

# Habonim Dror UK: Refugee Crisis Choveret



Naomi Chazan, Sebastien  
Chapleau, Sam Grant, Kalela  
Lancaster, Jonathon Leader,  
Walter Rothschild, Richard  
Verber, Adv. Asaf Weitzen, Ben  
Wright

Habonim Dror UK

Platinum House,  
Gabriel Mews, Crewys  
Road, London,  
NW2 2GD

02082092110

01617959447

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# Introduction

The current refugee crisis is the worst we've seen since WWII, people from all over the world, but primarily the Syria, are fleeing civil war, persecution and genocide. As a movement that believes in Shivyon Erech Ha'adam (The Equality of Human Value), tikkun olam and social action, we simply cannot sit idly by whilst human beings are faced with such desperate circumstances. Jewish history and the Jewish experience only serves to cement this responsibility, an essential part of the Jewish narrative is our experience as the "stranger". Be it when wandering in the desert, stateless and homeless for forty years, or more recently, when we fled our homes in Europe escaping Nazi atrocities, our collective experience as refugees is etched into our collective identities.

Inspired by our Jewish values, demanded by our Jewish history, we hope this serves as a small but important tool in helping people educate themselves and others about issues pertaining to refugees both in Europe and in Israel; and indeed anywhere else in the world; and how to take action on those issues.

We are eternally grateful for the contributions by our partners in the community, The Association of Jewish Refugees, The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, JCORE, Rene Cassin and World Jewish Relief. Without their support this document would not have been possible. It also is a strong indicator of the depth of knowledge, talent and resources that we have in our community, and it's something we should be immensely proud of.

So all that's left to say is read, enjoy and we hope you find this useful!

Aaleh Ve'Hagshem,

Leader

# Where Are Refugees Coming From? And Should We Be Helping them?

By Richard Verber,

Campaigns Manager at World Jewish Relief

The refugee crisis seemed to hit our TV screens out of nowhere. Where are the refugees coming from and why? Should we be helping them in Europe or Syria? Richard Verber, Campaigns Manager at World Jewish Relief, goes behind the headlines

In the evening of September 2 pictures started to circulate round the world of one boy: Aylan Kurdi. His image would grace the front cover of nearly every British newspaper the next day. Three years old, from Syria, he died as over 2,600 people have done this year, trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

The world suddenly seemed to wake up. The timing was strange: the Syrian civil war has been burning for well over four years. 250,000 people have died. Nearly eight million Syrians are displaced within their own country. Another four million people have fled to neighbouring states – mostly to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan – for safety. Many have been there for years.

But it took the tragic death of one little boy – Aylan – to galvanise the British public and get the government to act. The British Jewish community knew that it too had to stand up and be counted.

This was a grim reality we knew all too well. World Jewish Relief has been working with Syrian refugees since 2013 when we set up programmes in Jordan.

With rations cut, resources expended and the prospect of conflict resolution at home in Syria non-existent, some refugees decided that the only option of a better future was a move westwards into Europe.

Once refugees starting entering the EU – and arriving at Calais in particular – the refugee crisis became a domestic issue for Britain as well as a foreign policy one.

British Jews felt a moral imperative to act, perhaps even a religious duty. Whatever our family backgrounds, we don't have to go too far back in our history to find relatives who were also refugees.

For many people it is the story of the Second World War and the Kindertransport. Tens of thousands of children – and adults – were saved thanks to the Jewish community here and because Britain eventually opened its doors just a little.

I am only alive today because my grandma, aged eight, somehow made it to a boat from Germany, arriving in Southampton as part of the Kindertransport just two months before war broke out. Her parents died in Auschwitz as did her sister and cousins.

As the Jewish community's response to international disasters, World Jewish Relief launched a new emergency appeal for Syrian refugees backed by all the synagogue movements and youth movements under the banner of the ZYC. We are really grateful to Habonim Dror for your support.

Although our television screens have shown thousands of refugees on the move across Europe, the greatest vulnerability amongst the largest number of refugees still remains in and around Syria itself.

World Jewish Relief's focus has therefore been to work with other international actors to make being a refugee in Turkey, close to the Syrian border, as accommodating as possible.

Providing education facilities and winter emergency packages to Syrian refugee children seeks to ensure that these families are supported in the short to medium term, and encourages them to feel that there is at the very least a prospect of a reasonable temporary option. World Jewish Relief is delivering these services through our Turkish partner the International Blue Crescent.

Our emergency programmes manager was in Turkey recently visiting the refugee camps and monitoring our programmes. He was impressed with the accountability of our local partner, moved by the plight of these most vulnerable of refugees and convinced that our support is well targeted.

World Jewish Relief cannot of course ignore the fact that there do remain thousands of refugees on the move. We have two partner organisations in Greece providing medical support and emergency packages to refugees both on the North Aegean islands and for those transiting in Athens, Thessaloniki and on the Macedonian border in Eidomeni.

We know that the Jewish community, like other faith communities, are both willing and able to do more and we will continue working with the whole Jewish community to make that happen.

[richard@worldjewishrelief.org](mailto:richard@worldjewishrelief.org)

# Refugee crisis: how your school can help

By Sebastien Chapleau,

Headteacher, La Fontaine Academy

## From fundraising to lobbying the government, there are many practical ways for schools to offer assistance

More than 300,000 refugees are estimated to have crossed the Mediterranean into Europe this year. They are suffering and dying in staggering numbers – more than 2,500 have already lost their lives in 2015.

