



University of
Nottingham
Human Rights Law Centre

REFUGEE WEEK 2023

SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

23 June 2023

Presented by Student Caseworkers at the
Human Rights Law Centre Refugee Clinic



REFUGEE WEEK



**REFUGEE WEEK (19TH-25TH
JUNE 2023)**



Refugee Week is the world's largest arts & culture festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. The festival was founded in 1998 in the UK and is held annually around [World Refugee Day \(20 June\)](#).

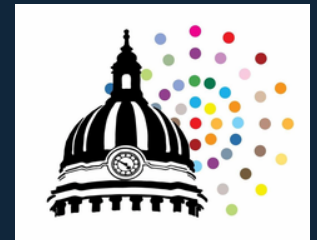
Through a programme of arts, cultural, sports and educational events alongside media and creative campaigns, Refugee Week enables people from different backgrounds to connect beyond labels, and encourages an understanding of why people are displaced, and the challenges they face when seeking safety.

Refugee Week's vision is for refugees and asylum seekers to be able to live safely within inclusive and resilient communities, where they can continue to make a valuable contribution.

[You can learn more here.](#)



"A week-long festival to welcome, celebrate and stand alongside people who are seeking asylum and who are refugees within the city of Nottingham."



[You can learn more about Nottingham's Refugee Week celebrations here.](#)

CONTENTS

Who We Are	04
Who is a Refugee?	05
An Interview with Adel Hamad: A Refugee's Journey to Education and Advocacy.	07
Supporting Refugees: Organisations making a difference.	08
The Illegal Migration Bill: Examining the Challenges and Implications for Asylum Seekers and Refugees with Dr Natalie Hodgson.	12
Unveiling the Essence of Compassion.	14
How to Get Involved.	16
Examining Refugee Representation in Media: Book, Film and Television Reviews.	17

WHO WE ARE



Mohammad Ismail

I am undertaking an LLM in International Law at the University of Nottingham. I also have an LLB (Hons) from the University of Nottingham. I am interested in how international law can be used to improve the lives of people across the globe.



Frankie Woodman

I have just finished my undergraduate degree at the University of Nottingham – studying law with French and French law. I am really interested in refugee/asylum law and hope to work with refugees in the future.



Ritika Goyal

I am pursuing an LLM in Human Rights Law at the University of Nottingham. My research interests lie primarily in the areas of international human rights law, criminal justice system, and refugee law.



Rosie Woodward

I am studying for a master's degree in International Law and Development. I have studied refugee politics and international refugee law and I am passionate about improving the welfare of refugees.

We are student caseworkers at the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) Refugee Clinic. The Clinic is housed within the HRLC's Forced Migration Unit and works in collaboration with Across Borders and St Andrews Refugee Services (StARS) in Egypt to support refugee and asylum applications to the UN Refugee Agency's Cairo office. As caseworkers, we assist with drafting these applications and carry out country of origin research.

To learn more about the Clinic and the work of the Forced Migration unit, please [visit our website](#).

As part of Refugee Week 2023, we have put together this newsletter in order to highlight some of the issues that refugees and asylum seekers are facing, as well as promote this year's Refugee Week theme of 'Compassion'.

In this newsletter, we aim to highlight various charities working on refugee issues, alongside the work of academics and student organisations. Through interviews and reviews of relevant media, we showcase opportunities for readers to learn, and get involved with refugee and asylum related issues.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

The UN Refugee Agency estimates that there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide as of the end of 2022, as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. Among these, 35.3 million are considered refugees and 5.4 million are asylum seekers. Others are internally displaced people and people in need of international protection, such as stateless persons who have no nationality.

[[UNHCR - Refugee Statistics](#)]

CONVENTION AND PROTOCOL RELATING TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES

A refugee is someone who fled their home and country owing to ‘a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’, according to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention. They are often forced to flee war, violence, conflict or persecution, and are among the most vulnerable people in the world. Asylum seekers are people whose claim to official, legal refugee status is not yet definitively evaluated in the country to which they fled. Since, by definition, refugees and asylum seekers are not protected by their own governments or in their own countries, the international community is required to step in to ensure they are safe and protected.

Refugees are protected under international law by the **1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol** which provide the internationally recognised definition of a refugee and outline the legal protection, rights and assistance a refugee is entitled to receive.

The most important of these rights and the core principle of the 1951 Convention is ‘**non-refoulement**’ which states that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. Other rights outlined by the Convention include: the right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions; the right not to be punished for irregular entry into a safe country; the right to non-discrimination; the right to decent work; the right to housing; the right to education; the right to social protection; and the right to access to justice.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

The **UN Refugee Agency** acts as the 'guardian' of these treaties and works with governments to ensure that these protections are translated into national laws that ensure refugees are protected and can exercise their rights. Countries that have signed the 1951 Convention, such as the UK, are obliged to protect refugees in their territory and treat them according to internationally recognized standards.

Dr Natalie Hodgson, Assistant Professor in Law at the University of Nottingham, elaborates on the oft-used term 'illegal migration':

"Under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.' That means that, if you and I were to one day find ourselves in a situation where we were at risk of death or torture, and the government could not or would not protect us, we would have the right to travel to another country and request asylum. Fortunately, many of us will never experience this sort of persecution in our lifetimes. But there are lots of people around the world are not so lucky, and they are forced to flee their countries in search of safety.

Under Article 31 of the Refugee Convention, States are not allowed to penalise an asylum seeker for entering a country irregularly. This provision was inserted into the Refugee Convention in recognition of the fact that people may not always be able to travel through regular routes. For example, you might not own a passport and, if you are scared that Government agents are planning to torture or kill you, you might not want to apply for a passport.



