

EXODUSZINE.CO.UK

ISSUE  
7

Standing up to racism

Gaza Poets Society

Asylum seekers – the facts

Human rights – which ones are  
you willing to give up?

# EXODUS

Produced by refugees and people seeking asylum for the community



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Exodus is a non-profit magazine produced by a small group of volunteers to give a voice to refugees seeking a new life in the UK. Exodus team: Jean-Marc Hall, Souran Soleimani, Helen Ball, Martin Trepte.  
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## Worrying times with far right on the march

WITH the rise of the right wing and its racist narrative, coupled with the kind of extremism that Reform is peddling, putting the spotlight on what their policies would actually mean for those seeking sanctuary in the UK, is now a matter of the utmost urgency.

After 120,000 supporters of the far right EDL took to the streets of London, it is clear that unity and solidarity of those standing up to racism is more important than ever.

This is a huge wake-up call and although there is an overwhelming anti-racist majority in Britain, campaigners, trade unions, politicians, faith groups and others need to unite and stop the far right at the ballot box.

Let us continue with the correct narrative. Immigration is good for this country. As well as filling countless important jobs left by an aging population, they put more into the system than they take out.

Small boat crossings are just three per cent of overall migration but constantly dominate the debate.

To stop the small boat crossings it is essential to offer safe and legal routes.

The reason people are stuck in hotels

is that the Conservative and now Labour government decided to delay the processing of those seeking sanctuary.

Putting them in hotels is just holding up the processing of claims and making it look like a crisis while hotel owners are making fortunes instead of treating people with humanity and decency.

Let's not forget that nearly 80 per cent of asylum claims get approved.

The overwhelming problems in this country are caused by years of austerity. The government refuses to tax millionaires and billionaires who pile money away that stays unused and of no benefit to the economy. Instead of putting money into social housing, the health service and education, money is spent on military arms that fuel wars that inevitably cause more people to flee their homes.

People coming out of hotels should be supported and helped to get into work and housing and integrated into communities.

We hope that all who take time to read EXODUS will understand and share the stories of hope and bravery from refugees to counter the prevailing narrative.

Jean-Marc Hall

Exodus project co-ordinator

## Exodus team spreads word at Freshers' Fair

EXODUS volunteers Souran Soleimani, Helen Ball and Jean-Marc Hall, spread the word about the magazine and its message of hope among new students at Reading University's Freshers' Fair.

It is the second year that the team have attended the event, alongside friends from organisations with similar aims and values including Amnesty International and Care4Calais.

Exodus project co-ordinator Jean-Marc said: "It was a fantastic day spent with like-minded people spreading a positive message about refugees and people seeking sanctuary in the UK. The students were really engaged and receptive which gives me hope for the future."



Souran Soleimani, Helen Ball and Jean-Marc Hall at the Freshers' Fair.

# Take it away maestro

## Keyboard presented to talented young musician who taught himself to play the piano on his mobile phone

**A** TALENTED youngster who had been practising his piano skills on an app on his mobile phone has been presented with a keyboard of his own after stunning the organisers of a music event with his playing.

Amirreza, 14, who arrived from Iran with his family last year, took part in The Maidenhead Festival SoundLab in May.

The event was designed to give people hands-on experience of musical instruments, including the piano.

Festival chairman Lisa Hunter said: "Amirreza had been watching from a distance and eventually asked if he could play. We were all blown away by his talent, which was all the more incredible when he told us he was only able to practise using an app on his phone."

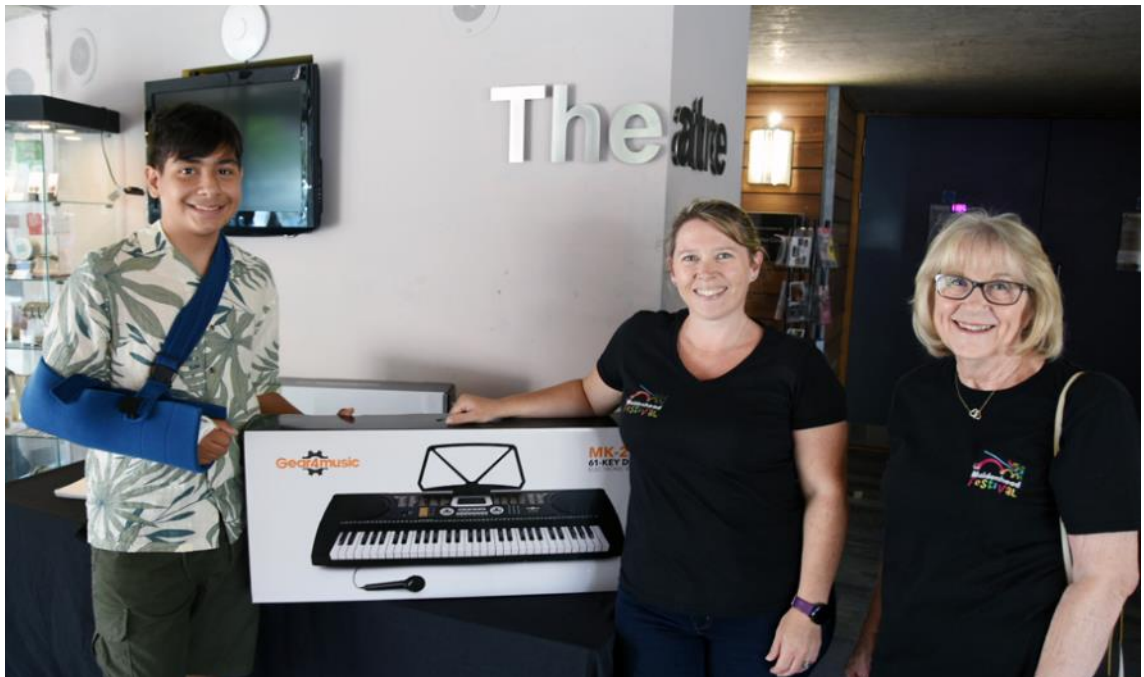
It emerged the teenager has only been playing for about nine months and was self-taught using videos on YouTube alongside the phone app.