As community hubs, schools have the power to help. They can motivate the government to take on more than the 4,000 refugees per year it has already committed to, and are well placed to support these people on the ground. Here are some of the ways you can help:

### Pledge to offer places (and tell people about it)

At the moment, pledging places simply means working out how many children your school could accommodate, and shouting it far and wide. Write to the local community, council and press about why it's the right thing to do. I've shared my school's commitment with several publications, including the London Evening Standard, and the chief executive of my school's multi-academy trust has written to tell mayor Boris Johnson too. If lots of schools support the resettlement of displaced families, we can show that there is the space and will in Britain to welcome those in need.

### Motivate your community

Call a meeting to gather ideas from the school community. Many people will already be sending supplies to charities supporting refugees; you can pool resources and decrease the processing costs for organisations by hosting a collection at your school, then driving the donations over in one go. You can find a map of local collection points [here](#).

Charities are collecting non-perishable food; cooking utensils; clothes for babies, children and adults; newborn supplies including formula, nappies, bottles and blankets; toys; firewood and kindling; and books for all ages.

You can also raise funds and donate the money to the many organisations that are working with refugees in Europe and further afield. Many schools are already fundraising experts, but you can find lots of tips and ideas here.

Here are some of the organisations your school could support and an idea of the difference you could make:

Refugee Council: £100 will pay for the education and travel for two children for a week.

Unicef: The UN's children's charity is providing life-saving supplies such as clean water, medicine and psychological support. £11 will provide an emergency water kit for a family.

Save the Children: £50 will provide two hygiene kits including soap, towels and toothbrushes.

British Red Cross: £30 will buy 28 mats to help Syrian refugees cope with the cold.

## **Educate your students**

We are planning assemblies for each year group to explain the crisis to our students in an age-appropriate way and prepare them for the possibility of welcoming new peers to our school.

Our academy trust has provided sample lesson plans for key stage 1 and key stage 2 to help teachers get started. Students are encouraged to ask and answer questions about the status and rights of refugees and ways that they can help. At the end of the lessons, students write messages and questions for refugees and the government and display them in their classes – with the potential to tweet them to 10 Downing Street.

We are also getting students to send toys and letters to refugees. Most of the children who receive these boxes will not end up in our school, but we want to show them that there are children in Britain who welcome them.

## **Plan for potential arrivals**

Many schools already have comprehensive systems in place to support students arriving from all corners of the globe, and these systems need to be adapted for potentially large numbers of new students.

Some schools will be more prepared than others. At Ark Elvin Academy in London, for example, 50 languages are spoken. Each teacher is trained in teaching English as a second language, and in the cultures and backgrounds of the different groups in the school.

But if you don't have this internal expertise, there are ways to bring it in. My school has forged links with language charity English for Action, which has agreed to provide free English lessons for our students and their families. There are other similar charities across the UK, including:

- English for Action – working across London.
- English in the Community – working in the south-east.
- The English-Speaking Union – 35 branches and 5,000 members across England and Wales.

## **Reach out to your networks**

Teachers and school leaders will be involved in various networks that they can work with to share resources and ideas. I've reached out to other school leaders across the UK via my professional network, Future Leaders, and have been moved by the reciprocal pledges I have received.

My school has also joined the six others in the STEP Academy Trust to work with Citizens UK, which advises schools across Britain on how to respond to the crisis. The organisation is made up of a network of local citizens alliances, so you can get support from a chapter near you.

## **Why help?**

It's not easy juggling the daily demands of teaching and school leadership, and adding in responsibility for helping other children may seem too much. But as a teacher I feel it is my responsibility to support every child in having equal opportunities in life.

We owe this to our students, too. They may be meeting their targets in English and maths, but we have failed in our responsibility as educators if they do not leave us as caring, active citizens in their communities. Let's take this opportunity to model active citizenship and show our students what it means to lead.

## What is the issue?

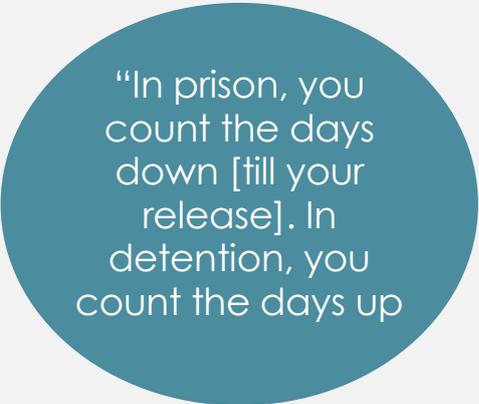
This year has seen the greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Amid heated debate about the UK's response, the shameful truth is that Britain is the only country in Europe where asylum-seekers are locked up indefinitely. There is a connection between how we talk about those seeking sanctuary here and how we treat individuals once we arrive. Under current UK immigration law people seeking asylum from persecution can be detained and held in custody for an indefinite amount of time. Although, UK Home Office policy states that asylum seekers are supposed to be processed as soon as possible, the length of time in detention can range from months to years.

As a consequence of this policy, asylum seekers are held for lengthy periods in centres like Campsfield and Yarl's Wood, often without proper access to legal assistance or any sense of the proceedings on their case. Many asylum seekers are already very vulnerable, fleeing conflict and overcoming terrible ordeals to make their way to the UK. The effect of this practice on these detainees is horrific, especially for vulnerable people such as pregnant women, survivors of sexual violence and people suffering from mental illnesses, who receive no specialised care for their needs. Even Russia has a time limit.

