

Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK
SUMMER 2024

accompany | serve | advocate

“It was the first time in my life that I had gotten to celebrate my birthday, so I was super happy and pleased...”

Karim, JRS UK Refugee Friend



JRS International

The biggest displacement crisis in the world

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has forcibly displaced nearly 9 million people making it the most severe displacement crisis globally.

Though the crisis has faded from headlines, the horrendous humanitarian situation persists, with **protection, education, (mental) health support, and shelter urgently required.**

A refugee friend shares the story of her home country:

In February 2022, my good friend Omer sent this message from Khartoum:

"Today I heard that [redacted]'s son [redacted] was stopped by Police when he was coming home from school. they beat him!!! [redacted]"

We can't tell whether they're real police or militants...in police uniform (janjaweed).

I don't know when this big mess in Sudan will be finished?"

Things were deteriorating fast; inflation was soaring, the Sudanese pound worthless, food staples nearly impossible to buy. The government had failed to implement reforms, including eradicating corruption.

On 15 April 2023, fighting between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces began. Communication has since been sporadic.

When we do receive updates, we hear friends and family are grappling with a failing healthcare system targeted by militias. Millions fled the country or migrated internally. Troops ransacked houses. Widespread reports of rape and sexual violence. Videos on social media show residents digging mass graves, or child soldiers fighting.

As fighting intensified, Omer wrote to me again:

"The situation today is quite bad. We are hiding in our houses from the bullets. It's like a gang war in the cities."

That was the last I heard from him. Like millions of others trapped by the fighting, I have no idea what has happened to my friend – only that his family left Sudan seeking refuge and he remained to protect their home.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) operates in Chad, focusing on education, and South Sudan, providing essential items for the most vulnerable displaced people including survivors of gender-based violence.

Message from the editor



We will continue to walk with refugees. Or sometimes run – as was the case last month when more than twenty amazing supporters, including one of our refugee friends, took on the London Marathon to raise vital funds for JRS UK.

As ever, I'm amazed by our supporters' dedication and solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers. A huge thank you to all those who took part (whether running or supporting our team!) and to everyone else who has donated, volunteered or fundraised for JRS UK's work in recent months. Your support means the world, especially in the increasingly hostile environment.

On 25th April, the so called 'Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill' received Royal Assent and became an Act of Parliament. This new legislation paves the way for the government to forcibly and permanently send people seeking asylum to Rwanda without even examining their claim.

The Rwanda Plan is dangerous. Not only does it present numerous human rights concerns, but it shirks the UK's responsibility towards refugees.

The scheme also sets a worrying precedent for more countries to outsource asylum.

People seeking sanctuary in the UK continue to face so many other challenges, some of which we discuss in this edition of *Together*. On pages 6 and 7, Sophie, our Senior Policy Officer, speaks about JRS UK's newest report, *After Brook House*, and how much of the mistreatment and abuse identified in the 2017 Brook House report continues today. On pages 8 and 9, Michael, our Senior Legal Officer, discusses the importance of JRS UK's Legal Project as legal aid continues to be cut, and shares an invitation to walk with us in June during Refugee Week.

Amidst all of this, it is easy to feel dejected and discouraged. So, in these moments, it's important to find reasons for hope. On pages 10 and 11, refugee friends share touching reflections on some of our recent celebrations, and why rejoicing together is important.

For me? Rejoicing together is a way of marking our successes and wins, motivating us to keep persevering. It's also a beautiful way of affirming the dignity of all our sisters and brothers, and what we all find joy in. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, *If one member is honoured, all rejoice*. I hope these moments of celebration give you strength too. Thank you for walking (and running) with us.

Victoria

Victoria
Senior Communications Officer

From our kitchen to yours!

Head chef Basarat shares her recipe for Jollof Rice and Fried Chicken, a firm favourite at our social-drop at JRS UK.

Would you like to eat with us? Why not try this tasty recipe at home?