He said: "I used to play with my thumbs on my phone but there was also a piano at the church where we go and I learned to play with my fingers."

"In church there is someone who plays the piano and they are teaching me how to read music."

So impressed were the Maidenhead Festival team that they immediately helped arrange for piano lessons provided under a special bursary scheme by the Berkshire Music Trust, and Amirreza is now on a waiting list for a teacher to become available.

In the meantime, as part of its legacy programme of supporting the arts and artists in the community, the Festival has bought Amirreza his own key-



Amirreza, above, receives his keyboard from Maidenhead Festival chairman Lisa Hunter and volunteer Joyce Delasalle. Below, the young maestro stunned everyone with his playing at the SoundLab.

board, complete with stand, stool and headphones, so he can continue to practise on his own.

Amirreza, whose favourite piece of music is Mozart's Turkish March, said: "I am so happy. Playing the piano calms me down and this means so much to me."

Lisa added: "We are really honoured to be able to present this to Amirreza as he was the stand-out talent at our SoundLab event."

"It's wonderful that Maidenhead Festival is able to foster that talent as part of our legacy of supporting the arts."

Unfortunately Amir had to wait before he could start playing his new keyboard properly as he suffered a broken wrist in a football accident at school.

"Hopefully I'll be out of the cast in three weeks," he said.

**Martin Trepte**

Picture: Ian Longthorne, Maidenhead Advertiser





# Refugees languishing in asylum hotels was a 'political choice'

NOBODY wants to see people seeking asylum confined to costly and unsuitable accommodation in hotels – such as at the Bell Hotel in Epping, the focus of right-wing protests which were a catalyst for copycat demonstrations across the UK.

It is important that refugees are integrated into communities around the country. The backlog of people waiting for a decision on their claim for asylum has grown, and it is vital to understand the issues in perspective.

A delay in processing claims, the lack of dispersal accommodation and the shortage of long-term housing options all contribute to the huge backlog of asylum claims.

The vast majority of people seeking asylum around the world do not come to the UK. But for the relatively small number of people who do, the most common reason they arrive is to join their family, who are already in the country.

Another common reason why they come to the UK is that they speak the language.

With massive press coverage of right-



wing protests outside hotels used to house people seeking asylum, plus the misinformation and exploitation by right-wing politi-

cians whipping up hatred and hostility, the consequences have left people seeking sanctuary terrified and vulnerable.

The right-wing politicians, looking for potential electoral votes and using deceptive tactics, are pitching working class people against working class people, just as the government did during the miners' strike in the 1980s.

While Nigel Farage and Kemi Badenock continue to simplify and misrepresent their policies to gain votes, they cavort with and tease those willing to intensify the situation, such as Badenock's aggressive remarks declaring it 'shameful' to remove St George Cross flags from lampposts.

Nobody had noticed that some Union flags were being flown upside down.

Fortunately, the counter demonstrations have shown the majority of the general public welcome migrants and share their compassion with those seeking sanctuary.

It is important to note the global number of forcibly displaced people has nearly doubled in the last decade due to conflict, persecution and global warming.

## 'We are no threat': resident's reply to protestors outside hotels

WE are writing to address some of the concerns that have been raised recently regarding protests in our area.

We understand that there may be worries, and we want to assure you that many of us are here to contribute positively to the community.

Some of us hold university certifications from our home countries in various fields.

We are not a danger to your community; we are human beings, just as your Government states, we are equal in humanity.

We have our own families, responsibilities and personalities.

It is unfair to judge everyone by the actions of a few.

Many of us have families, including young children and babies. We have hopes and skills that, given the chance, could be beneficial here.

When we consider the future, what message does fear and judgement send to our one-year-old babies who cannot under-

stand or articulate their own experiences?

As a 35-year-old, I am proud to be living in the UK, a country with a rich history. Every time I visit a historical site, I show respect and reflect on how this nation was built. I believe anyone who appreciates history can understand and respect this sentiment.



There's a misconception that we are living in luxury while some of you are homeless.

This is far from the truth.

Our living spaces are often very small and these rooms serve as our dining, cooking, and sleeping areas, especially with children.

The daily stress is immense.

We ask you to imagine yourselves in our shoes; many of us carry very sad stories.

We often feel we have no rights or power, even within our temporary accommodations, and many of us are not allowed to work.

The idea that we are taking your workplaces is also a misunderstanding. Individuals with qualifications and skills will always find their way and we are not the cause of homelessness.

We hope this message encourages a moment of reflection and understanding.

**A concerned hotel resident**



# Safe routes are the only way to break traffickers' business model

APPROXIMATELY 18,000 French police officers patrol the French coast, partly funded by the UK Government – at a cost of approximately £480m.

The size of this area used by refugees and people seeking asylum makes it impossible to stop small boats crossing the English Channel.

However, with Keir Starmer and Emmanuel Macron directing further proposals to stem the number of people arriving in the UK in small boats, the summer has seen weather conditions remain ideal for crossing the Channel.

And although the number of people crossing has soared this year, it still represents a minuscule proportion of overall migration.

French police have taken to slashing boats while waist deep in water, a practice deemed unacceptable and dangerous by humanitarian groups including Care4Calais. Women and children are often placed in the centre of the boat pro-

tected by those around them from the elements and the sea. This makes them vulnerable if the boat is forcibly damaged in shallow water.

Proposals by humanitarian groups have focused on providing 'safe and legal' routes for people to claim asylum in the UK, so they don't have to make dangerous crossings by boats.

