

YOUR ACTION

Issue 17 2026

PREGNANT IN THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

On Page 12 Aisha shares how difficult it was to go through pregnancy and giving birth while being housed in hotel accommodation without support.

AMPLIFYING VOICES

Members of a Refugee Action campaigning network for people with lived experience submitted evidence exposing the harsh reality of the UK-France Agreement. Read more on page 5.



**REFUGEE
ACTION**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Every story in this edition of Your Action reminds us of something simple but powerful: people seeking safety can rebuild their lives when they have the right support.

Inside these pages, you'll meet people navigating an asylum system that is too often uncertain and isolating.

You'll hear from those rebuilding their futures after finding safety, volunteers giving their time to support others, and community organisations developing the skills to provide trusted immigration advice.

You'll also discover how supporters like you make this work possible.

Whether it's helping a pregnant woman navigate the asylum system, supporting someone through an asylum appeal, or strengthening organisations so they can better serve their communities.

Your generosity helps people find practical support, dignity and hope.

This year at Refugee Action, we've had to make difficult decisions to ensure our work remains sustainable and focused where it can make the greatest impact.

But one thing has never changed.

Our commitment to standing alongside refugees and people seeking asylum.

Thank you for taking the time to read these stories.

We hope they offer not only a deeper understanding of the challenges people face, but also of the extraordinary resilience, compassion and determination that continue to shape our work every day.

Thank you for standing with us.



Tim
Chief Executive
Refugee Action

Please note names may have been changed and alternative imagery used to represent the people featured throughout this newsletter. These will be indicated by an asterisk. This is to protect the identity of our team and those our services reach.

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We share a collection of the wonderful messages of hope you sent to people seeking safety this summer

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Through a diary entry of one of our researchers, follow the realities, frustrations and resilience of those seeking sanctuary stuck at the UK-France border.

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YOUR SUPPORT IS HELPING PARENTS-TO-BE

Aisha* was battling pregnancy complications while seeking asylum. Read how your support helped.

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Shelly reflects on identity, belonging and why people seeking safety should be seen for everything they are.

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THE PEOPLE BEHIND WHAT WE DO

Read more about the power of volunteers across our services.



MESSAGES OF HOPE FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Over the summer, anti-refugee rhetoric dominated headlines and left many people seeking safety feeling anxious, isolated and unwelcome. But those voices do not represent the majority of people in the UK.



Every day, we see acts of kindness, solidarity and welcome in communities across the country.

That's why we took part in Hope Not Hate's "Million Acts of Hope" initiative alongside dozens of other charities - to create a moment of community.

We invited you supporters to answer one simple question: **When the world feels divided, what gives you hope?**

We also asked what you would say to someone seeking safety in the UK. The response was incredible.

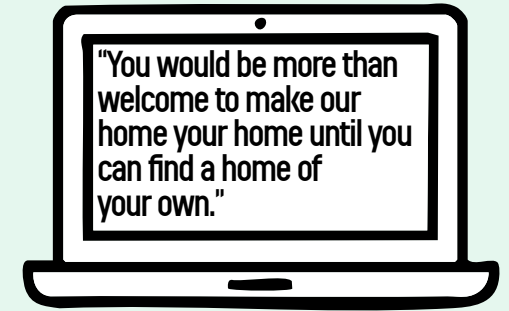
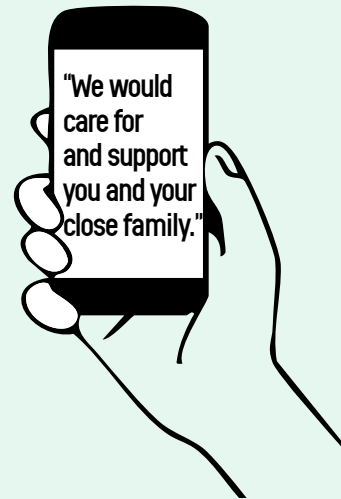
Supporters from across the country shared stories of friendship, compassion and community. They told us about neighbours helping neighbours, volunteers creating welcoming spaces, and people standing alongside those seeking safety.