## Why is this bad?

On a practical level, individuals wait in detention for months, sometimes even years, without knowing if they are close to release or deportation. The psychological effect of this open-ended sentencing can be disastrous, with research showing connection between indefinite detention and mental illness, suicide attempts and deaths. The conditions in detention are themselves of great concern, with reports of gross negligence towards detainees with medical needs, and abusive behaviour and practices on the part of officers reportedly commonplace.

Seeking asylum is a human right. The UK has a long history of accepting those fleeing oppression and welcoming them into society, though today, those who make the long and often treacherous journey to the UK are detained upon arrival.



“In prison, you count the days down [till your release]. In detention, you count the days up”

Open-ended detention is not only an egregious breach of the UK's moral obligation to help vulnerable people fleeing persecution; it is also a very ineffective system. The recent parliamentary inquiry into immigration detention described the system as "expensive, ineffective and unjust." The Home Office is currently wasting £76 million a year detaining migrants, many of whom are ultimately released. Reforms to the detention system could therefore mean bringing about a set of new practices that are more humane for asylum seekers, and ultimately far more efficient in terms of public spending.

### **Why is it a Jewish issue?**

'Strangers in a strange land'

Jewish experience and Jewish values combine to make this a Jewish issue. The concept of asylum goes back as far as the ancient Hebrews, Egyptians and Greeks, who recognised that a person persecuted for their political or religious beliefs could seek sanctuary in a foreign country. The UK has a strong history of providing a sanctuary for people fleeing atrocities, including the Jewish people. Modern concepts of asylum stem from the horrors of World War II, as do many modern human rights protections. Jewish experience of immigration to this country is still very raw and recent. Further, it was the experience of many German, Italian and Czechoslovakian Jews who had escaped Germany to England to be detained on the Isle of Man during the beginning of the Second World War. Many things differ from that experience to this, but one unifying factor is the portrayal of asylum seekers in negative terms by the media of the day. Genuine asylum seekers do not only exist in the past.

### **What can people do?**

- Find out more on the issue by checking out [www.renecassin.org](http://www.renecassin.org) or follow us on social media @Rene\_Cassin and through our newsletter for the latest updates on the campaign.
- Invite a Freed Voice member to your community to hear the voice of someone who has been through detention
- Join in the social media campaign #Unlocked15 to add your voice to the growing movement calling for an overhaul of the UK detention system. Tweet in a picture of what you would miss if you were locked up without a trial and without a time limit.
- Help us lobby politicians and so much more, get in touch with René Cassin at [info@renecassin.org](mailto:info@renecassin.org)



# Upon Arrival

By Ben Wright

Campaigns and Education Officer for JCORE

Since the summer refugees have been a constant fixture in British news broadcasts and publications. Whether the reports have left us feeling empathy, anger, frustration or emptiness, it has been a topic near impossible not to engage with. Yet the images we've often seen have been from beyond our borders: refugees fleeing Syria, crossing the Mediterranean, families walking through Europe and camped in Calais. It's been difficult for many to connect with refugees on a more personal level here in the UK. They remain for most of us, a faceless and silent, unseen minority.

Refugees however, arrive in the UK every day. Last year 31,433 people applied for asylum in the UK. Of these, many apply for asylum once in the country. This may be because they were told to this by those who helped them get to the UK or because they want to get advice before making an application.

## Ehsan's story

Forced to flee Iran following his participation in a student protest, Ehsan's family paid people-smugglers to bring him to the UK. Once here, he was directed to the offices of the UK Border Agency in Croydon. Upon arrival Ehsan sat down with a caseworker from the Border agency for a screening interview. His personal details were registered, along with information about why he fled Iran, his journey to the UK and checks made to see if he had applied for asylum in the UK or Europe before. After this, Ehsan was housed in a temporary hostel with a number of other asylum seekers.

Two and-a-half weeks later Ehsan was moved out of London and housed in an apartment in Bradford with two other Iranian asylum seekers.

With no means to support himself, Ehsan was registered on NASS (National Asylum Support Service). This entitled him to the no-choice accommodation in which he was placed in Bradford and £36.95 per-week in cash support. This covered food, clothing, travel costs, toiletries and any other necessities he needed. Three weeks after moving to Bradford, Ehsan sat down with Home Office staff, a lawyer and a translator for his substantive interview (main asylum interview).

Ehsan met his lawyer for the first time an hour before the substantive interview. The interview lasted a number of hours, covering in detail his life in Iran, why he fled Iran, how he left the country and how he reached the UK. Over the course of the interview Ehsan was challenged on a number of his experiences. Differences between what he said in this interview and his screening interview were continuously

questioned and inconsistencies highlighted. Often Ehsan was left unsure of what to say. After the interview, he was told it would be a number of weeks before he received a decision on his case.

While he waited for his claim to be resolved, Ehsan had little to do. Every week at a specified time he had to report to an Immigration Office. Failure to do so one week meant he was detained in an Immigration Detention Centre. Men arrived at his door early one morning, put him in a van and took him to Pennine House detention centre in Manchester. 26 days later he was released. His room had been given to another asylum seeker and he was placed in another property in Bradford. Ehsan spent much of his time volunteering at an Oxfam shop, taking English classes at a drop-in centre and connecting with other Iranian refugees in Bradford.

