

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SURREY

A wide range of agencies from across Surrey, convened and co-ordinated by the County Council, have been working with a number of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in recent years.

[Note: Individuals who are granted asylum or resettled in the UK have refugee status and receive legal protection and access to public funds and public services, as a result of being forced to flee their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution.

Asylum seekers are those who seek sanctuary in another country and the right to be recognized as a refugee, because of a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country. Asylum seekers do not have the right to work or claim benefits, social housing or temporary accommodation.]

Since welcoming Syrian refugees in 2016, this effort has expanded in recent times with the evacuation of initially military personnel and those supporting them from Kabul, Afghanistan and then Afghan civilians and more recently, those arriving in the UK from the Ukraine. British Nationals from Hong Kong have also been welcomed into Surrey, under their national re-settlement scheme. In addition, the County is providing accommodation for asylum seekers, most notably those that arrive in small boats having crossed the channel. A number of these are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, who warrant the utmost sensitivity in their treatment.

Each cohort has arrived in Surrey under different schemes, with different experiences/levels of support available to them and different needs and expectations of how they are to be treated and in some cases 'processed'.

Surrey's public, voluntary, private and community sectors have come together in the most generous and welcoming way to provide a wide range of support and help, which has included, recognising the variety of cohorts, their circumstances and needs:

- Hosting Ukrainian guests and supporting them in settling into Surrey community life
- Arranging ESOL classes
- Providing wrap-around support (e.g. GP registration, welfare, counselling, hygiene products, etc.) to Afghans house in 'Bridging' Hotels
- Providing guidance, advice and help in navigating the UK benefits and employment systems for those eligible
- Identifying and organising education provision for school aged children, further education and young adults
- Providing a Bus Pass scheme for Ukrainians
- Making welfare and safeguarding visits to asylum accommodation in re-purposed hotels
- Arranging and organising social and sports activities for asylum seekers
- Identifying suitable permanent accommodation in which Afghans can be resettled
- Undertaking research into the nature and needs of Hong Kong nationals arriving in the UK

Acknowledging that it is a dynamic situation with a constant flow into and out of the County, it is estimated that approximately 6,000 refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers are being supported and accommodated across Surrey.