A 'safe and legal' route to the UK means a journey that is formally approved by the UK Government – they exist for refugees from Ukraine and Hong Kong.

Such routes mean Home Office immigration rules permit the journey without a visa. The Government allows nobody to make a claim for asylum in the UK unless they are physically present in the UK. Seeking asylum from persecution is lawful and refugees do not need anyone's permission and it is enshrined in international law..

Safe routes include creating or expanding refugee resettlement programmes, expanding visa routes for refu-

gees to join family members, providing additional humanitarian visas, or creating an option to apply for asylum from overseas.

This is the only practical way to destroy the gangs' business model and stop the dangerous crossings. The Refugee Convention 1951 enshrines the right of everyone to 'seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution'. The Government continues to take a firm stance against asylum claims, making it more difficult for individuals to enter the UK. But the so called 'refugee crisis' has been manufactured by politicians, amplified by the right-wing media and exploited by those same politicians for electoral gain.

The long-term benefits of immigration suggests that by 2030 the country's economic production will depend on those who have come to our shores, for whatever reason, to make a home and future here.

**Jean-Marc Hall**  
(Additional information The Guardian and Amnesty International)



# Putting asylum issues into context

ACCORDING to the Refugee Council, the national charity that helps refugees rebuild their lives, integrate into communities and play a part in Britain, there were 85,112 asylum applications (relating to 109,343 people) in the UK in the year to March 2025.

This was up 15 per cent from the previous 12 months. Nearly a third had been waiting for more than a year for their case to be decided.

Of these 38,023 were people who arrived by small boats in the year to March 2025 — an increase of 22 per cent compared to the previous year.

At the end of March this year, of the 106,771 people seeking asylum supported by the UK Government 32,345 (30 per cent) were living in hotels, a figure that is decreasing.

For context total migration into the UK in 2024, according to the House of Commons Library, was 948,000 arrivals with 513,000 people emigrating, leaving a net figure of 431,000.

People seeking asylum are banned from working and get £7 per day from the Government to cover the costs of their basic necessities. If they live in a hotel it is £9.95 a week.

About half of asylum claims are granted protection at the initial decision stage, meaning they have been awarded refugee status or humanitarian protection. In the year to March 44,370 asylum seekers were granted protection, a 34 per cent decrease from the previous year when 67,533 people were granted asylum.

The quality of decision-making is often poor and about half of refusals are overturned on appeal. Asylum cases often take years to be resolved.

Newly granted refugees face destitution and homelessness as, when they receive a positive decision on their asylum claim, just 28 days later they must leave their Home Office accommodation and their financial support stops.

Faced with a cliff edge and no support to find new housing, open a bank account and secure income, among other activities needed before being evicted, many refugees are at significant risk of homelessness and destitution.

The definition of a refugee according to the 1951 United Nations Convention is:

*"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,*

Photo: Theglobalpanorama, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.



*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; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."*

A person seeking asylum is someone who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been

**'People seeking asylum are banned from working and get £7 a day to cover the costs of their basic necessities. If they live in a hotel it's £9.95 a week.'**

concluded. In the UK, a person seeking asylum becomes a refugee when the Government agrees they meet the definition in the Refugee Convention. Usually refugees in the UK are given five years leave to remain. They must then apply for further leave, although their status as a refugee is not limited to five years.

To put the number of asylum seekers in the UK into context, at the end of 2021 around 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced across the world.

Of these, 27.1 million were refugees,

while 53.2 million were internally displaced within their country of origin. About 41 per cent of displaced people across the world are children.

It is estimated 72 per cent of the world's refugees are living in countries neighbouring their country of origin, often in developing countries.

Meanwhile, the UK is home to approximately one per cent of the 27.1 million refugees who were forcibly displaced across the world.

People seeking asylum are looking for a place of safety. The top ten refugee producing countries in 2021 all have poor human rights records or on-going conflict. Asylum seekers are fleeing from these conflicts and abuses.

There is no such thing as an 'illegal' or 'bogus' person seeking asylum. Under international law, anyone has the right to apply for asylum in any country that has signed the 1951 Convention and to remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim. It is recognised in the Convention that people fleeing persecution may have to use irregular means to escape and claim asylum in another country — there is no legal way to travel to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking asylum.

The Convention guarantees everybody the right to apply for asylum. It has saved millions of lives. No country has ever withdrawn from it.

There is nothing in international law to say refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach.

Some of the countries through which people travel to get to Europe are unsafe. Many have not signed the Convention.

Refugees make a huge contribution to the UK. For example about 1,200 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association's database.

Children in the UK asylum system contribute positively to schools, in turn enabling more successful integration of families into local communities

People seeking asylum do not come to the UK to claim benefits.

Most know nothing about welfare benefits before they arrive and had no expectation that they would receive financial support.

**Sources:** Home Office Immigration Statistics, Ministry of Justice Tribunal Statistics, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Homelessness Statistics.

Martin Trepte



## ‘War leaves no one untouched’

I WAS born in a land where war wasn’t just a word. it was the weather.

The sky spoke in sirens, the ground trembled with explosions, and hope was something whispered, never declared. I was a child during the Iran–Iraq War, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. You don’t forget the sound of fear. You don’t forget hunger, silence, or the way your parents look at you when they can’t protect you.

Now, decades later, another war has begun. this time between Iran and Israel. The weapons are more advanced, the headlines louder, but the result is the same: destruction, displacement, and despair.

From afar, here in the UK where I now live as a refugee, the news arrives quickly, but the pain travels faster.

And sometimes, even the news doesn’t come. When the internet is cut off in Iran, I can’t reach my mother. I can’t ask if my relatives are safe or if my old neighborhood still stands. The silence becomes heavier than any bomb.

