

REFUGEE WEEK: A BRIEFING FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

This year has posed multiple new challenges to the protection and expansion of human rights that establish a humane, just and dignified life for everyone, including refugees and asylum seekers. From the passage of the [Nationality and Borders Bill Act 2022](#) criminalising refugees, the shirking of our responsibility by sending asylum seekers to Rwanda, to the real-life refugee crisis unfolding in Ukraine.

In this complex and even bleak landscape for our human rights, the theme for this year's Refugee Week, **healing**, poses a challenge. What might 'healing' during refugee week look like? How can we as Jews seek to educate and understand the roll-back of our rights when these very laws were written and ratified in the wake of our bitter persecution?

For Jews, it means finding a pathway from our historic experiences and values, to addressing some of the daily challenges of refugees today. Through collective education, listening, and recovering the deep similarities between our experiences, **Jews can take a stand against refugee hostility and for all our human rights**. This briefing explains key issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in the UK today, with further resources for learning and acting.

THE UKRAINE REFUGEE CRISIS

Almost 13 million people are believed to have fled their homes in Ukraine since the beginning of the war, according to the UN. Six million have left for neighbouring countries, and at least another 6.5 million internally displaced. Contrary to the Refugee Convention and the core principle of 'non-refoulement', which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom, the UK (which is signatory to the convention) requires visas for Ukrainians to enter the UK. Under the [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#), British citizens can nominate individuals or families to stay with provided they have first applied for a visa. Applications are made online, and both hosts and refugees will be vetted.

While we support the Home Office's efforts to welcome refugees, we know from our own struggles seeking asylum from wartime Europe that visa condition and sponsorship should never be prerequisites for those fleeing persecution. This is the reason the Refugee Convention was introduced, and these limits mark a dark departure from those international human rights protections for those seeking safety.

Despite the limits of the UK's approach, there are plenty of ways to help if you are unable to host a refugee, via a range of initiatives on the ground:

[Disasters Emergency Committee \(DEC\) Ukraine Appeal](#)

[World Jewish Relief Ukraine Crisis Appeal](#)

[British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal](#)

[Jews for Ukraine Hungary](#)

[How can I help Ukraine/Linktree](#)

[Israaid – Humanitarian organisation](#)

[Ukraine Take Shelter](#) – an independent platform connecting Ukrainian refugees with potential hosts and housing

[Refugees at home](#) – UK based organisation coordinating between hosts and refugees (not Ukraine specific)

THE NATIONALITY AND BORDERS BILL: AKA THE ANTI-REFUGEE BILL

This year, the government passed a set of laws outlining the biggest attack on refugee protection that we have ever seen in this country. These laws are **[unsafe, unjust, and unlawful](#)**. They consolidate the hostile environment to migration, penalising refugees because of the way they arrive here, increasing the detention of traumatised asylum seekers, making it harder to identify and support victims of modern slavery. Read our detailed response to the Bill [here](#).

The horrors of the Holocaust led to the creation of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (1948) and the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ([1951 Refugee Convention](#)), yet this Bill totally **contravenes the moral and legally binding standards established to prevent history repeating itself following the experience of Jewish refugees**.

PROCESSING REFUGEES IN RWANDA

The UK government's plans propose offshore processing and settling of asylum seekers in Rwanda. **These measures are inhumane, dangerous, and ineffective**. They contravene international human rights obligations, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): *"Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution"* (Article 14).

Rwanda's record of persecuting journalists and opposing politicians means the camps will lack any meaningful scrutiny and increase likelihood of abuse. The camps are inspired by Australia's [widely condemned offshore detention camps](#), which recorded a dozen deaths, numerous cases of violence, sexual assault, and suicide. Rwanda itself also has a poor human rights record, the UK giving asylum to people fleeing Rwanda as recently as last year, and [Rwandan police shot 12 refugees dead](#) who were protesting against poor conditions in the camps there. LGBTQI+ refugees are at particular risk, according to widespread evidence from Human Rights Watch, and Rwandan LGBTQI+ organisations on the ground. Read more via [Rainbow Migration](#).

Write to your MP using templates from these organisations:

[Asylum welcome](#)

[Bail for Immigration Detainees](#)

Write to the airlines via JCWI's campaign [HERE](#). One of them, Titan has already pulled out thanks to public pressure.

Sign one or all of these three petitions:

1. [Petition · No to offshoring! Stop Government plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda.](#)
2. [Stop Priti Patel's offshore refugee camps – Ripples](#)
3. [Don't send LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum to Rwanda \(allout.org\)](#)

Learn more:

Read [this blog](#) from the Detention Forum about the Rwanda policy

Note and share René Cassin's statement via our [website](#) or [social media](#)

DERWENTSIDE DETENTION CENTRE FOR WOMEN

More than [1500 women](#) who have come to the UK to seek asylum are inhumanely locked up in detention every year. Most are released back into the community to continue with their cases, just one indication that immigration detention does not work. For the state, detention is unnecessary and expensive and for detainees, [it is retraumatizing](#).

The Home Office has opened the first new immigration detention centre in seven years for women in County Durham, Derwentside (also known as Hassockfield), transferring the first women there on 28 December 2021. Led by Women for Refugee Women, [René Cassin has worked with](#) faith groups, activists and students have consistently protested the opening.

Learn more about the [local campaign](#) and W4RW's detention [campaign](#).

As Jews, we have our [own experience of seeking refuge and enduring detention](#). We cannot let history repeat itself. Here's how you can help:

Women for Refugee Women are taking the government to court to get Derwentside shut down. Donate to their legal challenge [here](#)

COME TO OUR REFUGEE WEEK EVENTS (20-26 JUNE) TO LEARN MORE

Monday 20th at 6pm in partnership with the Human Trafficking Foundation: *A Twitter Space – war in Ukraine and crisis for modern slavery victims*

Tuesday 21st 7pm, in partnership with Generation2Generation: *Then and Now, Learning from Refugee Experiences*.

Thursday 23rd 1pm an Instagram live conversation with the campaign to shut down Derwentside detention centre

Please check our [events](#) webpage for further details. We hope to see you there!

ABOUT RENÉ CASSIN

René Cassin works to promote and protect universal rights drawing on Jewish experience and Jewish values.

René Cassin works **within the Jewish community** – by building support for human rights values amongst British Jews, and **in the wider community** – by bringing the authority of a Jewish perspective on issues that resonate with Jewish experience

Founded in 2000, René Cassin has a dedicated staff team, supported by an engaged Board of Trustees, an expert Advisory Council and a wider group of alumni, volunteers and supporters.

Sign up to our [newsletter](#) to hear more