Installation in London that was part of Refugee Week 2019
Source: Guardian; Photograph: John Nguyen/PA

Or, if war breaks out, you might not be able to wait several months to apply for a passport if there is an immediate risk to your life. Often, people have a very good reason why they cannot travel through regular routes to seek asylum. For these reasons, Article 31 of the Refugee Convention recognises that it should not be a crime for a person to enter a country irregularly. And so, international law recognises that people seeking asylum are not "illegal" – they have a right to seek asylum, and the Government cannot criminalise them for seeking asylum, even if they enter a country through irregular routes."

To learn more about the international framework protecting refugees, please visit this link:
[The 1951 Refugee Convention | UNHCR](#)

AN INTERVIEW WITH ADEL HAMAD: A REFUGEE'S JOURNEY TO EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

Adel Hamad is a refugee from Syria. He came to seek asylum in the UK after fleeing the conflict in his home country in 2012. He now works for the Resettlement Team of the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF) and is currently undertaking a Master's degree in International Relations at the University of Nottingham. We had the chance to speak to Adel, who was able to tell us more about his journey to the UK.



Are you able to share some of your personal experience and journey as a Refugee?

In 2012, due to the war in Syria, I made the difficult decision to leave and embarked on a perilous journey. I crossed borders, from Lebanon to Turkey, and then ventured across the Mediterranean Sea, eventually arriving in Italy. However, life in the south of Italy was challenging, and I faced limited opportunities. Determined to find a better life, I decided to continue my journey and headed to France. Unfortunately, the reception there was not as welcoming as I had hoped. After careful consideration, I chose the UK because of its reputation for upholding human rights. It took two years, but in 2014, I arrived in the UK and was warmly welcomed by the authorities. From Dover, I made my way to London, then Birmingham, and finally settled in Nottingham.

As a student enrolled at the University of Nottingham, how do you believe the University can contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive academic atmosphere for students who are refugees or asylum seekers?

The University of Nottingham is rightly known as a "sanctuary for refugees". They have provided immense support to asylum seekers, including myself. I initially struggled, but the university offered resources to help me overcome barriers. Likewise, they can organise awareness sessions on how to apply to universities and help refugees understand the criteria for higher education. This support can bridge a significant gap in knowledge and pave the way for individuals from difficult situations to pursue my studies.

We understand that you conducted research concerning Syrian refugees as part of your thesis. Could you tell a bit about this research and some of your findings?

Throughout my master's degree in international relations, I focused my research on the experiences of Syrian refugees, particularly the impact of the terrorism discourse on their lives in the UK. I conducted interviews to explore media perception of refugees. What stood out the most was that none of the refugees or asylum seekers wanted to be labelled as such. It was not their choice to flee their country, and it is crucial for us to stand together and support those who have been forced to leave everything behind due to their race, religion, or other factors beyond their control.

SUPPORTING REFUGEES: ORGANISATIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

NOTTINGHAM CHARITIES

As Nottingham celebrates Refugee Week, we wanted to highlight some charities in the city doing fantastic work helping refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham.

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF) is a Nottingham-based charity whose mission is to support asylum seekers and refugees in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire in gaining just outcomes, rebuilding their lives and integrating into society. **Adel** sought support from NNRF when he first arrived in Nottingham:

Refugee Forum is offering remote appointments and limited face-to-face services.

To get advice and support, please call **0115 960 1230**

Monday to Thursday between 10am and 3pm or

email at info@nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk



Nottingham Refugee Forum

@NNRF1

To get advice and support, please call 0115 9601230 on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesday or Thursdays between 10am and 3pm.

Nottingham, U.K. nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk Joined May 2014

3,045 Following 2,163 Followers

"I approached Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF) to seek support. They played a crucial role in helping me navigate the challenges of starting a new life. I also began volunteering with them and other small charities in the city, which allowed me to connect with the community and contribute in meaningful ways. Therefore, Nottingham became the main place to start my life, to work, to study, and to contribute."

The NNRF also works with Nottingham City Council in order to help implement the UK Resettlement Scheme, a scheme launched in 2021 which aims to help resettle the most vulnerable refugees. The Resettlement Scheme helps to provide specialist support to newly arrived refugee families and works with families from their arrival in the UK for a period of five year.

Refugee Roots is a Christian charity that helps asylum seekers and refugees build relationships and navigate the complexities of building a new life in the UK. Their mission is to create 'a place to belong' for refugees and asylum seekers. They want refugees to feel welcome and valued and want to provide support to help rebuild lives with dignity. We had the chance to speak with the Director, **Adam Baker** about their work:



"Refugee Roots welcomes all, helping those in need find friendship and a place to call home. Refugee Roots welcomes everyone, valuing each person and their culture, embracing equality and diversity while empowering and supporting those that need it most. A range of empowerment initiatives include befriending, accompanying asylum seekers to appointments, information, advice and guidance, as well as supportive groups and activities, such as free English conversation classes. Having worked with more than 650 participants in this financial year to date to find friendship and a safe place to be."