**Kurdish Iranian refugee and Exodus journalist Souran Soleimani reflects on the war between Iran and Israel**

You sit in a small flat in a quiet British town, refreshing the same screen, waiting for a message — any sign that the people you love are still alive. That kind of waiting becomes a war of its own.

This war, like every war, won’t remain on maps or in military briefings.

It will enter memories.

It will shape the futures of children who grow up with nightmares and no language to explain them.

It will create more refugees, people forced to carry both their past and their paperwork in the same hand.

And what of the mothers? I think of them most.

Whether in Tehran, Tel Aviv, Gaza, or Karkuk, they carry the truest weight of war.

They are the ones who wait by doors. Who pray through sleepless nights. Who bury their sons and still feed the living.

I remember my own mother during the

Iran- Iraq War. How she wrapped us in her arms when the windows shook and how she smiled so we wouldn’t cry, though her own eyes were full of tears.

Mothers never surrender. But they are always the ones who lose the most.

People often ask: “Whose fault is it?” But that’s the wrong question.

The real question is: “Who pays the price?” And the answer is always the same: ordinary people.

This war, like all wars, is already writing its legacy, not in victory or defeat, but in broken homes, empty classrooms, and lost childhoods.

There is no such thing as a clean war. There is no such thing as a distant war. War always returns, sometimes in body, sometimes in spirit.

I write this not to offer answers, but to offer a voice, the voice of someone who knows what war takes and what it leaves behind.

War does not end where the bombs fall. It ends much later, if ever, in the hearts of those who survive it.



## I'm not waiting for the war to end — by Mohammed Moussa

*I'm not waiting for the war to end,  
I'm waiting for death to halt its relentless march,  
waiting for the kids to sleep well, dine heartily,  
and embrace mothers who do not grieve.*

*I'm not waiting for the war to end,  
I'm waiting for the end of funerals, the reunion of lovers,  
the resurrection of shattered dreams in the hearts of the  
young.*

*I'm not waiting for the war to end,  
I'm waiting for the golden hues to embrace the bleeding  
shore,  
for laughter to echo through the streets.*

*I'm waiting for the world to stand up and apologise  
for what it has done and what it has not,  
for what it has started and finished  
and left unending.*

# Creativity refuses to be crushed

EVEN in the face of the ongoing genocide, The Gaza Poets Society, the premier spoken word community in the Strip continues to act as both a creative outlet and a conduit for poets in the besieged Palestinian territory to connect with the international literary scene.

Founded in 2018 by Mohammed Moussa, a Palestinian freelance journalist, and podcast host, the society is a literary community that compiles anthologies, sponsors young poets and produces podcasts,

It collaborates with Gaza's Creative Allies, a global collective dedicated to amplifying the creative work of artists, writers, filmmakers and cultural practitioners who stand in solidarity with Gaza and the Palestinian liberation struggle.

Through art, storytelling and cultural initiatives, the collective highlights powerful expressions of resistance, resilience, and humanity, showcasing works that challenge oppression and advocate for justice.

Inspired by Gaza's enduring spirit,

Gaza's Creative Allies fosters collaboration, supports censored voices and promotes creative projects that reflect shared values of dignity and freedom, including exhibitions, open letters and campaigns.

Mohammed is also involved in We Are Not Numbers, an organisation of emerging writers from Palestine who tell their stories and advocate for their human rights.

Mohammed who has a degree in English literature is passionate about writing poetry, which he says is like 'a safe river where my feelings and emotions can flow peacefully'. He said:

"Through poetry, I express what I feel and experience, in an attempt to convey my experiences to the outside world."

Mohammed has written a poetry book titled "I Was Born in Gaza," about his experiences during war-time.

"Living in a besieged city and occupied country has taught me to snatch the sweetness of life from the bitterness of miseries," he said.

You can find The Gaza Poets Society on Facebook and Substack.



Picture: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0



**Mohammed Mousa, founder of the Gaza Poets Society.**

## Where are we going — by Shaimaa Qanoona

*We carry our pain in heavy silence,  
Walking upon the rubble of the impossible.  
Our bags are filled with tears,  
So where, dear heart, are we going?*

*Here we were, here stood our homes,  
Here the children played without end.  
Here laughter broke into smoke,  
And dreams scattered with the wind.*

*Gaza, oh sorrow of years,  
Wound of a mother that never heals.  
We fled, under a sky with no cover,*

*We die, with no chance of survival.*

*Where do we go, when tents offer no safety,  
When the wind howls, and wounds go untouched?  
We walk with no path, no homeland to embrace,  
And in the streets they ask: Where are you going?*

*We don't know, but we still hope,  
For a dawn to rise again over the broken*

*horizon.*

*We whisper prayers, we long for peace,  
And carry within us a longing born in darkness.*

*So to those who ask about the road ahead—  
We are a people that do not fade or grow old.  
And even if we're lost, our hearts will return,  
To a land where martyrdom is eternal, and so is love*



# Loved ones are alive in my heart

WHEN the joys of Eid arrive, and the village is filled with colourful decorations and new cars, a shadow of fear and sorrow quietly settles in.

Three cars raced by at terrifying speed – the sudden screech of brakes shook my body and mind.

I began to run – along with three of my neighbours – through the narrow village streets near the mosque.

I was running from torture, from shame, from the memory of a painful death I had once witnessed.

Two years ago, I had survived 171 days of brutal torture. But life had changed. My family had married me to my beloved, MahGul.

It had been nine months since our wedding. And God had blessed us – we were expecting a daughter, Mahal, who was due to arrive in just a few days.

That moment felt like a film of memories. I was running not just for myself, but for Mahal, for MahGul, for the happiness of my family.

I ran as fast as I could through the village streets, joined by three others – each seemingly running to save their own life. One of them was my neighbour, a Hafiz of the Quran, a reciter. He ran ahead of me with his brother.

Then suddenly, while running, he bent down, scooped a handful of dirt, and threw it into my eyes. Everything went dark. I stumbled.

