who supported the international effort but were not directly employed by UK Government (e.g. GardaWorld Contractors, Chevening Alumni and British Council employees) is also crucial.

1. **Strengthen and reform asylum policies**

* Establish safe routes for asylum seekers by working with European partners to coordinate safe routes. For instance, by negotiating a protection-centred replacement to the Dublin Regulation (which provided a safe route for family reunion before the UK left the EU) and working bilaterally with European countries to respond to crises such as in Ukraine.
* Resource and invest in improving the asylum system rather than prioritising deterrence measures, such as the Partnership Agreement with Rwanda.
* Fundamentally re-think the two-tier approach to refugee protection established in the Nationality and Borders Act. Protection should be based on an individual’s need rather than their mode of arrival**.**

1. **Provide quality reception and integration support to refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants**

* Invest, deliver in, and expand reception capacity and quality integration support for all new arrivals.
* Deliver integration services from day one and offered tailored support for women and girls e.g. access to childcare so that refugee women can attend classes.
* Support refugees in accessing the labour market by providing increased language support and job readiness training. Enabling the right to work for asylum seekers will also be crucial to achieving a more inclusive economy and supporting stronger integration outcomes in the long run.

**The IRC’s work on the Resettlement, Asylum and Integration**

The IRC has offices in over 40 countries working to support displaced people in some of the most difficult crises across the globe, including Afghanistan and Ukraine.

In the UK, the IRC’s Refugee Integration in Southeast England (RISE) provides newly resettled refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine the support they need to navigate life in the UK and become self-sufficient. The IRC also work in the US and Europe to help refugees and asylum seekers integrate into their new home countries.

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