SUPPORTING REFUGEES: ORGANISATIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

STAR Nottingham: STAR (Student Action for Refugees) is the national network of students building a more understanding and just society where refugees are welcomed and can thrive in the UK. The first STAR group was created by University of Nottingham students in 1994 and the network has since grown to reach 31 towns and cities across the UK. STAR members volunteer locally and work directly with refugees, building understanding and connections. They campaign nationally for policy change and equal access to higher education for refugees and learn about refugee protection and the asylum journey in the UK with experts and peers.



student_action_for_refugees

542 Posts 3,593 Followers 557 Following

STAR ❤️
STAR is the national network of students building a society where refugees are welcomed. We volunteer, campaign and learn together.

linktr.ee/studentaction4refugees

HUMAN RIGHTS LAW CENTRE REFUGEE CLINIC PARTNERS

We also spoke with the Refugee Clinic's partner organisations, Across Borders and St Andrews Refugee Services, to learn more about their work:



Across Borders
@acrossbordersuk

Refugee-led charity, we focus on refugee rights and system change to support people across borders. ❤️

UK acrossborders.org.uk Joined October 2019

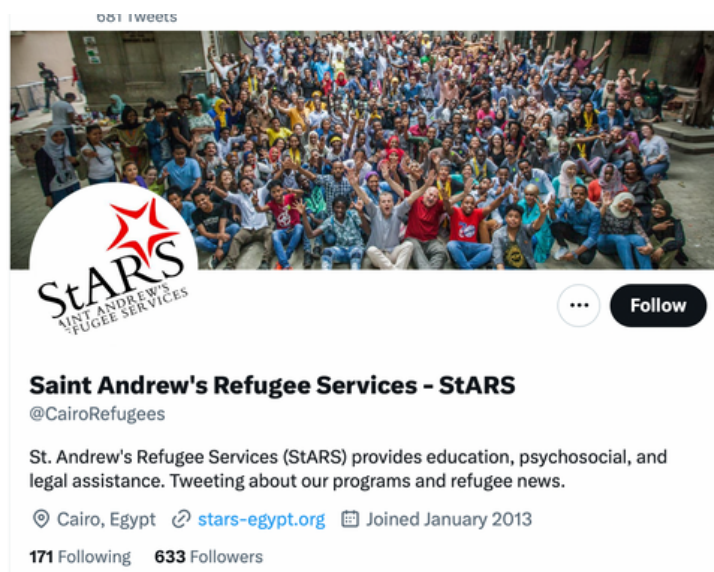
Across Borders is a UK-registered charity run by and for refugees and forcibly displaced migrants in the UK and across the Middle East. They support refugees and migrants in the UK through their refugee-led projects in the UK, which aim to build positive integration experiences and increase access to safe routes. Across Borders also runs a Remote Legal Project which connects law students in the UK with St Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) in Cairo. We spoke with **Rosie Watt**, Co-ordinator of the Remote Legal Project, who was able to tell us a bit more about their work:

"The Remote Legal Project enables law students to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge to support the Legal Aid department at StARS which assists refugees from Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen and Syria (among other places) with registering their asylum claim and receiving refugee status so that they can access support and entitlements whilst residing in Egypt. This means that law students who have trained in International Refugee Law have an opportunity to gain real-life experience of practicing law and StARS benefits from critical, additional case management support. Over the last three years, Across Borders has enjoyed working with the University of Nottingham's Human Rights Law Centre on this project, testing this approach in the initial stages of the project's implementation and honing the process to make it work for both partners. This is one of Across Borders' projects - we also have a refugee-led mentor programme to support refugees who are integrating in the UK after resettlement from another country and a programme to equip refugee to become interpreters."

SUPPORTING REFUGEES: ORGANISATIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

St Andrew Refugee Services (StARS): StARS is a refugee service provider in central Cairo that works to enhance the quality of life for refugees and vulnerable migrants through four broad program areas: education, psychosocial, legal, and community outreach. They provide high-quality services meeting the unaddressed needs of displaced people and offer a safe and inclusive space for displaced people to come together as a community.

As caseworkers, we support the work that StARS' Refugee Legal Aid Program (RLAP) does. RLAP is currently the only legal aid provider for those seeking refugee status in Egypt. **Rachelle August**, Coordinator of StARS's Refugee Status Determination Legal Aid Program, has been working closely with us throughout our internship with the Refugee Clinic as we navigate UNHCR guidelines to draft refugee status determination applications.



We had a chat with Rachelle about her work with StARS:

Can you please tell us about what StARS does to help asylum seekers and refugees in the local community?

St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) is a refugee-led organization based in Cairo, Egypt. Our work is centred on enhancing quality of life for refugees and vulnerable migrants through education, psychosocial, legal, community outreach, and unaccompanied children and youth support services. The refugee community in Egypt comes from many countries in the region, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. StARS' Refugee Legal Aid Program (RLAP) helps refugees seeking asylum in Egypt by providing advice and representation on registration and refugee status determination procedures with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). RLAP advises on protection related concerns in Egypt and assists refugees in accessing resettlement to safe third countries via referral of vulnerable cases to UNHCR. We also support refugees with accessing education and labour mobility pathways.

What are some of the common challenges facing the refugees/asylum seekers you work with?

There are no camps in Egypt, so the refugee community lives autonomously in urban areas. This allows some freedom; however, it also presents challenges as inflation and cost of living pressures have risen drastically. Refugees in Egypt are vulnerable to exploitation when seeking housing, and in the labour market where they mostly work informally. There is also inequality in access to education, and a high prevalence of gender-based violence. Related to UNHCR procedures, refugees are often unfamiliar with their rights and responsibilities in the refugee status determination process, and misinformation can impact negatively on case outcomes. Demand to address needs that flow from these challenges remains high, and StARS works in collaboration with other service providers, including many community-based refugee-led organizations to raise awareness and support the community to overcome these challenges so that refugees can live safely and with dignity.

SUPPORTING REFUGEES: OUR EXPERIENCE AS CASEWORKERS

We have been caseworkers at the Human Rights Law Centre Refugee Clinic for a little over eight months now and it has been a rewarding experience. We share some of our thoughts:

Frankie : One of the best parts of this experience is the insight it has given me into the UN system and how it affects refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt. This has not only expanded my knowledge of refugee and asylum law, but I have also been able to learn more about the issues that the people fleeing persecution face, not only in their home country but also on their journey to reach refugee status. This internship has been an important learning experience in terms of understanding how compassion plays a role here. Every week we have had the opportunity to build an understanding of asylum seekers and refugees by reading their interviews with StARS, learning more about what led them to flee their country and the discrimination that they continue to face. Ultimately, I have learnt that these are the people in society who deserve the most compassion.