Five months after arriving at the UK Border Agency in Croydon, Ehsan was told that his application for asylum had been refused. His lawyer helped him put together an appeal against the Home Office decision. This went to an Immigration Judge, independent from the Home Office. Ehsan spent the next three weeks again in detention before being placed in temporary accommodation for the fourth time. His appeal took another 5 months to be heard after his initial decision, and a further two weeks for judgement to be made. Ehsan was given refugee status, with the right to remain in the UK for five years. After five years Ehsan will be able to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Upon being granted refugee status, Ehsan had 28 days to sort out his future before his asylum support (accommodation and £36.95 p/w) was ended.

Ehsan's experience is similar to that of thousands of asylum seekers in the UK. In 2014, 41% of asylum applications were successful. Nearly 30% of those who appeal a refusal have the Home Office judgement overruled and are granted some form of protection. On this evidence, the quality of decision-making by the Home Office could be improved when dealing with asylum cases. For many, after experiencing trauma at home and on their journey to the UK, their experiences here take a further emotional and physical toll on them. Not allowed to work, a substantial number are left reliant on government support instead of being able to support themselves. The low level of support available means many, especially families, are forced to sacrifice one necessity over another, food over adequate clothing for their children, or transport to meet their lawyer instead of soap and shampoo.

There is however much we can do to support asylum seekers in the UK. The Jewish Council for Racial Equality campaigns extensively on the rights for asylum seekers and refugees. Our No Way to Live campaign aims to give asylum seekers who have been in the UK for over 6 months and are still awaiting a decision, the right to work. Our Asylum Support campaign is putting pressure on the government to make

sure that asylum seekers receive an adequate level of support and are not forced into destitution.

We also run JUMP (JCORE's Unaccompanied Minors Project) which pairs up young asylum seekers in the UK without parents or guardians with a volunteer befriender, and Refugee Doctors. Refugee Doctors pairs a refugee doctor with a British doctor, who mentors them as they work to requalify so that they can practice in the UK.

Beyond JCORE, Detention Action train and organise volunteer visitors to provide one-to-one support for people held in Colnbrook and Harmondsworth detention centres, while Rene Cassin is campaigning on the issue of indefinite detention for asylum seekers and migrants.

The synagogue drop-ins for asylum seekers and refugees in London also do incredible work, with one taking place every Sunday. Find out more about them here, or click here to read a previous posting on the New North London Synagogue drop-in.

# Refugees and Normality

By Walter Rothschild

Journal of The Association of Jewish Refugees

Germany is not a normal country. There is no need to be surprised by this. A country that has expanded and contracted so many times over the past 200 years is a country that can never quite work out where its borders are.

A country which was physically and ideologically split for an entire generation – from 1961 to 1990 – so that for 30 years Germans shot and killed Germans because they were trying to flee Germany in order to get to Germany ... A country which then suddenly had to open these borders and say 'Hey, we are all united again – isn't this wonderful!' while carefully covering up so many instances of oppression and injustice, carries, of course, immense internal traumata.

A country which spent almost 50 years occupied by the powers which had beaten it in a previous incarnation has trouble coming to terms with what really happened and can see itself as the victim. Entire regions have reverted to a pre-industrial peasant mentality.

The Jews in Germany are also not normal. But the Jews in Germany are mostly not Germans. Or, if they are, they are Germans who became Jews. The majority are technically 'refugees' from the former Soviet Union: not only can they not read Hebrew, they need lessons to be able to read German! Many came here at an advanced age. Some have children and grandchildren here who are growing up in the West but find themselves – as has been the case throughout history – living in two worlds.

Many Germans are fascinated by Judaism; many resent it. Although parts of the media are obsessed with it at a very superficial level, most know nothing about it. An increasing proportion of German citizens were not only born after the events of the mid-20th century but actually come from totally different countries and continents and do not share this history at all.

The AJR exists to serve the needs – as far as possible – of Jews who fled or were expelled from several European countries in the 1930s and 1940s. Interestingly, the Bundesrepublik Deutschland had to absorb many thousands of refugees – the Vertriebenen from Ostpreussen or Ost-Pommern or Sudetenland or from Schlesien - just a few years later. It then spent several decades accepting refugees from the DDR before mass flight in 1989 brought down what was left of the DDR structure. So the whole country is built on refugees and on the experience of the parents or grandparents of almost every citizen.

The Jewish community remained absolutely tiny until die Wende –the Reunification – when it was decided at some political level to allow in 100,000 'Jewish refugees' as Kontingentflüchtlinge. Although this move has created several other issues, how many of these people were actually Jewish? How many actually wanted to be Jewish once they got out?

The fact is that the overwhelming majority of Jews in the communities in Germany are technically also 'refugees', those who fled a country that was collapsing from within.

And now we are faced with more refugees – from countries south or east of the Mediterranean but also from the Balkans. And suddenly it's a major political problem. Of course, any organisation can be briefly overwhelmed when literally thousands of hungry, homeless people appear within a week so I do not want to criticise the Notaufnahme arrangements, which are far from perfect but at least wellmeant. Of course, politicians argue about who should be paying – the Kommunen, the Länder or the Bund. Of course, there are bureaucratic problems with officials who do not speak the languages of the asylum-seekers. This is normal and should calm down after a few months.

What interests me is the emotional response – 'they' are coming 'here'. No one ever asks how Israel managed to absorb so many immigrants, with different languages and cultures and few resources and little security. No one seems to ask 'Would I be here if my grandfather had not been allowed to come a few decades ago?' In 1946 up to half or more of the population of some parts of Brandenburg was formed of refugees and I sometimes ask a school class how many of them have or had four grandparents all from Brandenburg.