Then I heard laughter – loud, cruel laughter from the two brothers. In that moment, I understood. Something had changed.

Then the soldiers came – rushing toward me from the vehicles. They blindfolded me, shouted insults, and kicked me to the ground. I kept begging them: “I’ve done nothing wrong. I have committed no sin.

Please let me go. I just want to see my daughter.”

I had so many dreams for Mahal. I wanted to be with her once – just once – to hold her in my arms and feel like a father.

“Don’t kill Mahal’s future. Don’t destroy MahGul’s happiness.”

I kept shouting. They kept beating. For three long hours, they hurled curses at me, pulled my hair, and struck me again and again. Then, the car began to slow down. A voice said: “Take him out. Let him face judgment. This is it – the order from above has come. We will release him now.”



They dragged me out of the car, pain burning through my body.

My hands were tied, but they removed the blindfold. My eyes were still blurry from the dirt.

A military officer stepped out of the car. He walked toward me with fury on his face. He came close, spat in my face, and said: “We let you go last time. Now, you’ll do as we say. You will not speak for the Baloch missing persons. You will not speak for freedom.

“We are the justice. We are the equality. We are the law. And we are God.”

He raised a pistol and pointed it at my chest. In that moment, images of Mahal, MahGul, my elderly mother, and my homeland – they all flashed through my mind.

I looked to the God of the heavens, but I felt as though even He was helpless be-

fore these earthly gods. And then – a bullet pierced my heart. My blood touched the soil of my land.

That’s when my eyes opened. It was a dream. A nightmare. I couldn’t believe it – I was still alive. But my body felt like a corpse, and my soul like a ghost.

I placed my hand on my chest – there was no wound. I was not lying in a field.

I was alive. And in that moment, my thoughts turned first to my homeland – to the freedom and dignity of my people, to everything we had lost and everything we still dream to reclaim.

Then I thought of Mahal. And my love, MahGul. They were still alive in my heart.

It was only a dream.

**Naseer Baloch**

**Nappier Barracks Asylum Seeker camp  
Folkestone**



# Media coverage of EHCR puts trust in law at risk, warns report

AN OXFORD University report has warned misleading media coverage is shaping public debate on immigration and human rights and contributing to misconceptions that risk undermining trust in the legal system.

The study, by the university's Bonavero Institute of Human Rights in the Faculty of Law, found the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is frequently misrepresented in reporting on deportation cases involving foreign national offenders.

The report found a large majority of ECHR-related news articles published in the UK in the first half of 2025 focussed on immigration and deportation. Analysis showed frequent misreporting of immigration tribunal cases, as well as mischaracterisations of the UK's system of immigration appeals and the role played in it by the ECHR.

The study involved a review of media reports that mentioned the ECHR between 1 January and 30 June 2025, analysing 379 news stories and opinion pieces. About 75 per cent of these focused on the ECHR's role in immigration control – particularly appeals by foreign national offenders against deportation orders.

It found immigration tribunal cases are frequently misreported. It highlighted several high-profile examples of misleading coverage, including the so-called 'chicken nuggets' case – widely reported as the prevention of an individual's deportation on the basis of his child's dislike of foreign food, despite the decision not being based on this detail and having already been overturned.

These misrepresentations, the authors say, risk eroding public confidence in the legal system and are fuelling calls to leave the ECHR based on misleading portrayals of the role and operation of the ECHR in the UK.

Co-author professor Alice Donald said: "Our findings show much of the public discussion about the ECHR and immigration is not grounded in accurate reporting. For a debate of such importance, it is essential arguments are based on evidence and a correct understanding of the law. Without this, public trust in the rule of law is placed at risk."

Picture - Markus Spiske, Unsplash



Despite political and media focus on cases involving foreign national offenders, the report highlights successful human rights-based appeals against deportation are rare. The latest Home Office data on human rights-based appeals against deportation shows that in the 15 months to June 2021, the number of successful appeals amounted to only 0.73 per cent of the total number of sentenced foreign national offenders.

Over a five-year period to June 2021, the number of successful human rights-based deportation appeals represented about 3.5 per cent of the total number of deportations – and around 2.5 per cent when looking at appeals based solely on private and family life grounds. These figures may even be overestimates as they do not account for cases subsequently overturned by the Upper Tribunal.

The report clarifies the ECHR does not grant non-citizens a right to live in the UK, and that states are free to set their own immigration policies. In deportation cases, two provisions of the Convention are typically invoked: Article 3 (prohibition of torture or inhuman treatment) or Article 8 (protection of private and family life).

The report shows reliance on Article 8 in appeals against deportation gained significant attention in media coverage in the first half of 2025. But the possibility of claiming the right to protection of private and family life to prevent deportation is

heavily restricted by legislation passed by Parliament.

Under UK immigration law, deportation orders are mandatory for foreign national offenders sentenced to 12 months or more in prison, and exceptions apply only in very limited circumstances.

The report warns misconceptions about tribunal cases, the UK's appeals system and the ECHR have real consequences: sensational coverage can fuel hostility towards migrants and human rights law, and, as senior judges have noted, can even put the safety of members of the judiciary at risk.

The authors argue responsible reporting, combined with better data, is vital for sustaining democratic debate on immigration policy.

Co-author Professor Başak Çali, of the Bonavero Institute, said: "Politicians, journalists and commentators may legitimately hold different views on immigration and human rights. But mischaracterising how the law operates does a disservice to the public."

"Evidence should be the foundation of any debate, whatever view one takes on the policy questions."

The report concludes proposals by some commentators and politicians to curtail the UK's participation in the ECHR are being made on the basis of misconceptions rather than a clear picture of how the law is applied in practice.



**D**ISINFORMATION and about the effects of human rights legislation on immigration is fuelling calls by right-wing politicians to scrap legal protections so they can deport asylum-seekers more easily – stripping those rights from the rest of the population in the process.