Ritika: The past eight months have been rewarding. Volunteering at the Refugee Clinic as a caseworker has helped me strengthen my research and drafting skills. I prepared Appeal Briefs and Appeal Statements in support of applications for clients. After reading interview transcripts and 'Notification of Rejection' decision letters issued by UNHRC, I realised that their genuine refugee claims are often times rejected on flimsy grounds and/or on the basis of mere procedural errors. The interview transcripts explain how they undertook dangerous journeys to another country to protect their life and liberty from the State as well as family members. This strengthens my belief that the rights of refugees need to be ensured. This has also inspired me to continue working in the field of refugee law and contribute to improving the quality of life of refugees.

Rosie: Often valuable information gets missed or miscommunicated in interviews with UNHCR, and StARS helps clients convey their stories when this happens. For example, we learnt to write 'Appeal Briefs' which explain why a client has a claim under refugee law considering their story and country of origin (COI) research. Sometimes these Appeal Briefs are coupled with Appeal Statements, which summarise a client's whole life to support their claim and takes 20+ hours of interviews by the caseworkers at StARS to collect the information. We then learnt how to collate it into a coherent account that describes the client's story. Behind each document we drafted was a huge amount of work done by the tireless caseworkers, driven by compassion and understanding for clients who have often faced incredible hardship and experienced traumatic incidents. Our work with StARS was incredibly illuminating, and I would encourage any student to take the opportunity to work with StARS through the Human Rights Law Centre.

Mohammad: Saint Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS), is a beacon of hope for refugees and vulnerable migrants in Egypt. The organisation provides invaluable services spanning education, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and community outreach. I want to briefly highlight the recent conflict in Sudan which has further brought to light the urgency and importance of the work that StARS and other such organisations do. The war, initiated in mid-April between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has led to an alarming escalation of the humanitarian crisis. This has resulted in the further displacement of 2.2 million individuals, with over half a million seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, including Egypt. These circumstances have made the work of StARS more critical than ever. In these times, it is vital that we continue to support and raise awareness about the work of organisations like StARS.

THE ILLEGAL MIGRATION BILL: EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES WITH DR. NATALIE HODGSON

The Illegal Migration Bill is currently making its way through the UK House of Lords . What sorts of things does the Bill seek to do?

Natalie: One of the things that the Government proposes to do in the Illegal Migration Bill is to expand the UK's "inadmissibility" regime. What this means is that, if a person has travelled through a "safe country" on their way to the UK, they will be found to be "inadmissible" and prohibited from claiming asylum here. The Government says that this is important for deterring people from risking their lives and taking dangerous journeys across the English Channel. In theory, this sounds quite sensible – of course we should do something to reduce the number of people risking their lives, and potentially dying, in search of safety. However, there are a number of issues with the Government's plan.

First, many asylum seekers do stay in the first "safe country" they pass through. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the country with the highest number of refugees is Türkiye, which currently hosts 3.6 million refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have fled the war in neighbouring Syria. Currently, 74% of the world's refugee population are hosted in low and middle-income countries. However, it is not fair to expect these countries to bear the burden of hosting refugees. Wealthy countries such as the UK must play a role in responding to the global refugee crisis.

Second, many asylum seekers have good reasons for coming to the UK. Some people might want to come to the UK because they have family members here, they speak our language, or because they worked with our forces overseas (for example, asylum seekers arriving from Afghanistan). Other people might end up in the UK because it was where their people smuggler brought them, or because they simply did not feel safe and able to claim asylum in the countries they travelled to on the way to the UK.

The England and Wales High Court recognised in the case of Adimi [1999] that that 'some element of choice is indeed open to refugees as to where they may properly claim asylum'. That is, people should be allowed to choose which country they want to seek asylum in. By effectively requiring that people claim asylum in the first safe country they pass through, and by refusing to consider people's applications for asylum if they have travelled through a safe country, the Illegal Migration Bill represents an abrogation of the UK's obligations towards people seeking asylum.



Dr Natalie Hodgson
University of Nottingham

Dr Natalie Hodgson is an Assistant Professor in Law at the University of Nottingham School of Law. Natalie heads the Human Rights Law Centre's Forced Migration Unit.

Natalie's research areas include international criminal law, criminal law, criminal procedure and evidence, and refugee law.

She spoke to us about the UK's current political climate and its effects on the rights and lives of refugees, with a specific focus on the controversial 'Illegal Migration Bill' that is currently being considered by Parliament. The Bill was announced March 2023 and passed through the House of Commons in April. It aims to address challenges relating to the UK's asylum process but has been described as 'desperately cruel' by key human rights organisations.



THE ILLEGAL MIGRATION BILL: EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES WITH DR. NATALIE HODGSON

What happens to people who are found to be “inadmissible”?

Under the Illegal Migration Bill, people who have travelled through a safe country such as France on their way to the UK will be prohibited from claiming asylum here. But it is unclear what happens to these people next.

Article 33 of the Refugee Convention states that no state is allowed to expel or return a refugee to a territory where their life or freedom would be threatened. This is known as the prohibition on refoulement. Effectively, Governments are prohibited from sending a person back to the country they came from if they would face serious harm upon their return. Governments also cannot send people to any other country if they would face serious harm living there.

Due to the prohibition on refoulement, the UK cannot send anyone back to the country they came from if there would be a risk to their lives. And so, for the most part, the asylum seekers travelling to the UK in small boats cannot be returned to the countries they came from. They might theoretically be sent to Rwanda under the Government’s Migration and Economic Development Partnership – but removals to Rwanda are currently paused pending the outcome of a Court of Appeal hearing. Further, Rwanda only has the capacity to receive a thousand asylum seekers, if that, from England.