We as Jews have been warned many, many times never to forget that we were once wanderers in the wilderness, escaping oppression. We have been invaded and we have been in exile.

By August at least ten desperate young men and women had died trying to flee this year from France to England. They were unwanted and feared. Will 'Calais' be found inscribed on their hearts? I doubt it.

Has the world got any better since 1939? Alas, I need not provide an answer to this question. Sudden developments at the time of writing (early September) – stimulated largely by public disgust at images of corpses on the beaches or reports of dozens suffocated in what were little more than mobile gas chambers on the Autobahns – indicate a changed awareness and this is to be welcomed. Britain too is having to bow to the inevitable. If such a large proportion of the world's population are now desperate refugees, they will have to go somewhere. And where?

# Asylum Seekers in Israel: An Overview

## Hotline for Refugees and Migrants Editorial

Israel is home to 45,000 asylum-seekers who arrived in Israel from Africa through Sinai. The State and most Israeli media outlets label those people as “infiltrators”, a term originally used in the 1950s to denote Palestinian refugees who entered Israel at first to salvage their belonging and work their lands and then to commit sabotage and terror attacks. The use of this term is intended to portray asylum-seekers as a security threat. Asylum-seekers is the legal term used to denote people who left their country and arrived to another country and declared that they will be in danger if returned to their homeland. The review of the individual asylum claim of the asylum-seeker is the process of examining whether the person is a refugee or not. However, the State finding a person to be a refugee or not has only a declarative role.

A refugee, as stated in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, is a person “who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

92% of asylum-seekers in Israel hail from Eritrea (73%) and Sudan (19%). Both are dictatorships that brutally repress their populations and violate their human rights. Sudanese citizens who live in Israel escaped genocide and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Arab Khartoum regime against African (non-Arab) tribes located in western Sudan (Darfur) and southern Sudan (the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile region). Citizens of Eritrea flee a country with no civilian judiciary, a country that never held democratic elections and whose citizens are obligated to perform endless national service. This service is unlike the service performed in other armies and includes performing various forms of hard labor for the benefit of the regime, including: mining, paving roads and agricultural work. Eritreans who defect from national service are considered traitors and if they are caught, they are tortured and sometimes executed or tortured to death. Despite the severe punishments for defector, each month over 1,000 soldiers defect from the national service and flee the country.

Israel maintains a policy of “temporary protection” or “delay of removal” for Sudanese and Eritrean nationals, so as to be in compliance with the non-refoulement principle. The principle, the heart of the Refugee Convention, forbids states to deport people to a place where their lives or liberty is likely to be endangered. However, asylum-seekers from those countries who are not in detention were not eligible to file

asylum requests until late 2013. As of April 2014, only two Eritrean nationals and zero Sudanese citizens were recognized as refugees in Israel, eliciting criticism from the High Court of Justice.

Israel grants asylum-seekers a visa that only gives them the right not to be deported from Israel until their deportation is possible. On these visas, a Ministry of Interior stamp reads: “This permit is not a work permit”, but because of the State made an obligation to the High Court of Justice, employers of asylum seekers are not fined. Because many employers are unaware of this, asylum-seekers have to make do with temporary jobs and are willing to work for less than minimum wage. Israel makes it difficult for asylum-seekers to work and bars them for access to medical and welfare services because it believes that the “infiltrators” come to Israel to work and harming their ability to live in dignity in Israel will deter more of them from coming and would encourage those who are already in Israel to leave. In practice, until the construction of the border fence with Egypt was completed in 2012, African asylum-seekers kept entering Israel in the hope of finding refuge here.

Asylum-seekers in Israel live mostly in areas where the cost of living is comparatively low, meaning, in the economic periphery of Israel: the neighborhoods of southern Tel Aviv, impoverished neighborhoods in Jerusalem, Eilat, Arad and Ashqelon. Asylum-seekers often live in very crowded apartments in those areas due to their low wages and because apartment owners exploit the fact that many landlords are unwilling to rent apartments to Africans and raise the prices. One can find apartments where ten asylum-seekers live in just one room. The crowdedness that characterizes the living conditions of asylum-seekers increases the burden on the already-poor infrastructure of the impoverished areas where refugees live, increasing the anguish of the Israeli residents of those neighborhoods.

In addition to depriving asylum-seekers of social and economic rights, Israeli officials, even at the highest levels, are waging an incitement campaign against the refugees that is designed to justify the State’s treatment of them, which differs widely from the practice of other nations. Asylum-seekers are presented as “work infiltrators” who came to Israel to work, and not as humans who were persecuted and whose lives will be in danger if they are deported from Israel. Government officials struggle to explain why these people, who according to them are illegal work migrants, are not deported from the country as Israel routinely does with undocumented migrants. In addition, ministers and elected politicians present refugees as criminals and spreaders of disease based on racial stereotypes. The asylum-seekers, who make up about 0.5% of Israel’s population, are also presented as a demographic and a security threat.