Jollof Rice & Fried Chicken

Ingredients for 6 servings:

- 2 tins of chopped tomatoes
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and quartered
- 2 small red onions, 1 quartered, 1 diced
- 1 scotch bonnet pepper, or habanero, stem removed

- ½ cup vegetable oil (120 mL), plus 2 tablespoons for frying
- 1 lb boneless chicken thighs (450 g), cubed
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 cups parboiled long grain rice (400 g), washed
- 2 stock cubes
- 3 tablespoons butter

"The key to the best cooking is adding some love and instinct to a recipe!" – Basarat

Method:

- Blend tomatoes, red bell pepper, quartered onion, and pepper together until smooth.

- Add diced red onion, chicken, and curry powder to a hot pan with oil. Cook until onions are soft, and chicken has browned. Remove chicken from pot and set aside.
- Raise the heat, and add blended tomato mixture to the same pot, cooking until reduced by half.
- Add in remaining oil, and fry sauce for 8-10 mins.
- Add the chicken back to the pot, and add in the thyme, stock, and rice too.
- Cover pot and cook for another 30 minutes on low heat.
- To serve, toss with butter.

Enjoy!

Our Home

How can we work in solidarity to ensure all our neighbours, new and familiar, have safe and welcoming homes?

This Refugee Week, we're invited to ponder what *Home* means to us, and what it means to share a collective home.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the people supported by JRS UK is the lack of accommodation. Destitute asylum seekers are often forced to seek rest on night buses, rely on friends who might let them 'sofa surf' for a night or two, or else find a nook where they can sleep for the night.

The JRS UK 'At Home' hosting scheme matches destitute asylum seekers with individuals, families, parishes, and religious communities who are able and willing to offer short term accommodation.

The act of hosting those in need of safety and stability is one of the most transformative acts of solidarity and kindness our supporters can provide.



Ahead of Refugee Week (17th-23rd June 2024), we asked Hosts and Guests in the At Home scheme what home means to them:

Home means...



Rebeca, Guest: "Home is where you have your health, where you have your peace, where you are welcome, where you have community who you can socialise with, where you can heal and rest your head."



Elizabeth, Guest: "The beauty of a home is the people, the peace, and the love within it."



Riya, Host: "Home is security, a place where we rest and rebuild our strength."

A collective home means...



Elizabeth, Guest: "To host, you need love. If you don't care, don't host. When you have nothing, some people look at you with disdain. When people like my hosts care for you, you are not alone, you suddenly feel you are worthy."



Elizabeth, Guest: "The difference with JRS hosts is that you could see it was not a "job" for them. M. she identified with you, she really cared. G., her husband, he would tell me when Manchester United was playing because I love football."



Margaret, Host "It's wonderful to be able to offer support, and to gain insight into the lives of others – even though it be to the horror, anger and helplessness. Also, that these people are no longer strangers, we open our hearts to people who need a welcome."



Marie, Host "By hosting a refugee, you gain more than you give. It widens your horizons and puts you in touch with a reality that most people are unfamiliar with."



Jim, Host "We live in a world of stark difference, of richness and poverty. Living with refugee friends has helped me to meditate on this and has changed me."



Accommodation is in increasing demand and we are in need of hosts.

Can you help? Visit www.jrsuk.net/at-home-hosting-scheme to learn more about how hosting works.

Can't host, but want to help? If you're not able to host, please do let others know about our hosting scheme!

If you have any questions, please email Amy-Leigh, Accommodation Project Coordinator, at amy-leigh.hatton@jrs.net



Rebeca, Guest: "There are many people on the streets, who are suffering. Take people in! Follow the process and JRS can find a good person, who won't give you problems. God will bless you, honestly, because it's not good to be homeless."

**Want to learn more?
Stay tuned for JRS UK's new report on asylum seekers' experiences of homelessness, released 25th June 2024.**

After Brook House

JRS UK have just published our latest research report, *After Brook House: continued abuse in immigration detention*. Its findings are horrifying.

The Brook House Inquiry report, published in September 2023 examined abuse at Brook House occurring over several months in 2017. It found numerous instances of violent abuse against detained people, and routine, layered failures to care for and safeguard them, alongside a “toxic” and “dehumanising” culture. The Inquiry observed that these problems were not isolated or confined to Brook House, and often persisted at the time of writing.