“What this means is that tens of thousands of people will be forced into a state of limbo – they will not be permitted to claim asylum in the UK, but they will not have anywhere else that they can go. It is unclear what the Government plans on doing with these people. ”

The Government says it is doing this to stop people risking their lives crossing the Channel, but are there any other solutions?

Many of the asylum seekers travelling to the UK on small boats do not choose to undertake dangerous journeys – they have no choice but to travel irregularly.

Generally speaking, the UK only allows people to apply for asylum if they are physically in the UK. The UK does not have a specific visa that asylum seekers can apply for. There are a few exceptions to this – for example, when the war in Ukraine began, the UK created a specific visa scheme available only to people from Ukraine. But for the vast majority of asylum seekers – including people trying to leave Sudan due to the current violence – there is no way to travel to the UK safely. The only way to come to the UK is through these dangerous, irregular routes.

One of the reasons why we have not seen large numbers of Ukrainians crossing the English Channel in boats is that many Ukrainians were able to come to the UK through safe routes. As such, if the Government wanted to reduce the number of people risking their lives at sea to come to the UK irregularly, they could simply make it easier for people to travel here to seek asylum through safe routes.

The unfortunate fact is, for as long as there is war and conflict, there will be people in search of safety. Events in Afghanistan, Ukraine and Sudan have shown us that there is very little we can do to stop people being forced to leave their homes in search of safety. The choice for us in the UK is whether we are willing to help these people come to the UK safely, or whether we are going to make them to travel through dangerous routes in search of asylum.

“The choice for us in the UK is whether we are willing to help these people come to the UK safely, or whether we are going to make them to travel through dangerous routes in search of asylum.”

UNVEILING THE ESSENCE OF COMPASSION

As we celebrate Refugee Week with a focus on compassion, we asked our interviewees what compassion means to them and the work that they do with refugees and asylum seekers.

STAR NOTTINGHAM

For STAR, compassion means having empathy and understanding towards refugees and their experiences. It involves recognizing the hardships refugees and asylum seekers have faced and showing kindness, support, and solidarity. In the context of our work, compassion means actively working to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for refugees in the UK and in higher education, advocating for their rights and equal access to university.

“My big thanks goes to all the charity organisations working in Nottingham including Red Cross and NNRF.”

Adel Hamad

ACROSS BORDERS

A key concern for Across Borders is societies' perceptions of each other and how these can support but also be a barrier to welcoming people who are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants across borders. Building understanding of the 'other', which starts with having empathy and compassion, is therefore central to our vision of building a world where all refugees, asylum seekers and migrants can participate as equal members of society, using their skills and capabilities to build bridges across cultures and borders.



ST ANDREWS REFUGEE SERVICES

StARS provides services to meet unaddressed needs in a safe and inclusive space where displaced people can come together as a community. We strive to undertake work with refugees ensuring their own agency when assessing and making decisions about access to services. In our legal work, RLAP provides trauma informed practice training to staff, and at an individual casework level awareness of the impact of past experiences of trauma or on-going protection challenges on a client's ability to tell their story is key factor in each assessment. The success of our casework depends on taking sufficient time to build a relationship of trust between the legal advisor and refugee that is not attainable in the absence of compassion and respect.

REFUGEE ROOTS

Our work is only possible because of the 152 volunteers that care who join with us to provide a place to belong for refugees in Nottingham. A dedicated staff team and generous volunteer team enable Refugee Roots to make a lasting difference to the lives of our participants. Compassion threads through every aspect of our work and every interaction as we empower and enable participants to navigate the complexities of building a new life in the UK. For many like Mohammed "it's like a family" to be part of Refugee Roots.

WHY STUDENTS SHOULD ENGAGE WITH THESE ISSUES

Dr Hodgson explains why it is important that law students learn about the obstacles facing asylum seekers and refugees:

The issues facing refugees and asylum seekers are not just matters of refugee law. The Illegal Migration Bill and the Government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda raise a number of legal issues that law students should care about.

The plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda was challenged on procedural fairness grounds. Advocates raised issues concerning how long asylum seekers were given to make representations about why it would be dangerous for them to be removed to Rwanda. If you believe in the importance of procedural fairness, then you should be concerned about the Illegal Migration Bill.

Under international law, states are obligated to carry out their treaty obligations in good faith. By refusing to consider the protection applications of people who have travelled to the UK irregularly, it can be questioned whether the UK is performing its obligations under the Refugee Convention in good faith. If you care about public international law and the importance of a rules-based international order, then you should be concerned about the Illegal Migration Bill.

Refugee rights are human rights. Any violation of human rights affects all of us, because these are rights to which we are all entitled by virtue of being human. If you care about human rights, then you should be concerned about the Illegal Migration Bill.

In 2022, 8,700 children travelled to the UK on small boats to seek asylum. Child asylum seekers are subject to the provisions of the Illegal Migration Bill and it is entirely possible that children might be sent to Rwanda. If you care about children's rights, then you should be concerned about the Illegal Migration Bill.



Demonstrators outside Royal Courts of Justice, Central London
Source: Guardian; Photograph: Tom Pilgrim



Demonstrators outside the Houses of Parliament in London
Source: Guardian; Photograph: Tolga Akmen

"As members of a legal community, we should care about the Illegal Migration Bill, not just because of the Bill's impact on refugees and asylum seekers, but because of what the Bill says about the state of law and justice in the UK more broadly."

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

STAR Nottingham: Students can join STAR via our page on the Student Union's website and alumni/non-students are also welcome to participate through the SU's associate membership. Our volunteering activities include a weekly Wednesday English Class in collaboration with the Red Cross and a weekly Women's group at the Women's Centre. We also run events, socials, and fundraisers throughout the year, so there is lots to get involved with.

