

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO: 00.01AM TUESDAY 1 JUNE 2021

Contact: [name] from [organisation] on [mobile] including out of hours

WOMEN AND CHILDREN ABANDONED BY PROPOSED REFUGEE RULES, REVEALS NEW CAMPAIGN COALITION

Two in every three women and children that the UK would accept as refugees now, would be turned away in future under proposed new government rules (1), reveal new figures released today (1 June 2021). The findings, which also show that women and children make up half of people currently accepted as refugees each year in the UK (2), are being published for the launch of a new coalition campaign – Together With Refugees – that is calling for a more effective, fair and humane approach to the UK's asylum system.

The campaign's polling also reveals that two in three Britons (64%) agree that the UK should protect refugees fleeing war and persecution (3).

If agreed by the UK Parliament the new rules (4) would mean that most people who would be accepted as refugees under the current rules – meaning those confirmed to have fled war or persecution following rigorous official checks - would no longer have their rights recognised in the UK due to their method of arrival. This includes half who would be women and children despite the Home Secretary's statement on the launch of these proposals that: "We should ask ourselves, where are the vulnerable women and children that this system should exist to protect?" (5).

Sabir Zazai, Together With Refugees spokesperson, CEO of coalition member Scottish Refugee Council and a refugee himself (6), said: "Abandoning people fleeing war and persecution, including women and children, is not who we are in the UK. These are mothers escaping war-torn Syria, women fleeing sexual violence in Congo or children escaping life-long conscription into the military in Eritrea. These are people in fear of their lives. These are people like me. These are also people like you, people who want to live in safety and dignity.

"The majority of people in Britain believe in protecting refugees, and the government themselves have said they want to protect the most vulnerable including women and children. That's why we are calling for a more effective, fair and humane approach to supporting refugees. We urge the

government to rethink its proposals and stand up for people's ability to seek safety in the UK, including those who overcame hardship to find any route they could to escape danger."

Mariam, a clinical support worker on a Covid-19 ward in Leeds, came to the UK in the back of a lorry in 2009. She was forced to flee the brutal dictatorship in Eritrea after her husband, who had been forcibly conscripted into the army, escaped, and she was imprisoned as a result. Mariam has worked exhausting 12-hour shifts during the pandemic, sometimes four days in a row, but she loves the opportunity to help people.

She said: "When I left Eritrea, I didn't know if I was going to live or die. I just knew I had to get out. Every day, I thank God for bringing me here, and secondly I thank the people of the UK who saved me. Every time you give someone sanctuary, you have the opportunity to save a life. Why would you send them back? Help them, save them. The UK gave me an opportunity and now I'm working. I don't want to be dependent on the government. I'm working and if I'm asked to help, I will help."

The new analysis of official figures also found that in recent years the top five countries people flee from and are accepted as refugees in the UK are: Iran for fear of torture, violence and persecution including against women and girls, LGBT people and religious minorities; Sudan, due to conflict, particularly in Darfur; Syria where war has torn the country apart for a decade; Eritrea, to escape enforced conscription into the military or civil service indefinitely and sometimes for life; and Afghanistan to flee conflict and threats from the Taliban including because of their links with western forces including the British Army (7).

Almost nine out of 10 (85%) of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries and seven out of 10 (73%) live in neighbouring countries to their country of origin (8). In Europe, many countries receive more applications for asylum than the UK. In 2020 Germany, France and Spain each received approximately three times the applications of the UK (9).

Together With Refugees is a growing coalition of more than 200 national and local organisations who believe in showing compassion to refugees fleeing war and persecution. It was founded by Asylum Matters, British Red Cross, Freedom from Torture, Refugee Action, Refugee Council and Scottish Refugee Council.

The coalition is calling for a more effective, fair and humane approach to the UK's refugee system that: allows people to have a fair and efficient hearing for their claim for protection, including those who endured traumas and struggle to get here; ensures people can live in dignity in communities

while they wait to find out if they will be granted protection; enables refugees to rebuild their lives and make valuable contributions to their communities; and where the UK works with other countries to do its part to help people forced to flee their homes.

To find out more visit www.togetherwithrefugees.org.uk

Notes to editors

- (1) Analysis of Home Office data by the Refugee Council found that on average, 15,410 people were granted refugee status each year from 2015-2020. Based on the claim in the New Immigration Plan that 'For the year ending September 2019, more than 60% of those claims were from people who are thought to have entered the UK illegally' it is projected that 9,246 of these would no longer be accepted as refugees under the new rules (see (4)).
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>
- (2) Analysis of Home Office data by the Refugee Council found that in total, 59,941 people received an initial decision grant of protection (refugee status or humanitarian protection) between 2015-2020. The total number of women and children granted status is 29,882. This equates to 50% of the total. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>
- (3) Research commissioned by Refugee Council and British Future: ICM interviewed a sample of 2,007 GB adults aged 18+ online between 16 and 18 April 2021. 64% agree 'The UK should protect refugees fleeing war and persecution'. Just 12% disagree. 70% agree 'We need an asylum system that is effective, fair and humane, so the UK can uphold our responsibility to offer refugee protection to those who need it.' Just 11% disagree. Scottish Refugee Council commissioned research by Survation on attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland in June 2020.
<https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/survey-shows-desire-for-new-approach-to-refugee-protection-in-scotland/>
- (4) The new rules would mean that all those who claim asylum after arriving in the UK through an irregular route would face removal to a third country, with their asylum claim only progressing if removal is not possible. People who arrive irregularly who go on to be granted refugee status would only receive temporary protection with reduced rights and entitlements. The vast majority of people who claim asylum are unable to access 'regular' routes (entering the UK with a valid visa and/or passport) with their only option being to enter irregularly (by crossing the channel in small boats or in the back of a lorry). The Refugee Convention makes it clear that people should not be penalised for entering a country irregularly for the purposes of claiming asylum. A media background briefing on the proposed rules can be found here. <https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Together-With-Refugees-background-media-briefing-on-NPI.pdf>.
- (5) Home Secretary statement on the New Plan for Immigration (24 March 2021)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretarys-statement-on-the-new-plan-for-immigration>
- (6) Sabir Zazai sought safety in the UK in 1999, fleeing the conflict in Afghanistan.
- (7) Grants at initial decision by country of origin (average no per year 2015-2020).
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>

1	Iran	1636
2	Sudan	1067
3	Syria	1049
4	Eritrea	850
5	Afghanistan	534

- (8) <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/>
- (9) In the year ending September 2020, the UK received 37,550 applications for asylum, Germany

received 124,380, France 103,370, Spain 108,225 and Greece 64,185.

Eurostat <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>)

About Together With Refugees

Together With Refugees is a coalition of more than 200 national and local organisations, refugees and people from all walks of life who believe in showing compassion to refugees fleeing war and persecution. The coalition was founded by Asylum Matters, British Red Cross, Freedom from Torture, Refugee Action, Refugee Council and Scottish Refugee Council.

The coalition is calling for a better approach to supporting refugees that: allows people to seek safety in the UK, no matter how they came here; ensures people can live in dignity while they wait to find out if they will be granted protection; and enables refugees to rebuild their lives and make valuable contributions to their communities. It also wants the UK to work with other countries to do its bit to help people forced to flee their homes.

Find out more at www.togetherwithrefugees.org.uk