



Refugee and asylum briefing (October 2026)

What does the term 'refugee' mean?

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution or a serious threat to their life, safety or freedom, and who cannot safely return. They are recognised as needing protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

What does the term 'asylum seeker' mean?

An asylum seeker is someone who has fled their country and asked another country for protection. If their claim is recognised, they are granted refugee status. To claim asylum, the person must be in the country where they want to claim it. They cannot apply for asylum from elsewhere.

Global situation

Most refugees don't travel to wealthy Western countries.



- Wealthier / higher-income countries
(e.g. much of Europe, North America, Australia)
- Neighbouring countries and
low- and middle-income countries
(where most refugees are hosted)



65%
of refugees
remain in
neighbouring
countries.



68%
of refugees are
hosted by low- and
middle-income
countries.



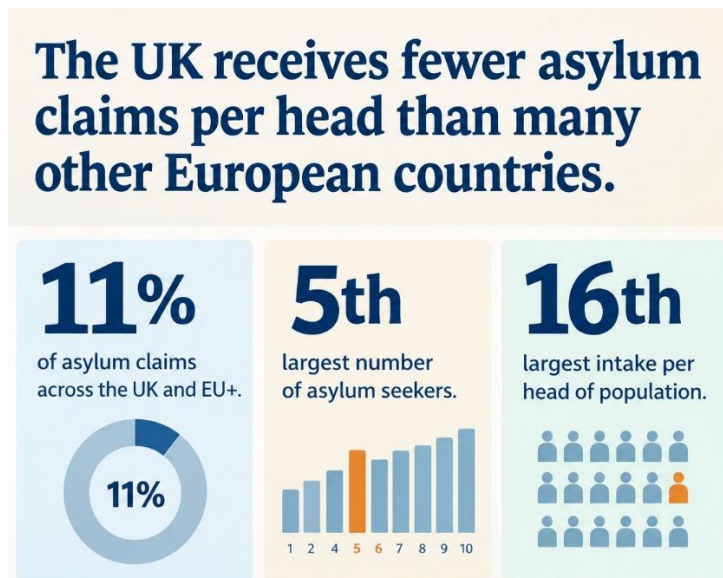
Most refugees stay close to home and are supported
by countries with fewer resources, not wealthy Western nations.

Source: UNHCR

- At the end of 2025, **117.8 million people** worldwide had been forced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations
- Forced displacement globally has nearly **doubled** over the last decade
- Sudan is the world's largest displacement crisis. Around 14 million people have been forced from their homes since April 2023, with millions of refugees in neighbouring countries.
- There are **42.5 million** refugees globally (i.e. outside the borders of their own country)
- The number of refugees finding safety through resettlement or sponsorship pathways (safe routes) fell by **more than half** in 2025

- Refugees make up **less than 1%** of the UK's population
- 149 countries have agreed to protect refugees under the Refugee Convention (and Protocol). No country has ever formally withdrawn.

UK asylum situation



Source: Home Office statistics, year ending March 2026

- **85,891** people claimed asylum in the UK in the year to June 2026, **down 20%** on the previous year
- For comparison, in 2025 Germany had **163,000** asylum applications, France **152,000**, Spain **143,000** and Italy **134,000**
- The UK ranks **16th** in Europe (EU+) in terms of asylum applications per head of capita
- 39,271 people crossed the Channel in small boats in the year to March 2026 – virtually all of them claimed asylum
- **Two thirds** of small boat arrivals in the year to June 26 were from Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan or Iran – all countries suffering **horrific conflict, violence or oppression**
- Between 2018 and 2025, **60% of all initial decisions** on asylum applications from people who arrived by small boat were grants of protection, with many more successful on appeal
- Around **64%** of asylum appeals had a favourable outcome in the year to March 2026
- The value of asylum support payments **fell 37%** in real terms between 2000 and 2024
- Asylum seekers are **not allowed to work** in the UK, unless they have been waiting more than 12 months and qualify for a role on the Skilled Worker List; they also cannot claim mainstream benefits or access social housing
- People seeking asylum who are eligible for Home Office support receive £49.18 a week in self-catered accommodation, or £9.95 per week where meals are provided
- Sudan was the most common country of origin for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK in the year to June 2026

- **Everyone** has the right to seek asylum – it is recognised as a universal human right
- Asylum seekers **are not required** to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach
- There are **no safe, legal routes** to the UK for the purpose of claiming asylum

UK refugee situation

- Refugees (including refugees arriving on resettlement/Ukraine schemes) can work, claim mainstream benefits and apply for social housing (subject to same criteria as other people)
- From March 2026, refugee status (following an asylum claim) is subject to review every 30 months, with a baseline waiting time of 20 years for permanent settlement
- 3,840 people were granted protection through resettlement schemes in the year to June 2026 (87% of them Afghan), **48% fewer** than the year before
- The Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) was closed to new applications in July 2025
- Refugee Family Reunion in the UK has been suspended since September 2025, leaving **children separated from their parents indefinitely** with no prospect of being reunited
- Changes to government 'good character' guidance introduced in 2025 mean that anyone who arrived via a 'dangerous journey' will 'normally' be refused UK citizenship forever
- Around 237,000 Ukrainians have come to the UK through humanitarian visa schemes since 2022, **less than 4%** of the 6 million Ukrainians who have sought refuge across Europe.

Suffolk situation

- We estimate there are several thousand settled refugees in Suffolk (i.e. those here longer term), the largest community being Kurdish and many having British citizenship
- Around **1,700** Ukrainian refugees have come to Suffolk under the Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family Schemes since 2022. 189 are currently living with their host sponsors, while others have moved into independent accommodation or relocated elsewhere.
- There are currently **260** asylum seekers in 'dispersal' accommodation in Suffolk, with a mix of single people and families. Around half are in Ipswich and half elsewhere in the county.
- There is no asylum contingency accommodation currently in Suffolk – i.e. **no hotels**
- There are around **325** unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and UASC over 18 (leaving care) in Suffolk, the majority in Ipswich with smaller cohorts elsewhere
- Around **375** refugees have arrived in Suffolk under resettlement schemes over the past decade – predominantly Afghan and Syrian and almost all in family groups
- Challenges include rural isolation, access to transport, healthcare and other services, language, housing, digital access, and growing hostility towards refugees & asylum seekers