Follow our Instagram for more information: @star_nottingham. To get involved with Student Action for Refugees, visit: [Student Action for Refugees \(star-network.org.uk\)](http://StudentActionforRefugees.star-network.org.uk).

Rosie Watt (Across Borders): We'd love to hear from students who are motivated by Across Borders' projects and vision. We are a small group of volunteers with only one paid staff member so we're always open to hearing from people who are enthusiastic to get involved and support the work. This could be with project support, fundraising or comms work which includes our social media or any other skills that a volunteer can bring.

Across Borders is at an exciting point because we're working on our strategy for the 3-5 years so it's a great time to join us and be involved in the expansion of our work.

To get involved with Across Borders visit: [Across Borders UK \(www.acrossborders.org.uk\)](http://AcrossBordersUK(www.acrossborders.org.uk)).

Adam Baker (Refugee Roots): We are always welcoming volunteers to be part of our work. We have opportunities for one-to-one befriending, assisting conversational language groups and supporting creative activities too. We are also always looking out for [fundraisers like Otto](#) who may be looking for a challenge or a way to use their networks of friends, family and online communities to raise much needed funds for the charity.

[Set up a fundraising page today](#) and be part of the difference. [Join us during Refugee Week](#) for a whole range of events to find out more!

To get involved with the Refugee Roots, please visit: [Refugee Roots \(www.refugeeroots.org.uk\)](http://RefugeeRoots(www.refugeeroots.org.uk)).

Rachelle August (StARS): Law students admitted to the University of Nottingham's Human Rights Law Centre project with StARS support RLAP remotely by contributing to our first instance and appeals casework and research for refugee status determination, as well as protection and resettlement referrals. Several times a year, RLAP also recruits volunteer legal advisors to work in Cairo for at least six months. Volunteers receive some initial intensive training following which they work directly with RLAP clients in workshops, one-on-one interviews, and on casework. Volunteers are often law students or recent graduates, and working with RLAP is a great opportunity to acquire experience in International Refugee Law practice. Volunteering can also lead to a paid position, and many of our former volunteers and staff are now working with International Non-Government Organizations and other positions in the humanitarian field.

Expressions of interest for volunteering can be sent along with a CV to: volunteer@stars-egypt.org or visit: [Saint Andrew's Refugee Services \(stars-egypt.org\)](http://SaintAndrewsRefugeeServices(stars-egypt.org)).

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF): To get involved with Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum then email info@nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk or visit [Nottingham Refugee Forum \(nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk\)](http://NottinghamRefugeeForum(nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk)) for information on how to become a volunteer.

EXAMINING REFUGEE REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA: BOOK, FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

We reached out to students and academics at the University of Nottingham who kindly sent us some reviews of films, books and TV series that share the stories of refugees and asylum seekers.

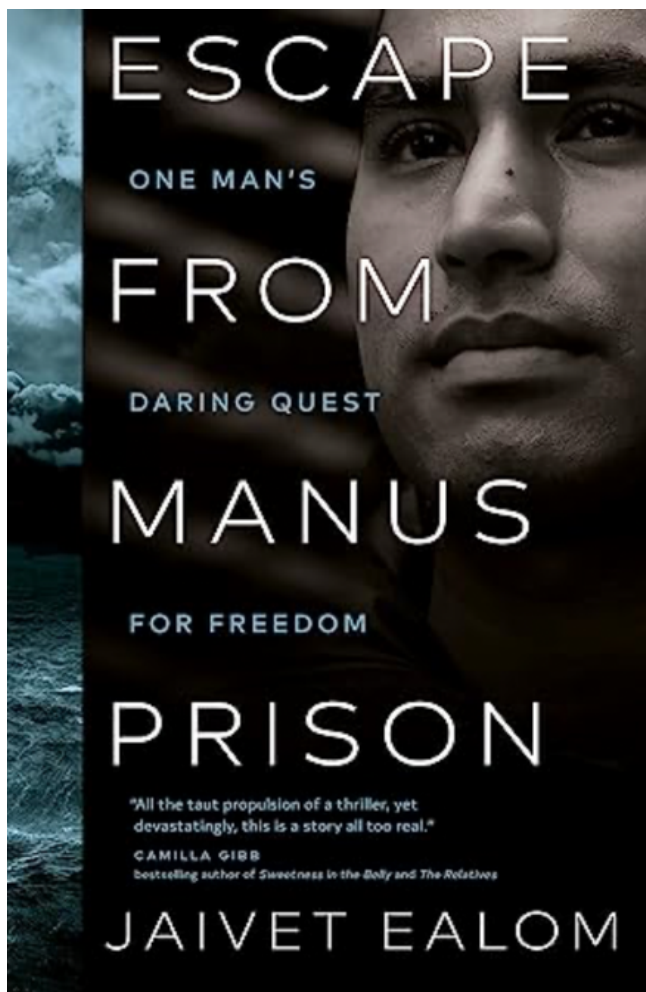
Escape from Manus Prison: One Man's Daring Quest for Freedom – Autobiographical memoir by Jaivet Ealom

Natalie Hodgson - Assistant Professor in Law

Jaivet Ealom's favourite show was the US television drama 'Prison Break'. At the age of 25, he put the lessons he learned from this show into practice when he disguised himself as an interpreter and escaped from the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre, one of two offshore processing centres used by Australia.