Again and again, one message came through loud and clear: you are not alone. Across the UK, people are choosing:

- ✓ Kindness over division
- ✓ Connection over fear
- ✓ Hope over hostility
- ✓ Welcome over exclusion

On the next page, we've shared just a small selection of the messages sent to us.

Together, they celebrate the compassion, solidarity and welcome that exist across the country, and remind everyone seeking safety that there are people who stand with them.



"Please come here. I believe in solidarity and the rights of all human beings."

"Everyone deserves a safe place to call home."

"I have worked with some brilliant nurses and support workers who have come from overseas to help us."

Read more messages of hope by scanning the QR code



BOTAN'S STORY

Botan and his family fled their home in Iraq and were forced to take a dangerous journey into the UK



He and his wife finally arrived in the UK with their two young children. But safety didn't come quickly.

Because of the pandemic, Botan claimed asylum over the phone.

"We arrived during the pandemic and didn't understand the process. We were placed in asylum accommodation with no idea what would happen next.

Months passed without answers. It felt like we became victims again"

He was then introduced to Refugee Action, where a caseworker helped his family understand their claim and the next steps.

A year after his initial screening interview, Botan's asylum claim was

refused, despite evidence that returning to Iraq would put his life at risk.

"I was helpless. I couldn't guarantee safety for my children."

With support from a Refugee Action caseworker, Botan appealed the refusal. In January 2025, the court overturned the decision and granted his family refugee status the next day.

"The asylum system is a bitter experience, but I'll never forget how Refugee Action supported my family. Their support made a real difference. Sometimes they helped us navigate the system, sometimes they simply listened."

Today, Botan volunteers at a food bank and supports a charity providing free bikes to people seeking asylum.

His children remain his greatest source of strength. Thanks to supporters like you, Refugee Action can continue helping people rebuild their lives and find welcoming communities on their journey to sanctuary.

CHALLENGING HARMFUL POLICIES HEAD ON

Members of a Refugee Action campaigning network for people with lived experience of the asylum system submitted evidence exposing the harsh reality of the UK-France Agreement.

WHAT IS THE UK-FRANCE AGREEMENT?

It aims to reduce Channel crossings by returning some people who arrive in the UK by small boat to France, while allowing others to come through agreed legal routes.

An independent inspection was launched to reviewing how the agreement works in practice and its impact on people seeking asylum.

WHY RAS VOICE SUBMITTED EVIDENCE

In April, members of Refugee Action's Refugee and Asylum Seeker (RAS) Voice network submitted evidence to the independent inspection.

They shared their lived experience to help ensure the voices of people seeking sanctuary are heard.

Their evidence highlighted how current policies can cause harm and called for a system shaped by the realities people face when seeking safety.



THEIR WORDS

"No one is illegal... we stand shoulder to shoulder to protect our human rights and serve humanity.

"The "one-in, one-out" swap creates an environment of fear and uncertainty for migrants.

"This policy doesn't fully take into account the lived experiences of those affected.

FIELDWORK DIARY: RESEARCHERS' VISIT CALAIS

Two members of our team travelled to Calais last summer to better understand the realities facing people seeking safety at the UK–France border. Here, researcher Halima shares what she learned.

My journey began in Dover. Our bus stopped at the immigration checkpoint before boarding the ferry.

Passengers handed over their passports and moved on quickly. When I passed over my refugee travel document, everything changed.

The border guard paused.

He examined my refugee travel document carefully. Although I had the correct documents, the questions kept coming.

Did I have permission to enter France? Had I travelled to the UK by plane? Did I live there?

I answered each question as other passengers watched and the driver waited. The minutes stretched by.

Eventually, the guard handed my documents back.

I remember feeling embarrassed enough to apologise for delaying everyone else.

As the ferry crossed the Channel, I kept thinking about how fragile movement can feel when your right to travel is treated as something suspicious.

I was travelling with valid documents, yet still felt uncertain and exposed. And I knew that, for others, the stakes were far higher.

When we arrived in Calais, the city carried its own story.

Near the station and across the city, we saw people living in informal camps, hoping for safety and a chance to rebuild their lives.

We moved between locations, speaking to people where they felt comfortable. Preserving dignity mattered. So did listening.