The same politicians and right-wing newspapers which convinced 17 million people to vote for Brexit have now manufactured the 'small boats crisis'.

Their Brexit has directly caused the increase in small boat crossings following the end of the Dublin agreement, which allowed for the repatriation of asylum seekers to other EU countries without considering their claims. But instead of admitting this spectacular own goal, they have doubled down on the issue, whipping up public anger and protests with misinformation and blaming refugees for many of today's problems.

Now those same conmen, charlatans and snakeoil salesmen who took away our European citizenship want to strip us of our human rights as well.

Politicians like Reform's Nigel Farage and leading Tories are demanding the UK leaves the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and scraps the Human Rights Act (HRA), a UK law passed in 1998



## When the solution is worse than the problem

that incorporates the ECHR into domestic law. Sadly, even some Labour politicians are now dancing to Reform's tune as the party rides high in the polls and also starting to call for the suspension of our human rights.

Right wing politicians and commentators are demanding the UK scraps the HRA because they claim it prevents asylum seekers from being deported.

They claim the law is broken as they can't deport people they don't think should be in the country. Human rights defenders point out that the courts are enforcing the law – which means some attempts to deport people are simply unlawful.

Whatever the merits of the arguments, is it really worth stripping 69 million people of their human rights simply to be

able to deport a relative handful of asylum seekers? Surely this is a case of the solution being far worse than the problem it is supposed to fix?

If you don't know much about the HRA and think that leaving the ECHR won't affect you, take a look at the rights enshrined in it below, and ask yourself which protections you'd be happy not to have.

### Human rights explained: which ones would you be prepared to give up?

THE European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is an international treaty created by the Council of Europe – not the European Union – that protects human rights in its member countries. The Human Rights Act (HRA) ensures these rights can be enforced in UK's legal system.

The ECHR is overseen and enforced by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, France. The HRA brings fundamental rights from the ECHR into UK law.

If a UK court finds an Act of Parliament breaches these rights, they can issue a declaration of incompatibility, leaving it to Parliament to decide whether to change the law.

The Human Rights Act includes the following articles:

**The Right to life** - Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law.

**The Prohibition of torture** - No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**The Prohibition of slavery and forced labour** - No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.

**The Right to liberty and security** - Everyone has the right to liberty and security.

**The Right to a fair trial** - Everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law.

**The Right to respect for private and family life** - Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.

**Freedom of thought, conscience and religion** - Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

**Freedom of expression** - Everyone has

the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

**Freedom of assembly and association** - Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

**The right to marry** - Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family

**Prohibition of discrimination** - The enjoyment of these rights and freedoms without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.





Above MP Dianne Abbot leads the march and right, Exodus's Jean-Marc Hall at the counter protest against the far right.

# Marchers unite against the right

MORE than 20,000 people marched in solidarity against the far right supporters of the English Defence League (EDL) and their festival of hate, finishing in Whitehall, London, in September.

'Stand up to Racism' counter demonstrators showed that although there is a silent anti-racist majority in Britain, activists,

campaigners, and ordinary people all need to unite and stop the far right both on the streets and at the ballot box.

Speeches by MPs Dianne Abbot and Zara Sultana highlighted the challenges and the huge wake-up call facing the UK, made simultaneously with a passionate call for empathy and understanding from

Mo, a refugee from war torn Sudan.

The counter demonstration ended peacefully and compliant, confirming that hate and intimidation would not succeed.

But when even the Prime Minister is using language about 'an island of strangers' the march showed the importance of communities standing together.



More than 20,000 people took to the streets of London to show that hate and intimidation should have no place in the UK.



# The campaigner who likes to cook

MAJEDA Khouri is a foodie with a mission. Or, more precisely, an activist who likes to cook.

She combines the two in the London-based Syrian Sunflower, the social enterprise she set up as she re-made her life after fleeing civil war.

She was apart from her husband and two children, had nowhere to live and as an asylum seeker was barred from working. She spoke little English, and understood less: “people seemed to be talking so fast.

“So I would put earphones on for almost 24 hours a day until I got familiar with the British accent.”

She imported that determination, drive and energy from Syria, where she practised as an architect and, after the outbreak of conflict, became a rights activist. She was detained and witnessed and documented human rights abuses, especially against women and children.

In the UK an early breakthrough came when she met a woman from Migrateful (in-person cookery classes in London).

“She asked me, ‘Can you teach me to cook?’”

That led to Khouri doing cookery classes for 15-20 women. But though she loves food, her real interest was the opportunities it opened up for conversations. She was particularly concerned to challenge and change negative ideas about refugees.

“I told the British women attending the classes about women in Syria, how they became refugees, how they used their skills, about their bravery, about how they took responsibility, especially those who fled with children after their husbands had been killed or detained.”

This food-and-talk tactic blossomed after she was officially granted asylum: “I needed a job. Because I have these skills and people like my food, I did a lot of supper clubs and Sunday lunches, introducing people to Syrian food.”

Another group, TERN (The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network), helped her acquire the know-how to establish a company, and switched her on to the idea of a social enterprise because: “I wanted not just a business, but to help other women with a refugee background.

“At the same time I was hearing from Londoners and other British people that refugees were ‘taking our taxpayers money’.”

So, later she was able to offer jobs to women in Syrian Sunflower. She taught



**MAJEDA Khouri (Photo: Migrant Voice)**

women how to register their own kitchen business and translated health and safety rules into Arabic: “I had got the experience, so I transferred it to them.”

Syrian Sunflower now caters for corporate events and weddings. The events have included a meal for 2,000 in Italy (“I didn’t sleep for three days”) and party food for the re-opening of the Museum of Migration in London.

She also gives refugee women tips on integrating into British society.

