

BRIEFING: REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Bible is full of stories of people who were forced or chose to move across borders because of natural disaster, exploitation, trafficking, war and persecution. Adam and Eve are sent from the Garden. Joseph is both trafficked and then followed by his family to Egypt. Moses leads the children of Israel on a long wilderness journey. In the New Testament we discover a Jesus who migrates three times: he makes the ultimate border crossing in the incarnation; he is an undocumented infant refugee to Egypt; he becomes an itinerant preacher and healer. The Churches' concern for asylum seekers and refugees is in part recognition that in welcoming the stranger, we welcome Christ himself.



In the twelve months up to June 2019 there were 32,693 asylum applications. In comparison in 2018 Germany received 161,900 and France 114,500.

CONTEXT

In the UK, the so-called '**hostile environment**' has shaped the way the state provides support

for asylum seekers and refugees. Churches have been working to try to change attitudes and policies to be ones which prioritise human dignity and human rights.

It can take months or sometimes years for the UK Home Office to decide an asylum application, during which time people are offered basic accommodation, receive £37.75 per week and are not allowed to work. This is despite there being good evidence to show the importance of

employment on someone's integration, as well as meaning they do not have to be a burden on the taxpayer.

The UK Government uses immigration detention for people that they want to deport or who they think might be at risk of absconding (going underground). The UK has no time limit on detention, and so people can be locked up indefinitely without having committed a crime or been convicted of an offence. In the 2017-2019 Parliament there were cross-party efforts to seek a maximum of 28 days for immigration detention and it is very likely that this issue will return in the new UK Parliament.



In the UK at the end of 2018 there were 126,720 refugees, 45,244 pending asylum cases and 125 stateless persons - around 0.26% of the UK

population (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) .

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What does welcoming the stranger or loving your neighbour mean to you in the context of this election?

If you were forced to leave your home and your country, how would you want to be treated in the place that you sought safety?

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

What will you do to restore dignity to people seeking asylum in this country?

Will you support:

- a time limit for immigration detention of 28 days?
- restoring asylum seekers' right to work?