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I'm trying to stay in France. I hope they can give me citizenship here and allow me to work - Research participant



I met people carrying everything they had left with them. Their bags held documents, spare clothes and memories of home.

Many described police taking tents and belongings, repeated displacement, and constant uncertainty. We met people from Sudan, Eritrea, Syria and Palestine. Some hoped to reach the UK. Others didn't.

"One man told me he wanted to remain in France. I'm trying to stay in France. I hope they give me citizenship here and allow me to work."

His words stayed with me.

In Calais, I heard stories of family, work, dignity and hope – not borders, crossings or numbers.

It was a reminder that people seeking safety are far more than the stereotypes attached to them.

The border is often presented as a place of order and protection. What I saw was people living with uncertainty, exclusion and fear, while holding on to hope.

That is what I remember most. Despite everything they had experienced, people continued to look forward, support one another and imagine a better future.

It's a reminder that behind every headline about migration are human beings whose stories deserve to be heard.

READ THE RESEARCH

Halima's diary is just one part of our work to better understand the experiences of people seeking safety. Scan the QR code to explore the comprehensive research and learn more about what we found



LOCKED OUT LOCKED UP

The reality of the UK asylum system



97%

of people arriving
by small boat claim
asylum in the UK



68%

come from countries
impacted by British
colonial rule



89%

are from Africa, Asia,
and the Middle East

LOCKED OUT

People denied safety
before arrival

Left homeless and
without support

Facing policy
harassment and
violence



LOCKED UP

People denied
freedom after arrival

Trapped in asylum
accommodation for
months or years

Banned from working.
No way to rebuild
their life

“

It feels like an open prison

*Sources: Refugee Action, Locked Out, Locked Up: Experiences of asylum policy and systemic racism in the UK and northern France (2026). Statistics are drawn from Refugee Action's analysis of Home Office Immigration System Statistics (year ending December 2025). Full references are available in the report. www.refugee-action.org.uk/lockedoutlockedup

LOPEZ'S STORY

The challenges people seeking safety face don't end when they reach the UK. Lopez endured isolation and uncertainty in asylum accommodation.



Lopez is grateful to be safe in the UK. But safety hasn't brought peace of mind. Living in Home Office hotel accommodation means signing in and out every time she leaves. If she misses a meal because of an appointment, there is no food waiting for her.

“When meals are given, they are almost always the same. The isolation and restrictions have harmed my mental health.”

The uncertainty of the asylum system has been just as difficult. After her asylum interview, her claim was refused, taking a serious toll on her mental health.

Not being allowed to work has also been deeply painful.

Back in Kenya, she worked as a qualified nursing assistant.

“I loved my work. Here I am not allowed to do what I know and love.”

She dreams of returning to nursing, studying Social Care, and supporting others going through the asylum process.

Lopez was introduced to Refugee Action through a friend and later joined the RAS Voice group. She says joining the group changed her journey.

“It felt like finding a family. It reminded me that I am not alone.”

Today, she volunteers by braiding and styling the hair of women seeking asylum. She wants others to know they are not alone.

Her message to anyone going through the asylum system is simple:

“The journey is frightening. But you can't give up. Stay strong. In the end, you will conquer.”

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS PARENTS-TO-BE LIVING IN THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

Parents-to-be are being left to go through pregnancy and early parenthood without care, stability and support in the UK. Your're changing this.

I stayed inside the room for three months. I didn't have the confidence to go outside. My depression got worse.



Aisha* arrived in the UK in 2021 with her husband, after being forced to leave their home country. They thought they'd find stability and support.

They'd arranged to temporarily stay with friends, believing the asylum process would be straightforward. But everything changed when Aisha found out she was pregnant.

People waiting for a decision on their asylum claim are entitled to financial and accommodation support**.

Aisha and her husband submitted a request for this support and were moved into temporary asylum hotel accommodation.

Life was already uncertain. But as her pregnancy progressed, things became harder.

In the hotel, they had little control over their daily lives. Meals were provided at set times, with no flexibility. For Aisha, this became especially difficult during pregnancy.

The food arrived undercooked. She couldn't afford to buy anything else, so she had no choice but to eat it. As months passed, she started having pregnancy cravings at night.

"I was getting hungry, so I kept bread from breakfast to eat later."