“I even trained them to take children to parks and to school — not to wait for their husband to do it — because they didn’t have the confidence to go out of the house or use transport. They were afraid to

talk to people. It’s odd to think that as a child and before I married, I didn’t enter the kitchen unless I wanted to eat or drink.

“An interest in cookery only came when I had kids and I wanted them to be healthy and didn’t want to give them any processed food.

“It was never in my mind that cooking will be my job, until I came to the UK. But it was a good skill.

“Now, through cooking, I share my beautiful culture and tell the untold stories of Syria.”

And fortunately, she adds, “Londoners want to try everything, all kinds of food.”

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# Arts centre celebrates quarter of a century of transforming lives

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead. Exodus journalist **Souran Soleimani** speaks to creative director Jane Correy about its role in the community and its outstanding work to provide a welcome to people seeking sanctuary

**SOURAN Soleimani:** Norden Farm's mission is to bring the community together through creativity. In this vision, how do you see refugees and migrants playing a part?

**Jane Correy:** Refugees and migrants are part of our community and enrich all of our lives...

**SS:** As a refugee myself, I was given the opportunity to work in the café here at Norden Farm after receiving my residency. This experience was a powerful example of integration for me personally. From your perspective, how important are opportunities like this in helping people build a true sense of belonging?

**JC:** My personal experience from living in another country, is that being able to work can be so important in making you feel part of the community. It enhances your self-confidence and gives you a real sense of belonging. For new arrivals, being able to work side-by-side with existing residents makes it easy to forge new relationships and promotes understanding.

**SS:** In your view, what role can the arts play in supporting the integration of refugees and migrants in the UK?

**JC:** The arts provide avenues for self-expression. This can be so important especially for new arrivals who may not have the language to be able to express themselves fully. Being creative together breaks down boundaries and promotes social cohesion. We find that bringing people together in a creative project instantly bonds people. A shared creative activity promotes social connectivity.

**SS:** Norden Farm highlights the con-



**Souran Soleimani and Jane Correy pictured at Norden Farm.**

nection between the arts and health. How can creative projects support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of people who have experienced displacement and trauma?

**JC:** Creative projects can really support wellbeing. In addition to providing ways to express yourself there is lots of research

about the way creative activity reduces the production of Cortisol, the anxiety hormone.

The joy of learning new creative skills means that participants are given tools for life which can help them manage their wellbeing.

**Story continued on next page**





Norden Farm's annual Kite Festival brings together people from a diverse range of communities. Pictures: Norden Farm

## 'The arts promote social connectivity and cohesion'

**Story continued from previous page**

**SS:** Your education policy emphasises children and young people. What specific opportunities could be created for refugee and migrant children to help them gain confidence and develop self-expression?

**JC:** We've tried lots of different ways of bringing refugee and migrant children into the Norden Farm programme. The most successful way is once they are in a local school. We have a programme of work for local schools.

We also deliver arts workshops directly to where new arrivals are living. This provides activity that everyone can get involved in and also hopefully gives visual signs that this is a welcoming community and they are valued. We are still working on how to connect with new arrivals once they have settled status on how to maximise participation.

**SS:** How do you plan to diversify your audiences so that migrant and refugee communities feel represented and welcome at Norden Farm?

**JC:** We are always open to ideas..

**SS:** Have you collaborated, or do you plan to collaborate, with local refugee or migrant support organisations to co-design inclusive programmes?

**JC:** We haven't been able to do this yet but we are very open to the idea.

**SS:** What challenges have you faced, or do you anticipate, in engaging refugee and migrant communities through the arts?

**JC:** The challenges are communication, organising, and also people moving on.

**SS:** Do you see Norden Farm taking on a stronger role in supporting migrants and refugees in the future, both artistically and socially?

**JC:** Our hope is that our relationships will continue to grow.

**SS:** As Norden Farm celebrates its 25th anniversary, what achievements are you most proud of in terms of bringing the community together through creativity?

**JC:** I am very proud of the Kite Festival. I was looking for a new project that would really reach out across all communities.

Kites seem to feature in so many different communities from east to west and north to south. We work with a huge range of community groups and schools to make kites that people come together to fly in a local park at the end of summer.

We also take kite-making workshops into new arrival communities. What I love about the festival is that people learn how to make and fly kites – a simple pleasure that they have for the rest of their life. And most importantly that so many diverse communities come together at the festival to do it! We have a music stage, storytelling, food stalls and the atmosphere is always really friendly and open.

**SS:** What message would you like to share with the community, including migrants, refugees, and long-term residents, on this special anniversary?

**JC:** That the arts enrich and transform lives. They promote social connectivity and cohesion and improve your well being. Get involved.





# Exodus visits Clapton Punks' inclusive art fair - where no one is made to feel like an outsider



Jean-Marc promotes Exodus at the art fair.

EXODUS magazine was once again invited to the annual Clapton Punks Outsiders Art Fair at the Spotted Dog Clapton Community Football Ground in East London.

The day brought together art vendors sharing their publications of fanzines with inspiring and emphatic titles, including: 'Liver Mortis', 'Bubble-gum Zine Archive', 'Squid Horse Comics', 'To Catch A Pig Zine', 'Photography in Abandoned Buildings', 'No Sweat, Solidarity Against Sweatshop Factories' and 'Punks against Apartheid', as well as guides to finding 'The Very Best Supermarket 'meal-deals'.

Out on the Clapton Community football pitch, Matt Avian led a great talk about Radical bird-watching, a presentation on the understanding of why bird-watching is so popular around the world and explaining the concepts of the movement to make bird-watching more inclusive and accessible, particularly for marginalised communities.

His unique demonstration challenged traditional notions

and explored the connection between birding, mental well-being and social justice. (Facebook: Reclaim the Hides).

There was also the chance

to visit the recently installed memorial to members of the local community who had joined the International Brigade to fight fascism in the Spanish

Civil War in the 1930s.

