

Quick Guide to helping refused asylum seekers

What is the problem?

Every year around 50% of those claiming asylum in the UK are given negative decisions, and at that point they lose their asylum support, have 21 days to leave their asylum accommodation, and are told they must return to their country of origin. Some will be put into Immigration Removal Centres with a view to sending them back, but most will simply be left with no recourse to public funds – effectively destitute and reliant on handouts and accommodation from friends and possibly charities. Most end up moving from place to place, sofa-surfing and doing odd jobs in return for food or lodging. Some find illegal work, usually at a rate way below minimum wage: others are forced into some sort of slavery, either physical or sexual. Oxfam's 2011 report [Coping with Destitution](#) is an in-depth study of what refused asylum seekers do to survive. A more recent study from the British Red Cross, [Can't Stay, Can't Go](#), focuses on those who cannot be returned for various reasons, yet are left here destitute.

How many are there in the UK?

No one knows for sure, partly because the Home Office does not record statistics of people who leave the UK of their own accord, and partly because they make no effort to find out the true numbers from their data of refusals, removals, voluntary returns and successful fresh asylum claims. What we do know is that the numbers are increasing every year by several thousand, because the numbers removed from the country are always far less than the number of refusals. Those who utilise the life-saving [Red Cross destitution services](#) are just a fraction of the true numbers, which are likely to be above 100,000 in total.

Ways of helping:

- **Offering accommodation**

As the problem of asylum destitution became apparent at the turn of the century, projects began to spring up offering a place to stay. At first these were random, often uncoordinated acts of generosity. Gradually new charities emerged, and in 2005 the first meeting of the national No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) took place in Manchester. Now established as a national charity, NACCOM has over 40 member projects offering some form of accommodation to refused asylum seekers. These include night shelters, hosting schemes where rooms in private houses are offered and housing schemes of various types. You can find all the details on the [NACCOM website](#), including a map of such projects across the UK.

Among the projects there are some that make good use of empty vicarages and presbyteries, and even a [clergy hosting scheme](#) in London. If you think your diocese or church may have something to offer, why not get in touch with the [network capacity builder](#)?

- **Offering support**

It may well be that you cannot, for various reasons, offer a place to stay, but would like to offer your time or expertise in some way. Most of the NACCOM member groups don't just offer accommodation, but rely on volunteers helping in many other ways. Some have drop-in services, offer legal support, distribute food, mentor young people-the list is endless. Check out your local group [here](#). Alternatively, look for one of the other services in your area supporting asylum seekers from the list on [Find Your Local Project](#)

- **Giving**

Working with destitute asylum seekers attracts almost no government funding: since government policy is to try to get them to leave the country, they will not fund accommodation or support projects that help refused asylum seekers stay here. Those who work in this field are dedicated, committed activists who work hard for comparatively little. Many are volunteers, doing a range of jobs to keep their organisation afloat. Although there are some excellent charitable trusts that support work with refugees and asylum seekers, there is never enough money to go round.

Financial support enables these small grass-roots organisations not only to keep going, but to provide the best they can for their vulnerable clients.

- **Campaigning**

Even though practical support is vital and saves lives, the truth is that only a change in heart and subsequent changes in legislation at government level will put an end to destitution. A more just system, better funding for legal aid, the right to work, ending detention, higher asylum support rates and end-to-end accommodation are all necessary for that to happen. [Asylum Matters](#) is a coalition of over 80 frontline organisations that campaigns and lobbies for change at national level. [Right to Remain](#) deals principally with individual cases. You will also find campaign actions on the [Refugee Action](#) and [Refugee Council](#) websites.