There was no way to prepare food herself, and no option to choose what her body needed. Even when she developed gestational diabetes, nothing changed. She had to cope as best she could.

Her health deteriorated. She was

dealing with the physical strain of pregnancy while also facing growing anxiety and isolation.

Many parents-to-be want to enjoy their pregnancy and look forward to the arrival of their baby.

This experience was robbed from Aisha and her husband. They spent her pregnancy navigating growing health concerns as well as uncertainty about their asylum claim.

Just days after giving birth, Aisha was discharged back to the same hotel room. Recovering from surgery in those conditions was overwhelming.

"The bed was too high for me to climb into safely, so I slept in a chair beside my newborn. It was very painful."

There was no space to wash clothes properly. No quiet or privacy. Basic tasks became exhausting.

At a time when many new mothers rely on support from family or community, Aisha and her husband were left to cope on their own. Aisha's mental health worsened.

"I stayed inside the room for three months. I didn't have the confidence to go outside. My depression got worse."

To make things even worse, they received the dreadful news that their claim for protection had been refused.

Desperate and looking for help, Aisha was referred to Refugee Action. And things quickly started to change; she finally had someone on her side.

Our teams helped her secure suitable

accommodation, navigate the asylum system and find a solicitor to support her appeal.

After nine months in the hotel, Aisha and her family were able to move into a home.

Step by step, she began to move forward.

Today, life is still not easy. Like many people rebuilding life after the asylum system, she continues to face uncertainty. But things are different now.

She has a space where her daughter can grow. A place where she can begin to recover. And the chance to care for her family.

Aisha's story is a reminder of the additional challenges many women face during pregnancy in the asylum system.

That is why Refugee Action continues to stand alongside people seeking safety.

Because no woman should have to go through pregnancy and early motherhood without care, stability or support.

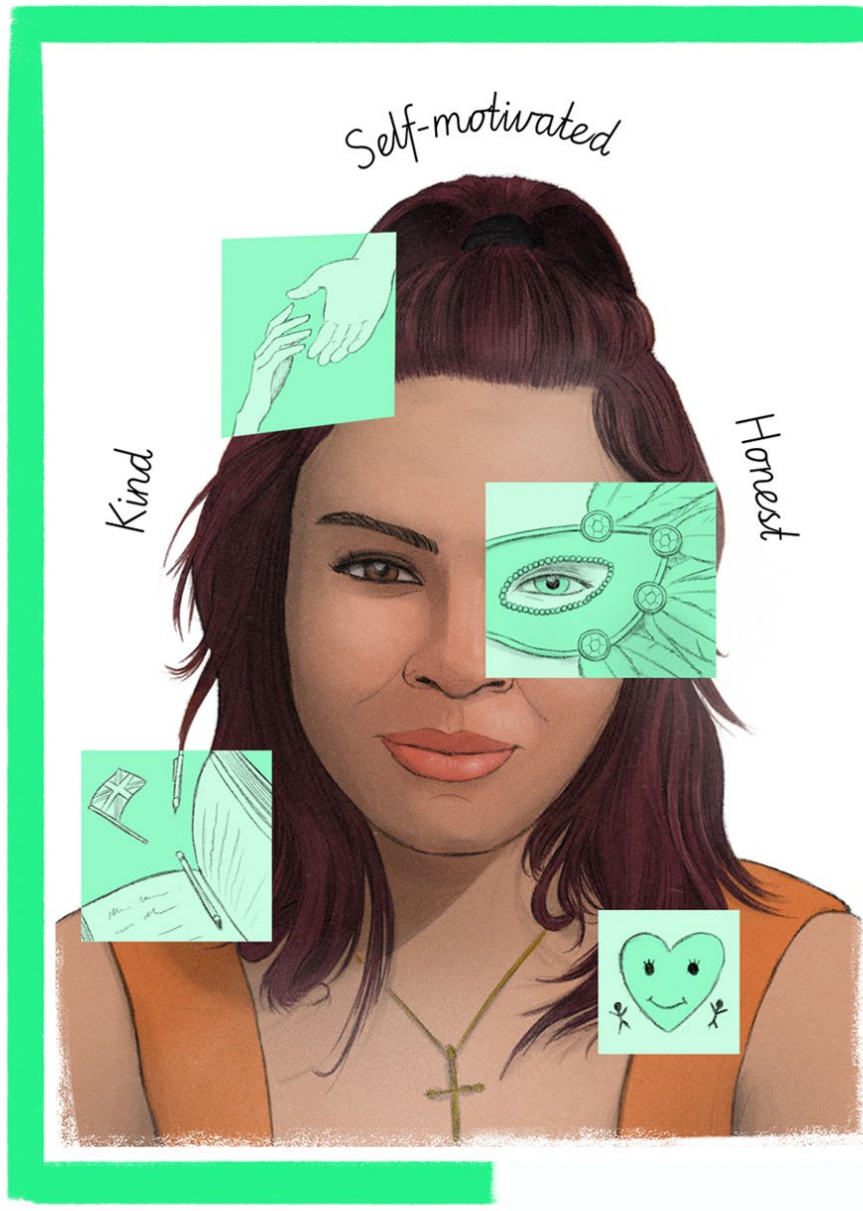
Your support helps Refugee Action stand alongside mothers and families when they need it most.