After Israel realized that depriving asylum-seekers of basic rights does not deter more of them from coming, along with constructing a fence along the entire Egypt-Israel border, the Netanyahu government pushed through an amendment to the Anti-

Infiltration Law (originally used against terrorists in the 1950s). Under the amended law, which was enacted in June 2012, all asylum-seekers who entered Israel were jailed for a minimum period of three years, except in extraordinary humanitarian cases. This law was voided by the High Court of Justice in a ruling issued on September 2013, following a petition of human rights organizations, including the Hotline. In response, the government rushed to pass a new amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law. Under the second version of the law, asylum-seekers who enter Israel after the law came into force (December 2013), will be jailed for a year. After a year in jail without trial, the asylum-seeker will be transferred to an internment camp for asylum-seekers that the state calls an “open center for residents”, located across the road from the prisons for refugees, near the border with Egypt. Along with the new arrivals, any asylum-seeker already in Israel can be jailed in this “open” detention camp called “Holot”. This law, too, was voided by the High Court of Justice following a petition by human rights organizations, including the Hotline. This is the first time in Israeli history that the High Court twice voided the same law. To bypass this ruling, the Knesset passed a third version of the law. Under this version, which is currently in force, asylum-seekers will be imprisoned for three months after entering Israel. Following this period of imprisonment without trial, the asylum-seekers are transferred to the Holot detention camp for a period of 20 months. Since the border fence has halted nearly all unauthorized crossings into Israel, the overwhelming majority of the detainees in Holot are asylum-seekers who’ve lived in Israel for years and were ordered to report to detention when they came to renew their conditional release visa at the Ministry of Interior. Asylum-seekers are torn from their lives, their jobs, their friends, and sent to live in a detention camp in the middle of the desert without ever being accused of a crime. The purpose of the law is to coerce the asylum-seekers into “voluntarily” leaving Israel, since Israel cannot deport them by force. In August 2015, the Israeli High Court of Justice issued a ruling in response to a petition by Israeli human rights organizations, including the Hotline, which reduced the detention period in Holot from 20 to 12 months.

# Which Israel will determine G's fate?

By Prof. Naomi Chazan,

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants Board member

Contemporary Israel is one big bundle of contradictions: it is often as uplifting as it is off-putting; as compassionate as it is oppressive; as humane as it is cruel. Its people display amazing kindness and warmth, yet constantly exhibit reprehensible intolerance and xenophobia. They selflessly tender care to the needy while they close their doors to the dispossessed. And they sustain untenable policies at odds with the basic principles of human dignity which they claim to hold so dear. Nowhere is this odd admixture more visible than in Israel's treatment of the African refugees and asylum-seekers that have reached its shores in recent years. The story of G (full name withheld) tells it all.

G was born in a small village in a war-torn West African state some 25 years ago. When he was barely eleven years old, militant rebels captured his hometown, razed his home and murdered his entire family before his eyes. He managed, somehow, to escape — only to fall into the hands of human traffickers who transferred him, along with others, to Egypt. Some two years later, he and his cohorts were smuggled across Sinai into Israel and then abandoned.

That is when the good Israel took over. G and a close friend were picked up and sent to a boarding school in the north of the country. They were enveloped in the warmth of the principal and the staff. G was placed in the hands of an adoptive family and began, with their love and the tremendous goodwill he so desperately needed, to begin to heal the wounds of the traumatic experiences he had undergone. While other children his age were celebrating their bar-mitzvah, G started to retrieve what was left of his childhood.

For four years, embraced and encouraged by marvellous people who were aware of the immense complexity of his background, G slowly came into his own. He studied, made friends and began to flourish — always propped up by people who were cautious of his fragility and understood his sensitivity. Five years ago, G successfully completed his matriculation exams, making him eligible for admission to one of Israel's institutions of higher education.

Throughout his high school years, G was protected from harassment by the immigration authorities: as a minor he was safe from deportation. Yet repeated attempts to secure him official residency status in Israel failed. Once G completed his secondary education, he no longer enjoyed these safeguards. His country of origin was a numbing memory. He had nowhere to go, could not receive a work permit and was

unclear as to how to proceed. He decided, together with the friend and compatriot who had accompanied him on his tortuous journey, to pursue his dream of a college education.

Four years ago G started to study at one of Israel's foremost public colleges. Here, too, he benefited from an attentive administration, cooperative faculty and a group of students who took it upon themselves to help him when needed. He was granted a full scholarship, but — lacking any formal status — could not work to supplement his meager stipend. His application for a student visa was lost in a bureaucratic morass. He decided, with the backing of his guardians and the support of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrant Workers, to file for permanent residency. His requests were turned down time and again. Even his petition for residency on humanitarian grounds was rejected by the authorities (he is now waiting for a hearing on his appeal).

During his four years as an undergraduate, G has experienced both the warmth of extraordinary Israelis and the cold crassness of others. He has moved from the relative safety of the classroom to the constant threat of arrest by immigration police on the streets. Every time he was accosted, he was able to prove that he is a student in good standing. But he spent sleepless nights until, finally, in his third year, he received a student visa. He has barely scraped through, yet he has survived and even thrived.

G is just completing his final requirements for his first degree and has begun to explore possibilities for graduate studies. His future, however, is totally uncertain. Israeli policy sees him as yet another infiltrator to be summarily extradited. The only home he knows is Israel; the only language he speaks properly is Hebrew; all his friends and support mechanisms are here. He simply has nowhere to go — but Israel doesn't want him.

For years, policy-makers have done everything possible to avoid Israel's obligations according to international refugee conventions to which it is signatory (and which it itself initiated in the aftermath of World War Two). It has failed to process most of the thousands of applications for refugee status — granting barely a handful in the past decade. It has promoted degrading legislation (struck down twice by the High Court and now revived), allowing for the detainment of asylum-seekers in Holot. It continues to incarcerate others in Saharonim prison. It has launched a program of expulsion of African migrants to third countries under the guise of “voluntary” repatriation, where their condition is, to put it mildly, precarious.

