



Asylum and Refugee Network - QARN

Refugees are the human face of international injustice.
Michael Bartlet, former UK Quaker Parliamentary Liaison Officer

QARN's aims

We aim to:

- 1) Work to change the way that refugees and asylum seekers (whether recognized under the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees or not) are treated, to ensure that justice and compassion are the guiding principles.
- 2) Support each other as Friends acting under concern.
- 3) Keep Friends in our Meetings up to date with developments.
- 4) Support British Quakers' principled critique of current asylum policy, as part of our corporate Quaker witness, in keeping with our testimony to equality.
- 5) Guide Britain Yearly Meeting, now that Meeting for Sufferings have accepted that asylum is a Concern, to help them to work effectively for justice and compassion in our asylum and immigration system.

QARN is a Britain Yearly Meeting recognised Quaker body, and is regularly consulted about press releases and statements issued on behalf of Quakers in Britain.

Quakers and Refugees: past and present

Quakers have always combined a global outlook with practical action on the ground: Many Quakers opposed the international trade in slaves and helped fugitives from the slave states, though some Quakers built wealth from complicity in slavery. We look back in our history to the relief committees set up for refugees from the Franco-Prussian war in the 1870s, and the South African war 1899-1902. We remember Quaker support for children caught up in the Spanish Civil War, and our involvement in the Kindertransport that rescued Jewish children from the concentration camps. British and American Quakers ran refugee camps in Europe between 1940 - 1948, and this work was recognised by the award of the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize.

Today, Quakers are engaged in many initiatives to support asylum seekers, forced migrants and refugees. We have seen the injustice they face on a daily basis and recognise that there is a need to challenge a system which is fundamentally flawed. In 2006, concerned Friends in the UK set up the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) so that we could work together on joint advocacy and campaigning for radical change to the asylum system.

How we work

- We hold four meetings a year in person, on zoom or blended. These are open to all Quakers, and our meetings are based on Quaker worship and business methods.
- The website www.qarn.org.uk is a valuable resource for Friends' learning and testimony, offering breaking news on asylum issues and a useful archive. QARN also has a Facebook page. We provide leaflets on several key issues, available here: <https://qarn.org.uk/qarn-leaflets-download-them-here/>
- The QARN e-mail list enables Friends to exchange information, highlight urgent issues and sign joint petitions.

QUAKER ASYLUM AND REFUGEE NETWORK (QARN)

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- Since 2015, QARN has held three conferences linked with other Quaker bodies. We arrange special meetings each year during Yearly Meeting.
- In 2021, QARN, QCEA, and QPSW worked together to provide a Woodbrooke course on reimagining asylum systems. It provided a historical view of Britain's migration policies and the values that have underpinned it; it looked at systems of oppression and issues of racial and migrant justice; and how to bring about change.
- In 2017, the Sanctuary Meetings initiative was launched at Britain Yearly Meeting. Many Quaker Meetings have become Sanctuary Meetings, seeking out ways to support local work to assist asylum seekers and refugees as well as tackling harmful policies. Some QARN members are championing Sanctuary activities in their Meetings.

QARN's campaigns

We recognised that we could not campaign on every matter of concern, and therefore decided to focus on specific issues. Our strategy is for QARN to participate in selected networks that are also focused on these issues – especially those networks that have participation and leadership by people with lived experience of the immigration system.

We began by joining with other organisations in a campaign to **end the detention of children**. Following the progress of this campaign, we took up the issue of **indefinite detention**. The decision to detain men and women in Immigration Removal Centres is an administrative one, it is not made by a judge, and those detained do not know whether they will be held in prison-like conditions for days, weeks, months or even years. This is another form of torture for people who have fled killing and torture in their home country and had hoped for a place of safety in ours. In 2012, QARN's statement calling for an end to indefinite detention was adopted by Britain Yearly Meeting and recommended for advocacy with MPs. QARN belongs to the Detention Forum, a coalition of over 50 organisations, which campaigns for a time limit and a supportive environment (alternatives to detention). QARN has made submissions to parliamentary inquiries into immigration detention and responded to Home Office consultations.

In addition, we are currently active on several issues: The devastating human impact of the **'hostile environment' policy**, enforced since 2012; the **destitution** of those whose asylum claims have been refused; the extortionate **visa fees** imposed on migrants on the 10 year path to Indefinite Leave to Remain; and the **dehumanising language** used to describe people seeking safety on our shores. Linked with the expertise of the networks we belong to, we have also developed **positive policy recommendations** to bring to policymakers, seeking a more just, efficient and compassionate asylum system.

Our core concern is that asylum seekers, including children, forced to flee their homes and arriving here in search of safety, are facing a toxic and violent media as well as overwhelming obstacles and unnecessary delays in the official processes. Quakers will continue to challenge the culture of disbelief, create a culture of hospitality, and work for justice and compassion in asylum and migration policy and practice.

The QARN network provides a space for support and encouragement for Friends working for change. To [invite a QARN speaker](#) to your Meeting, or to [join us](#), send a message to info@qarn.org.uk.