From helping people find safe accommodation and access the legal advice they're entitled to, to providing specialist casework throughout the asylum process, your generosity **means no one has to face these challenges alone.**

*Names have been changed and alternate imagery used to protect the identity of those we support.

**People seeking asylum who are housed in accommodation where meals are provided receive a reduced asylum support payment of £9.95 per person, per week to cover essential personal items

MORE THAN A REFUGEE: SHELLY'S STORY



Last year, we launched a new campaign to challenge the labels and stereotypes too often attached to people seeking safety

Our More than a Refugee project celebrates people with lived experience of seeking asylum, sharing their talents, passions and achievements beyond their refugee journeys.

We're reminding people that no one should be defined by their refugee status.

What people often miss when they see Shelly only as a refugee is the fullness of her identity.

“

I am a teacher. But when I return home, I am simply a mum again. I dance in the kitchen with my children, teach them about their Caribbean roots, cook our food, share our traditions and our stories.

I came to the UK in 2021 after being forced to leave my home because of persecution. I arrived with fear in my heart, but also with hope that one day my children and I would be safe again.

For years, I waited. I wasn't allowed to work. I couldn't plan my future. But I refused to let waiting define who I am.

When I was invited to be part of Refugee Action's More Than a Refugee project and saw the illustrations created about me, something shifted. For the first time, I felt truly seen. Not as a label. Not as a number. But as a woman with dreams, joy, strength and purpose.

The illustrations show who I really am — a mother who dances in her kitchen with her children, a woman who loves teaching, a volunteer, a Caribbean woman holding onto her roots, and a teacher in the making. They show my hope.

BEHIND EVERY LABEL IS A PERSON

To read more about Shelly and learn more about our More than a Refugee project, please go to refugee-action.org.uk/refugee-voices/ or use this QR code



SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS BUILD EXPERTISE

Refugee Action's Frontline Immigration Advice Project (FIAP) helps community organisations develop the skills, knowledge and the confidence needed to provide high-quality immigration advice.



People seeking safety often first turn to trusted organisations when they need support.

But providing immigration advice requires specialist knowledge and support, which can be difficult to access.

Over the past year, FIAP has supported more than 200 organisations across the UK to strengthen immigration advice services and better meet the needs of their communities.

OUR FIAP PARTNERS CAN ACCESS:



Specialist training on immigration and asylum advice



Mentoring and one-to-one support from experienced advisers



Study groups to help advisers develop their skills and confidence

FIAP helps organisations build lasting expertise so more people can access trusted immigration advice.

IRMO, a London-based charity supporting Latin American migrants and refugees, is one of them. Alejandra* first joined IRMO as a volunteer before becoming a trainee adviser. Now she is working towards qualifying as an immigration adviser.

In 2012, Alejandra left her home country to rebuild her life in the UK.

The move brought many challenges.

"I faced the uncertainty of adapting to a new culture and social system while building a new support network. Overcoming language barriers added further obstacles for me."

In her home country, Alejandra worked in law; she specialised in protecting the rights of Indigenous communities.