Since the recent elections, while parliamentary oversight has been minimal, the government has begun to simply expel even heretofore protected Eritrean and Sudanese nationals. And, above all, it has allowed a public campaign against foreigners to fester for several years with impunity. In complete defiance not only of

international law, but also of Jewish history and elementary human values, Israel — instead of designing a measured, reasonable and humane policy towards asylum-seekers — persists in doing everything to exclude the foreigners from its midst.

G is the recipient of all that is good in Israelis and all that is wrong with Israel's unconscionable policy towards those seeking refuge in its midst. Even G, who is the beneficiary of the goodwill of so many Israelis (for whom his success provides such satisfaction), is still in limbo. His formal standing is now a matter of life or death. G was recently diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. He is hospitalized and is currently undergoing intense treatment — surrounded by friends, faculty-members and students who have mobilized to accompany him at all times. But he lacks the peace of mind so essential for his recuperation. His status — in every sense of the word — remains ambiguous.

Which Israel will determine G's fate? Will it be the Israel which has adopted him and made him one of its own? Or will it be the Israel that refuses to see the skilled and competent young man who has emerged from the bruised and shattered orphan dumped on its doorstep over a decade ago and insists that he leave the country forthwith? In many respects, G's story — and future — is that of Israel.

*Taken from the Hotline for Refugee and Migrants blog, read more here:*

<http://hotline.org.il/en/blog/>

# The Anti-Infiltration Law Has Changed The Lives of These People

By Adv. Asaf Weitzen

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants Legal Director

For just over three years, I have been working for the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants as a lawyer. Almost throughout this entire period we have been dealing with the Anti-Infiltration Law and its negative impact. The Supreme Court has already voided the law twice following petitions we submitted together with other organizations. Perversely, the Knesset has also resurrected the law twice.

The Anti-Infiltration Law has received a great deal of publicity. Many view it as an unnecessary evil and a threat to the democratic principles of Israeli society. Others consider it as “a central pillar of Israel’s migration policy”, or excuse it in some other nonsensical way. Since the law is much more than merely a set of pompous words for anyone working and volunteering at the Hotline, I think it’s appropriate to share three stories of people whose lives were changed because of the law. One story for every metamorphosis of the law.

## **The story of Amy (real name was changed)**

Amy is an Eritrean asylum seeker. She entered Israel in early June 2012 and was held in the Saharonim facility for over a year as a result of the third amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law. She was jailed without a trial, without any attempt made to expel her, and on the other hand, without her application for refuge examined or decided upon throughout this entire period.

Amy, 24 years old, was one of the petitioners against the first version of the law. Throughout the time in which the court examined the intricate question of whether jailing people without a trial for a period of three years is constitutional and shall be allowed, Amy was locked up. In one of my visits to meet her in Saharonim, after a year in jail and when again I could not guarantee her date of release (if at all), she came out

crying and broken. A young warden saw her sad and conducted the following dialogue with me:

Warden: “How come Amy is down?”

Me: “Because she’s been jailed for over a year and we could not promise her release anytime soon”.

Warden: “And does she not want to return to Eritrea?”

Me: “No”.

Warden: “Why is that?”

Me: “Since terrible things are bound to happen to her there. That is also why the State of Israel does not try to send her back there”.

Warden: “So how come she’s in jail???”

Finally, after endless legal procedures we conducted on her behalf (in parallel to the constitutional petition), the District Court released Amy because her application for asylum had not been examined on time (Amy’s application was rejected after one year in jail). Several months later, Sweden recognized her as a refugee and she moved there with the help of the UNHCR. I recently spoke to her over Skype and she told me that she is well, learning the language and – for the first time in her life – that there is a state that takes care of her and grants her a place in the world. She added that she would like to come and visit Jerusalem, since she had heard it is very pretty, and did not get to see it during the time she was in Israel. Amy will never get back the year that she spent imprisoned in Israel.

## **The story of Pomidin**

Like Amy, Pomidin also entered Israel in June 2012 and was held in detention facilities until about two months ago. Pomidin comes from the Darfur region of Sudan, where he had to abandon his studies of Economics and flee. In his first year and a half in Israel he was jailed in Saharonim Prison while his application for asylum was pending (actually there hasn’t been a decision on it until today). This is not unique to Pomidin’s case. Until today, not a single decision has been made regarding the many asylum applications submitted by those who have fled Darfur.

After Pomidin had spent a year and three months in jail, the Supreme Court annulled the Anti- Infiltration Law in September 2013. According to the ruling of the court, Pomidin's life was about to change from being jailed without a trial into "a life of freedom and hope for the future" (quoted from the court's decision). However, the Ministry of the Interior did not follow the court's order to release all those imprisoned in Saharonim under the Anti-Infiltration Law, and instead dragged on for three months until a new amendment was passed, then transferring him in a cold winter night in mid-December to the "open" facility Holot, which had been built just across from the Saharonim Prison. After two days in Holot, Pomidin walked out with several hundred of other asylum seekers in a march to Jerusalem that came to be known as the Freedom March. As a penalty, he was jailed for three additional months in Saharonim – again without a trial. Several days later we served an appeal against his imprisonment in Saharonim and his transfer to Holot. But the courts stalled the hearings on our appeal for about six months (there were four hearings in the District Court, as well as two appeals to the Supreme Court, and during all that time Pomidin continued to be held in Holot). Finally, after the second appeal to the Supreme Court, the state retreated and announced Pomidin would be released.