The Brook House Inquiry Report echoed much of what JRS UK witnesses and hears through supporting people in detention at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centres, and people who have previously been detained at different IRCs across the UK. It also echoed research we published in 2020, examining the experience and impact of UK immigration detention centres over the previous two decades – essentially the life time of the UK’s modern detention estate.

We wanted to explore apparent parallels between events described in the Brook House Inquiry Report and immigration detention now, and to really understand how people with recent experience of detention responded to the report. To do this, we held a workshop with people who our detention outreach team had supported in detention, conducted follow-up interviews with some participants, and complemented this picture with casework analysis.

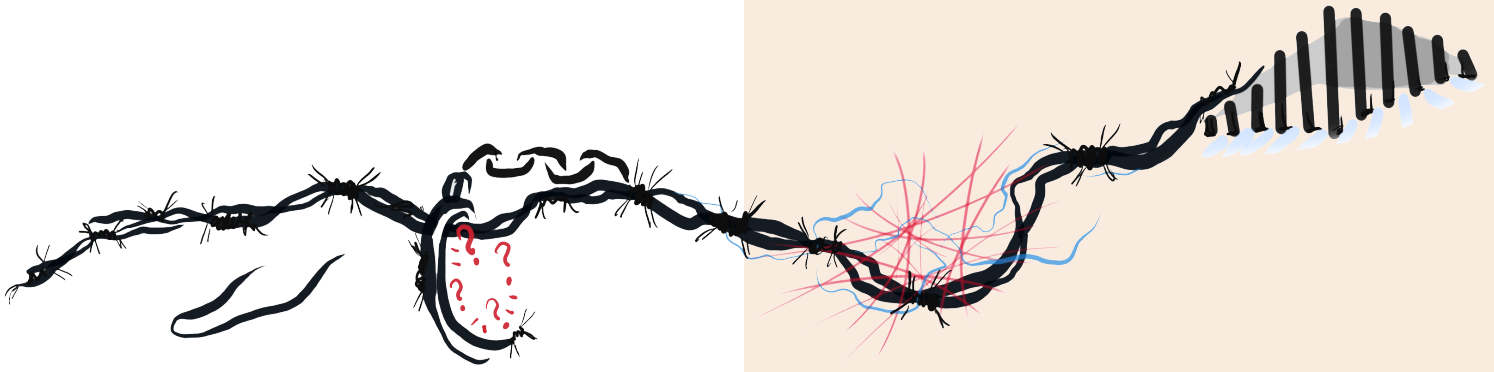
The core findings of the Brook House Inquiry Report were closely echoed in our findings on more recent experiences of detention at other centres. **Specific common themes identified were:**

- Immigration detention feels like prison, both the physical space and regime are prison-like.



- People are segregated (put in solitary confinement) when they shouldn't be – for example, to manage mental conditions that are only made worse by solitary confinement.
- There are huge deficiencies in healthcare provision in detention. This includes failure to provide people with necessary medication for weeks or more, and staff ignoring medical emergencies.
- It is extraordinarily difficult to access mental health support in detention, and this is coupled with a culture of disbelief around mental health. This needs to be set in the context that, as we have highlighted before, being in detention is profoundly harmful to mental health.





- Safeguards for vulnerable people are largely absent and where they exist do not work; even where the government recognises vulnerability, such as a history of torture or of having been trafficked, vulnerable people are routinely kept in detention.
- Force is used inappropriately, and often gratuitously, against detained people by staff.
- There is a staffing culture of abuse and humiliation within detention centres, and in the practices of detaining people and moving detained people.
- There is no effective complaints mechanism within detention.
- There are multiple barriers to understanding, communication and justice within detention.
- Long and indefinite detention are especially harmful – this closely echoes the findings of our 2020 research.

These findings clearly show that mistreatment and abuse in detention continues today. And that the events and culture that came to light at Brook House in 2017 are neither purely historical nor anomalous – they are business as usual. Events and culture like this are - still - endemic across the UK's detention estate, have deep systemic roots, and point even beyond themselves, to wider issues. Overall, being held in detention is dehumanising and profoundly damaging to mental health. It should not happen.