Alejandra was determined to rebuild her professional career here in the UK. While searching for opportunities, she discovered IRMO, one of our FIAP partners.

"I felt grateful to discover an organisation so committed to supporting and empowering the Latin American community with dignity, empathy and respect."

She first joined as a volunteer bilingual receptionist and community interpreter before moving into a volunteer immigration assistant role.

The role gave her a deeper understanding of the challenges many migrants face in navigating unfamiliar systems and accessing essential services. Wanting to learn more, she later moved into a trainee immigration advisor role with IRMO.

"Immigration law was totally new for me. But I thought, I like it. I love it. I want to go after that."

Looking ahead, she hopes to continue developing her expertise and supporting others.



My plan for the future is to become a qualified and registered immigration adviser, providing advice of the highest quality. I also see myself helping to train others one day.

For Alejandra, the goal has never been just personal success. She hopes to use her experience to help others build their confidence and find their own path forward.

Her story highlights the impact of Refugee Action's Frontline Immigration Advice Project: supporting community organisations to develop skills and expertise that stay within communities, creating opportunities for people like Alejandra to grow, thrive, and, in turn, support others.

*Names have been changed and alternate imagery used to protect the identity of those we support.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND WHAT WE DO: THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are part of everything we do at Refugee Action. Last year, over 240 people gave their time, skills and energy to support people seeking safety.

Our volunteers play a vital role in supporting our teams who respond to needs with care and consistency. Here is just a snapshot of what our incredible volunteers will be continuing to support our teams achieve.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN BRADFORD

Our volunteers support our teams in the region to:

- ✓ Run wellbeing and social activities
- ✓ Support family outings and community trips
- ✓ Deliver creative and practical workshops
- ✓ Creating opportunities for friendship and connection
- ✓ Run projects led by people with lived experience



AMPLIFYING VOICES WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Volunteers with lived experience of the asylum system also help shape Refugee Action's work by:

- ✓ Being part of groups that influence campaigns and policy positions
- ✓ Speaking at conferences and public events
- ✓ Contributing to training and consultation sessions
- ✓ Challenging misconceptions about the asylum system

HELPING PEOPLE THROUGH PATHWAYS TO WORK PROGRAMME

Our volunteers play key roles in helping people with lived experience gain the tools to thrive in the UK. They bring their professional skills and experience to:

- ✓ Mentor people rebuilding their careers
- ✓ Support CV writing and job applications
- ✓ Share industry knowledge and advice
- ✓ Help people build confidence and workplace skills

SUPPORTING CRISIS TEAMS IN GREATER MANCHESTER, BRADFORD AND THE WEST MIDLANDS

Our volunteers help people at risk of destitution and homelessness by:

- ✓ Triaging enquiries and identifying urgent needs
- ✓ Researching asylum support entitlements
- ✓ Supporting applications for housing, financial and emergency assistance
- ✓ Providing practical and emotional support during times of crisis
- ✓ Hosting vital information sessions for people stuck living in hotel accommodation about next steps
- ✓ Helping people understand their options, navigate complex systems and access specialist and community services

HELPING PEOPLE INTEGRATE INTO THEIR NEW COMMUNITIES

We've also had volunteers support our community building projects

- ✓ Running Conversation clubs to help people practice their English language skills
- ✓ Hosting a variety of information sessions for people seeking safety
- ✓ Co-producing and designing projects



RECIPE PACKS BY REFUGEES

Sign up to our new recipe subscription, Home Made, to rebuild lives through the food you cook. Discover new dishes, hear powerful stories and help refugees and people seeking asylum access vital support.

£10
a month



WHAT WILL YOU RECEIVE?

- A recipe card
- An step-by-step ingredients card
- A 'meet the chef' card
- Access to exclusive digital content including video tutorials

WHY IT MATTERS

For just £10 a month you'll receive recipes in the post from refugees and people seeking asylum.

Behind every recipe is a person rebuilding their life. Being part of Home Made helps fund vital support for people navigating the asylum system.

SIGN UP NOW

Be part of a community that shares more than food. Sign up for Home Made and start your journey today. Visit refugee-action.org.uk/HomeMade, call our team on 0800 141 2426 or scan this QR code



*Please note no food products are included in your pack

STAND UP FOR REFUGEES 2026: A NIGHT WITH PURPOSE

Our Stand Up for Refugees comedy event was back for its third year.