As the UK Government is preparing to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, Jaivet's story gives us a harrowing insight into what life was like for people subject to Australia's offshore detention policy (on which the UK's policy is based). Jaivet is detained on Manus Island after fleeing persecution from the military Junta in Myanmar. However, the conditions in detention are unbearable – he lives in a sweltering shipping container, is fed rotten food and must use toilets overflowing with sewerage. The simple matter of getting a new toothbrush becomes a bureaucratic nightmare, and it takes over five months to arrange for Jaivet to see a dentist following an attack that leaves his braces broken and his mouth in constant pain. Jaivet documents the psychological impact of years of living in these harsh conditions, including his own suicidal thoughts. Four years after being sent to Manus Island, Jaivet decides to escape from the detention centre.

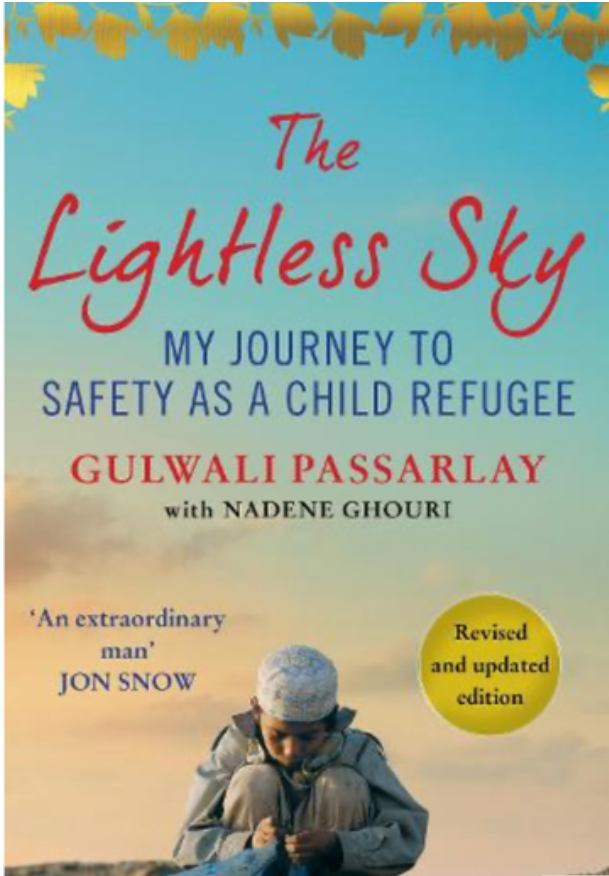
This is a story of resilience and tenacity, documenting Jaivet's search for a place of safety. But this is also a story of resistance, documenting the various ways that Jaivet and others refused to accept a policy that seemed to be designed to make asylum seekers suffer. Throughout the book, moments of humanity and kindness stand in stark contrast to the bleakness of life in detention. In an era where government policies towards asylum seekers appear to be growing increasingly punitive, this book reminds us of the power of acts of compassion.



Available at: [Escape from Manus Prison: One Man's Daring Quest for Freedom | Amazon UK](#)

EXAMINING REFUGEE REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA: BOOK, FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

The Lightless Sky: My Journey to Safety as a Child Refugee by Gulwali Passarlay



Available at:

[The Lightless Sky by Gulwali Passarlay | Waterstones](#)

Sofia Hurtado - LLM Human Rights Law

The Lightless Sky is the true story of how Gulwali, a teenager, crossed over Europe from Afghanistan to England in search of his brother, who he was separated from at the beginning of his refugee journey. It encapsulates the theme of compassion throughout; from Gulwali's mother paying a smuggler to transport him and his brother to safety whilst staying herself in a Taliban controlled area, to the lack of compassion shown towards Gulwali and his companions when trying to claim asylum, particularly in England.

The Lightless Sky is a powerful read, highlighting how badly child refugees are treated, despite their traumatic background. Gulwali himself experienced his father, a doctor, and Grandfather being killed by U.S. troops based on a suspicion of them hiding weapons for the Taliban. The book is an emotional but important read. It is not only an essential read for anyone wanting to practice or study refugee law, but also those who want to learn about the tough reality of being an asylum seeker in the modern age. It demonstrates that there are compassionate humans who help refugees and asylum seekers in any way that they can, even if it risks their own safety. Gulwali also portrays the theme of compassion in writing his own story, as traumatic and hard as it is to recount, in order to share the story of those who did not make it alongside him.

HAMSA: A Documentary and Educational Platform - Short film directed by Caroline Spearpoint and Miriam Thom

Marina Christou - LLM Human Rights Law

This short film/documentary is about the life of Hamsa and her family; refugees from Syria who sought asylum in Germany and resettled in the village of Schnega. After fleeing their home in Syria because of the conflict, the family were forced to travel on foot across eight countries to reach Germany: their journey lasted four years. During this journey, Hamsa and her family faced many difficulties, including harsh living conditions. For example, Hamsa characterised the refugee camps in Hungary as prisons.

Nevertheless, the film also illustrates the positive side of Hamsa's story, highlighting the welcoming environment shown to the refugees by Schnega's residents. This contributed to their inclusion in German society, giving Hamsa and her family the opportunity to move forward in life. The purpose of the film is to 'bring subjects and curriculum to life'. According to Caroline Spearpoint, one of the directors, the film allows 'young people to have a greater understanding of a complex issue such as the refugee crisis through being exposed to a human story such as Hamsa's'. It is a film that contributes to the engagement of young people with the refugee crisis and provides its audience with an opportunity to view the refugee crisis from the perspective and angle of a refugee, through Hamsa's story.

Available at: [HAMSA | Films For Action](#)

EXAMINING REFUGEE REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA: BOOK, FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

Transatlantic (2023) - Television miniseries created by Anna Winger and Daniel Hendler



Shae Heitz – Visiting Fellow in Law and Policy at the Rights Lab

The Transatlantic miniseries is an adaptation of Julie Orringer's 'The Flight Portfolio': a historical fiction novel based on the true story of Varian Fry. Fry was an American journalist who lived and worked in southern France during the outbreak of WWII. In addition to being a journalist, Fry was a humanitarian who co-founded the Emergency Rescue Committee, now known as the International Rescue Committee, who aided thousands of people that were displaced by WWII.