But the release of Pomidin after two years of imprisonment did nothing to change the conduct of the Ministry of the Interior. Only after another appeal to the Supreme Court was made, was another group of 180 asylum seekers – with very similar stories to Pomidin's – released following two and a half years in jail.

## **The story of Mutasim**

Mutasim Ali was fortunate. He arrived in Israel prior to the amendment of the Anti-Infiltration Law, and was therefore jailed "only" for four and a half months. The residency permit he received did not grant him the right to work, which would have been essential for him to sustain himself in Israel. But against all odds, Mutasim successfully learned Hebrew, made Israeli, Sudanese and Eritrean friends, and in parallel volunteered for the refugee aid organization ARDC , which he was eventually appointed to manage. Mutasim had attempted to apply for asylum in 2010, but the Ministry of the Interior had replied that he was not entitled to submit a request since he was receiving "group protection" as a Sudanese by default. By the end of 2012, Mutasim finally decided to file a request for asylum none-the-less, but until today no decision has been given in his case. All of this did not stop a bureaucrat at the Ministry of the Interior to summon Mutasim to Holot in January 2013. The summons was issued without providing reasons for the decision and without hearing Mutasim or considering his past and present life in Israel. How come? Because the newly amended

Anti-Infiltration Law made it possible. Subsequently, an appeal to the District Court was rejected, which is why Mutasim has been held in Holot since early May 2014. Thus, overnight, Mutasim turned from an efficient, volunteering and working man, who was sustaining himself and helping his friends, into a man dependent on an “allowance” of \$130 a month, expected to stroll around aimlessly throughout the day, while being monitored and disciplined by a regime of wardens and Interior Ministry bureaucrats. While it is true that the Supreme Court has already annulled the fourth amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law, based on which the Holot facility was established, Mutasim is still locked up there: The Knesset passed yet another amendment to circumvent the most recent Supreme Court ruling and to keep Holot running. Mutasim appealed to the Supreme Court following the ruling of the District Court. And if the directive for a temporary moratorium on the operation of Holot remains intact for long enough, Mutasim will be released along with everyone else who is currently being held there.

Any other option would simply be a crime against him and against all of us.

Every additional day which Mutasim remains in Holot is in contempt of previous Supreme Court rulings mandating the closure of the facility in its current form of operation. It is also in contempt of our heritage, of the commitment taken on by the State of Israel when it signed the Convention on Refugees, and of the basic values that shall be common to all of humanity.

Amy, Pomidin and Mutasim have spent an accumulative term of four years in jail. The time in prison has harmed them in a terrible and irreversible way, has cost the Israeli tax payer a fortune and resulted in nothing, neither with regards to the difficult situation in South Tel Aviv, nor to the “Jewish identity” of the state. Ahead of the hearing on our third constitutional appeal, it is time to stop this madness. It is time to stop locking up asylum seekers and time to think of real and just solutions.

*Taken from the Hotline for Refugee and Migrants blog, read more here:*

<http://hotline.org.il/en/blog/>

# Sukkot and the Refugee Crisis: What We Learnt From 40 Years of Wandering

By Jonathon Leader

Habonim Dror UK

We are currently in the process of celebrating Sukkot, the Jewish chag which simultaneously serves to celebrate and give thanks for a bountiful harvest “mmm wheat” the ancient Hebrews would declare; and also to commemorate our time, 40 years to be precise, of wandering the desert and living in temporary sukkot (booths or dwellings). Traditionally, this has always been one of the most joyous occasions on the Jewish calendar, we shake lulavs and etrogs to our hearts content, we eat pomegranate seeds, we sit in our lovely sukkot; and celebrate that after those hard 40 years, we were granted our salvation; altogether, a great time is had by all.

However this year, perhaps more than other years, commemorating our own time “meandering” in the wilderness, stateless; with nowhere to go is particularly poignant; in a not so joyous way. Currently we are witnessing the largest global refugee crisis in history; in 2014 the number of global refugees exceeded 50 million for the first time since the Second World War. Many of those refugees are fleeing the horrifying scenes broadcast globally from Syria, stuck between the rock of the brutal Assad regime and the hard place of the genocidal fanatics of the Islamic State. There are a number of sources in Jewish tradition which lay out our responsibilities to these people, most poignant of these is surely:

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not taunt him. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be as a native from among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

I don't feel it necessary, in this blog, to remind the Jewish world of all the other experiences we've had as strangers, those experiences have become a central theme of the Jewish story. We know them, because not so long ago, it was our great-grandparents and grandparents, arriving on the shores of Britain from Russia, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, France, the list goes on.

Now in fairness, the Jewish response to this crisis has been admirable, we've seen the youth movement world mobilise, arranging donation drives, helping sort donations, sending volunteering missions to Calais, in many ways, this has been a fine example of

empowered youth taking action when necessary. However, like in all struggles, there is still work to do.

We can also not forget those asylum seekers currently in detention in the UK, our government is currently the only one in Europe to still have no time limit on detention. In Israel for example, \*thanks to the Supreme Court\*, asylum seekers being held in the Holot detention centre can only be held there for a maximum of one year. In the UK, those being held in Yarls Wood “Immigration Removal Centre” (yes that’s actually what they call it) can be held indefinitely.

So when you’re next sat in your Sukkah, thinking about our time spent wandering in the desert, and how we were eventually granted our salvation, please take some time to think about those still wandering, still stateless, still oppressed and still, ultimately, strangers.

Aleh Vehagshem,

Leader. X