What started as an idea for a one-night celebration of community and comedy back in 2024 has become one of our favourite nights in the Refugee Action calendar.

It has become a powerful annual moment of community, resistance, and joy.

Hosted again by Milo Edwards, the night brought together an incredible line-up of comic talent featuring Shaparak Khorsandi, Tom Ballard, Josh Pugh, Gbemi Oladipo, Ester Manito, Alison Spittle and MC'd by Ollie Horn.

Every comedian gave their time for free with the goal of performing in solidarity with refugees. Every ticket sold helped power Refugee Action's work: welcoming people seeking safety, defending their rights, and standing alongside them as they rebuild their lives in the UK.

The room was full of laughter, of energy, of people who care.

More than entertainment, this has become a tradition of standing up, loudly and visibly, against hostility and for a kinder, fairer system.

Supporters, volunteers, staff, and people with lived experience all together, creating something bigger than a comedy night.

Some of the team from one of our corporate partners joined us and shared this reflection about the night:



Supporting Stand Up for Refugees was a chance to celebrate the courage and resilience refugees show every day. Through our partnership with Refugee Action, we've seen the strength it takes to rebuild a life, and this event was a powerful reminder of the hope and positivity at the heart of that journey." - Alynham Pharmaceuticals, UK & Ireland

Stand Up for Refugees is proof of what happens when the community shows up again and again.

Huge thanks to everyone who made it happen, on stage and behind the scenes. Together, we're building something that lasts.

RACE FOR REFUGEES

Your challenge. Your choice. Your chance to make change happen.

It's back for another year! Join the Race for Refugees and put your solidarity in action.

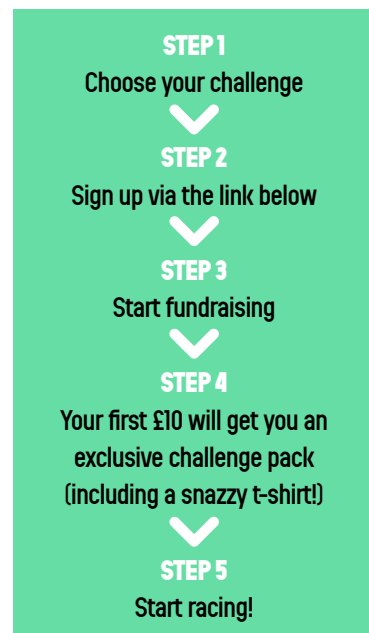
Race for Refugees is our annual fundraising movement, where people up and down the country set a personal goal to achieve and raise money along the way.

Runners, swimmers, painters, writers, walkers, knitters and more, all taking action in their own way to stand with refugees.

Whether it's a one-off event or a goal to conquer every day for a month.

Run your first 10k? Write a poem a day? Paddleboard the length of your local river? Cycle your own Tour-de-UK? Stitch a patchwork quilt? Brave a bungee jump? Your Race for Refugees can be whatever you want it to be.

This September, whatever you do, do it for refugees.



Head to www.refugee-action.org.uk/race-for-refugees/ to find out more and get involved!

FUNDRAISER SPOTLIGHT

Jack took on last year's Race for Refugees and raised a phenomenal £4,500!



He challenged himself to swim over 33km throughout September, in breaststroke.

Despite having days when he felt too tired or unwell to get in the water, he made it to the finish line one lap at a time.

The support along the way kept me focused on the bigger picture, raising money so Refugee Action can continue their work.

Jack Raced for Refugees because he "wanted to do something that showed solidarity with refugees at a time when they are facing so much hostility" and to "send a message that bigotry and hatred must not win".

A big thank you to Jack for his inspiring Race for Refugees, and to every other superstar in our community of supporters who show up for refugees and raise money throughout the year. Every small act has a big impact.

HOW FAR DOES YOUR SUPPORT GO?

For every £1 donated, 48p goes directly to our frontline projects, 26p goes towards fundraising to ensure our future stability, 7p is spent building campaigns to fight for a fairer system and 19p goes towards the running of the charity.