The series is unlike most WWII media. While the story adequately demonstrates the devastating effects of the war and the dangers of Nazism, each episode contains moments of humour, wit, and love. The careful crafting of scenes, bright imagery, and stunning cinematography, captures the brilliance of the city of Marseille, even during the war. The same radiance captured in the city is also captured in the lives of the refugees under the care of the Emergency Rescue Committee. The series humanizes the refugees and demonstrates that displacement does not define them. Furthermore, the series captures the happiness, joy, and light that exists within the community. In one episode, the refugees that are living together and waiting to flee from France celebrate a birthday party for one of the refugees, who is a well-known artist. In true artistic fashion, each guest was required to create an unconventional costume, including a dress made out of gloves and a hat made from high heels!

While the work of the Emergency Rescue Committee helped refugees flee danger, the Committee also helped refugees find joy in everyday life. None of that would have been possible without the kindness, dedication, and compassion of Varian Fry. The series adequately depicts how Fry experienced many challenges while working, including encountering resistance from the U.S. government to break their isolationist policies and aid refugees at the start of the war. Fry persisted in the face of these challenges. Each episode shows that every refugee has a story to share. More than anything, the series recognises and demonstrates that where there is compassion, there is hope.

Available at: [Transatlantic | Netflix Official Site](#)

EXAMINING REFUGEE REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA: BOOK, FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

The Swimmers (2022) - Biographical sports drama film directed by Sally El Hosaini

Shae Heitz –Visiting Fellow in Law and Policy at the Right's Lab



The Swimmers is a biographical sports drama that recounts the miraculous and heroic true story about the Mardini sisters. After civil war broke out in their home country of Syria, Sarah and her teenage sister, Yusra, make the challenging and dangerous decision to travel to Europe, in hopes of filing for family reunification upon arrival. Just before the war, both Sarah and Yusra were training as competitive swimmers, in hopes of qualifying for the Olympics. Once they fled Syria, their journey was anything but easy. The sisters, accompanied by their cousin, eventually make it to Türkiye, where they meet a smuggler who claims he can get them to Lesbos, Greece. Sarah, Yusra, and 18 other refugees squeeze onto an inflatable dinghy to travel across the Aegean Sea. However, during the journey the boat begins to take on water, endangering everyone on board. In a selfless act, Yusra and Sarah jumped out of the boat to help lighten the load. The sisters swam next to the dinghy, across the sea, to help bring the other refugees to the shores of Greece.

The film adequately depicts the challenges that these refugees faced once in Europe, including a lack of compassion and discrimination about where they were able to eat, rest, and live. However, the film also shows the power of compassion in the form of emergency aid response teams providing necessary resources to help the refugees arriving in Europe.

One of the most inspiring moments of the film is when Yusra and Sarah make it to Germany and ask swim coach, Sven, if they can swim in his club. Although he has some initial hesitations, Sven agrees to train the girls and prepare them for the Olympics. While Sarah's path takes her in a different direction, Yusra eventually fulfills her childhood dream of making it to the 2016 Rio Olympics as a swimmer for the Refugee Olympic Team.

This film is powerful in so many ways. Firstly, because of the incredible bravery and resilience of the Mardini sisters—who risked their lives to save others. Secondly, because the film truly captures how quickly war can upend the lives of citizens. Before the war, the Mardini sisters were students, athletes, and regular teenage girls going to nightclubs on the weekend to hang out with friends. It is important for people to recognize this version of Syria—the version before the war—existed not too long ago. Finally, the power of this film comes from compassion woven into every part of the story. You see the compassion the Mardini sisters have for each other, their family, and the other refugees. You also see the compassion of Sven, to coach the girls and provide them with the resources they need to achieve their dreams. This heroic story shows the power of resilience when partnered with the grace of compassion.

Available at: [The Swimmers | Netflix Official Site](#)

EXAMINING REFUGEE REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA: BOOK, FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

His House - Film by Remi Weekes (Writer/Director)

Madison Green – LLM International Criminal Justice and Armed Conflict



His House (2020) is a fictional horror-thriller film that depicts the traumas faced by asylum-seekers and how they are exacerbated by the unforgiving British immigration system. The film tells the story of a South-Sudanese couple, Bol and Rial, who, during the course of a harrowing boat journey across the English Channel, lose their daughter, Nyagak. They are subsequently moved from a detention centre to a dilapidated home infested with vermin and mould. In this house, Bol and Rial come face to face with an 'apeth' or witch, a manifestation of their past trauma. Within this space, the 'apeth', and other malevolent spirits, force the couple to relive their experience of violence, death, and grief. This horror is contrasted with the mundane horror of trying to navigate an immigration system that clearly wants Bol and Rial to fail. The cruelty of the British immigration system further infiltrates wider society, evidenced through the racism and xenophobia that the couple face.

This portrayal of Britain has only become more relevant since the film's release, with the introduction of harsher immigration policies such as the 'Stop the Boats' campaign and the Nationality and Borders Act (2022). In this sense, this film is a depressingly authentic representation of the refugee experience in Britain, predicting Britain's avoidance of its international legal obligations and the actual impact that this has on asylum-seekers. Despite this, the film also portrays compassion beautifully, with Bol and Rial choosing to protect each other in the face of horror, trauma, and societal rejection. Ultimately, His House demonstrates the indomitable power of compassion and acceptance in the face of cruelty and fear, resulting in a moving and authentic representation of the experience of asylum-seekers in Britain.

Available at: [His House | Netflix Official Site](#)