Shockingly, the government response to the Brook House Inquiry Report, published in March 2024, focuses on changes that have supposedly been made since 2017 – though we know little

has changed – and suggests that not much will be done in response to the Brook House Inquiry Report.

Additionally, the Illegal Migration Act passed in July 2023 hugely reduces oversight of detention and expands the contexts in which it can be used. The Act is very likely to worsen the problems identified by the Brook House Inquiry and in JRS UK's own, comparative research, and subject more people to them.

An entirely different approach is urgently needed. We are calling, once again, for an end to immigration detention and, for as long as it exists: for a time limit of no more than 28 days; for judicial oversight of the decision to detain; for the Brook House Inquiry's recommendations – which include a 28-day time limit and focus a lot on safeguarding – to be implemented; and for the Illegal Migration Act to be repealed.

Change is possible. The Brook House Inquiry uncovered something that is very current, but we can make it history.

To read *After Brook House: continued abuse in immigration detention*, visit www.jrsuk.net/after-brook-house-report

Write to your MP to express your concern about immigration detention and call for change. You can find our recommendations in our report, and tips on writing to your MP here: www.jrsuk.net/contact-your-MP

Want to support and donate to our Advocacy work? Visit www.jrsuk.net/advocacy

Access to good quality free legal advice

Michael, Senior Legal Officer, reflects on the importance of the JRS UK Legal Project, and invites you to walk with us to support the project.

The JRS UK Legal Project has now been running for just over 5 years. Over that period, with support from the Jesuits, trusts, and your donations we have expanded our team's capacity to four people (three full time equivalents) providing free specialist advice and representation to refugees who are registered with JRS.

The Legal Project was started in response to cuts to already inadequate legal aid, at a time when many dedicated providers were reducing services or even pulling out of legal aid altogether.

Poor provision of legal services means that people seeking asylum in the UK are often unable to find a good quality solicitor to help guide them through the complexities and the hostility of the asylum system. This can have a real detrimental impact on people's asylum cases – and asylum seekers can experience years of prolonged destitution and legal limbo as a result.

Unfortunately, we continue to see increasing cuts to and pressure on legal aid in the sector today.

This is where the Legal Project comes in. Refugee friends are able to access the project and our specialist advice through the destitution team, who help us to identify cases where our project can have the most impact.



We've taken complex cases to successful outcomes with fresh asylum claims, human rights claims and family life cases and we have successfully represented our refugee friends at appeals.

M is a young man from Sudan who had been in the UK for many years. His asylum case had failed and he had become destitute. He had been referred into JRS UK for support from an organisation supporting young refugees. The destitution team flagged his case to our project as one that was urgent and with their help, we obtained papers quickly and as the situation in Sudan collapsed into civil war, we were able to submit a new application allowing him first to access accommodation and then a grant of humanitarian protection allowing him to rebuild his life.



Whilst we value the opportunity to work as part of the JRS UK team, it must be said that there should be no need for a Legal Project. There should be adequate access to good quality free legal advice with legal aid funded solicitors to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are able to resolve their cases and move on with their lives.

So, while we can't give up on fighting for a fair and effective legal aid system to provide a reality of access to justice for everyone who needs it, maintaining and building our own legal project is an essential part of JRS UK's mission.

K had been without representation at her appeal but had managed to win. The Home Office had appealed the decision and she needed assistance to understand and act on the next steps. One of our legal officers was able to identify the issues and support the destitution team in finding her a legal aid solicitor to run the case and ensure the Home Office were not able to overturn her victory.

Will you walk with us? Help fundraise for the Legal Project

On Tuesday the 18th of June, JRS UK will be joining hundreds of law firms, barristers, and charitable organisations to walk the **London Legal Walk** to raise funds for The Legal Project.



Want to walk with us? Donate to our fundraising? Find out more? Visit www.jrsuk.net/london-legal-walk

The Legal Project also runs lively rights workshops on different aspects of the immigration and asylum process. Often, we take away as much about people's practical experiences of the system as we can give about law and procedures. We have been able to share insights of our refugee friends' lived experiences of the system and our expertise with the wider sector in developing strategy and building capacity.

We're also grateful to have several JRS UK volunteers who have been involved in accompanying refugees to provide practical support at appointments with the Home Office or at embassies and this work has had real positive effects on the outcome of some cases.

The importance of celebrating together



Many refugee friends supported by JRS UK experience long, protracted periods of legal limbo and destitution. Spending time and celebrating together is an important opportunity to form friendships, support one another through ups and downs, and think of something else whilst waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.

Refugee friends, Mariam, Sofia, and Karim reflect on moments of celebration they've shared with the JRS UK family.

Remembering each other, celebrating each other

In Pakistan, we're still fighting for women's rights. So, for women there, International Women's Day is not really a joyful occasion. We don't typically celebrate; instead, the day is used to advocate for women's rights. Women come together to address issues from the past year and beyond. It's not always a positive experience – there are often disagreements between protesters and the police. While this activism is necessary, it's also saddening.

Here in the UK, where women have more rights, it's different. We don't need to fight as hard, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't continue advocating for further progress.

I think International Women's Day should be a day to remember those women who are struggling to receive the basic rights, like freedom, but also to celebrate each other. To remember all courageous women who fought and advocated and to keep their candlelight lit. It's also important to shed light on all they have done for the coming generations and all barriers they keep fighting for future women and girls.

My experience here was really nice, we got to relax with meditation exercises - my favourite part - and enjoying being around other women to celebrate International Women's Day together.

Mariam

I found the International Women's Day amazing and so enjoyable. I loved being part of this community. It was my first time experiencing this with a charity as well. And I felt so empowered. It was important as we talked about different role models and strong women figures which was amazing. All types of women attended, we had some from the community as well as volunteers coming in to do activities with us and JRS women staff members also joined us throughout the day. Days like this are important because you learn more which you can take with you, whilst also coming together and participating in joyful activities.

Sofia



An opportunity to understand each other better

During Ramadan this year, we celebrated Iftar at the Centre. It was really wonderful in many ways. It brought people of different faiths together, and was a chance to understand each other better. Often, we don't have much opportunity or time to learn about other faiths, so events like these are great for gaining insight into why they practise certain things.

I once had an Iftar with my hosts, and we also have them together at Emilie House. It's a good chance to share our own faith and why fasting is important, and to invite others to join in. It's a nice way to encourage mutual understanding and celebration. I think it's important for us to have these kinds of gatherings, especially since we live together with people from different faiths. It helps us come closer and understand each other's beliefs better.

Mariam

I have been with JRS UK for a year and to find out that this was the first Iftar held here was amazing. I never expected charities to participate in such a thing and to be so inclusive. To even have someone from the local council and an Imam come in, give a talk and lead a prayer was truly amazing. And the food was so good! I was really happy.

Sofia



A chance to celebrate ourselves

When I was hosted at the Church, I was extremely comfortable and happy. Liz and Christina were amazing, we played cards, laughed together and we even made jokes with each other. The church was amazing as I felt undisturbed, and I had inner peace and I liked that I wasn't bothered too much.

My favourite memory was my birthday! It was the first time in my life that I had gotten to celebrate my birthday, so I was super happy and pleased. And everyone came, both my hosts, the people in the hosting scheme and some staff from JRS UK.

Karim

Could you host one of our refugee friends?

If you live in the London area and have a spare room sometimes*, you could make a huge difference to the lives of those we support.



Find out more about the JRS UK hosting scheme at: www.jrsuk.net/at-home-hosting-scheme

**placements can be as short as 1 week*

The Jesuit Refugee Service works in more than 50 countries around the world.

JRS UK is made up of staff and many volunteers who work to accompany, serve and advocate for destitute and detained refugees in the UK, of all faiths and none.

If you can, please consider donating to JRS UK. With your support JRS UK can continue to accompany destitute and detained refugees in a spirit of hospitality, welcome and love.

Donate today

Visit www.jrsuk.net/donate

Email uk@jrs.net

Mail your cheque/postal order made payable to Jesuit Refugee Service to the address on the right.



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