Later in the afternoon six short films were shown, which included one, 'Friends of the Queen' exploring the debate surrounding the gentrification of Newham and the local Queen's Market.

But perhaps the highlight films was the wonderful documentary about TRUK UNITED FC, 'We'll Go Down in History', a transgender and non-binary football club formed in 2021 by Lucy Clark.

Filmed over a period of two years, it captured the highs and lows of the pioneering UK team on and off the pitch as they strive to create a safe haven for their community in the face of rising transphobia.

The film is part of the #FiveFilmsForFreedom 2025 programme, which is presented in partnership with the British Council.

For Exodus, this was another great event helping to present and promote our magazine to organisations and individuals that share resilience, determination and hope in the face of adversity.



The memorial to local volunteers who fought fascism in Spain.



# Hopes and dreams lost in the chill waters of the Channel

ESCAPING war in Sudan involves attempting dangerous journeys to neighbouring countries and distant locations such as Europe.

Millions of Sudanese are displaced, with nearly four million refugees now in countries like Chad, Eritrea and Somalia.

Violence, ethnic cleansing and economic collapse force people to flee from their homes, worsening a catastrophe that seems endless.

Ibrahim, a young Sudanese man, became a victim of the war raging between the Government forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Aimed at transforming the ethnically mixed region of Darfur into an Arab-ruled domain, the RSF have been reported by Human Rights Watch (HRW) for acts of genocide, and like so many other young Sudanese men, Ibrahim chose to escape the violence.

In 2024 Ibrahim travelled from Darfur towards Khartoum and then over the bor-

der to Eritrea. It was here he encountered people smugglers, who he paid for a journey and eventual safe life in the UK.

He had no idea of the specific destinations or exact routes the smugglers would use to get him to 'safety'. It was only after he had handed over his money that he was told he was on his way to the UK. But unknown to him was the perilous journey he was about to undertake.

Ibrahim was left to the mercy of the smugglers. He had no control over the journey and because there were no safe or legal routes available to him, he was forced to rely on them.

He was taken on long, arduous and extremely dangerous routes involving travel and sea crossings that were far from a straightforward path.

The strong historical colonial ties of Sudan with the UK, and knowledge of the English language, are a reason for people like Ibrahim to choose to seek asylum in Britain, with many believing that the UK,

democratically governed and respectful of human rights, is a sanctuary for those escaping disruption and bloodshed.

But the only way Ibrahim could claim asylum in the UK was to actually reach British soil. He had to risk life and limb to claim asylum.

After years of being subjected to persistent and systemic persecution, including attack, arrest and surveillance, Ibrahim finally reached the French coast.

He was put into an unseaworthy and dangerous small boat with dozens of other people, and shoved towards the open sea.

His only possessions were family photos and a letter he had written to his family asking for them to forgive him for leaving Sudan.

As the boat struggled to move through the incoming waves, it capsized, throwing its occupants into the freezing water. Ibrahim perished along with five others, leaving a future that was never to be realised.

**Jean-Marc Hall**

Picture: FreedomHouse, marked with Public Domain Mark 1.0.







Members of the original VIAN team in Thatcham. The initiative now has several off-shoots

## Refugee green initiative grows from original roots

WHEN Exodus originally spoke to Kurdish-Iranian Bahman for our first issue way back in early 2023, he told us about the VIAN project he had started in Thatcham, Berkshire.

The initiative is a remarkable environmental project run by refugees and people seeking asylum.

VIAN is a Kurdish word that means 'love', and the love of nature and the environment spurred Bahman to answer the call from local residents who told him about areas that needed cleaning up.

He gathered a group of asylum seekers from countries as diverse as Iran, Namibia, India, Iraq, Sudan, Turkey, Uganda, Chad, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and together they picked up litter

- and not just from pavements but from tree roots, ditches, canals and streams.

One of VIAN's goals was to support the local council and residents and show gratitude for the kindness and support the community had shown towards refugees and people seeking asylum.

Unfortunately, Bahman was moved out of his accommodation in Thatcham when the hotel closed, but the good news is the VIAN project is alive and well, and thriving.

The initiative has quickly moved on to Reading, Maidenhead and Oxford and is now also operating in Newbury, Berkshire.

The mantra of the VIAN project remains the same. Bahman has made it clear: "In my opinion,

refugees living in hotels are a great potential force. With careful planning and management, that force could be used in many fields such as helping the environment.

"If asylum seekers and refugees were involved in schemes like VIAN, their time would be filled productively, and the British government could make good use of the huge amount of energy of those seeking sanctuary here in the UK."

You can find the VIAN Environment Society on Facebook.

If you would like to help refugees and people seeking asylum connect better with your local community, please get in touch with Care4Calais: [care4calais.org/get-involved/supporting-refugees-in-the-uk/](https://care4calais.org/get-involved/supporting-refugees-in-the-uk/)

## Changes to family reunion rules

AS OF September 2025, the UK Government has temporarily suspended all new Family Reunion sets of immigration rules.

A new set of immigration rules is expected to be announced in the Spring of 2026.

This means refugees with Protection Status in the UK will have to apply under a different set of rules until next Spring if they want to bring family members to the UK.

Some requirements of application include proof of financial income. For a couple it is at least £29,000 a year and an application fee of £1,938. An additional £1,938 for each dependent is also required.

Applicants also have to prove knowledge of the English language.

The British Red Cross, which has published this information, has recommended refugees applying under this set of immigration rules, speak to an immigration adviser to discuss their case.

The British Red Cross can provide help and information on what is involved in the application process and give guidance to immigration advisers and other organisations.

The charity cannot give legal advice, apply or pay for an application, but can help with filling in forms. For more details email: [FRAvice@redcross.org.uk](mailto:FRAvice@redcross.org.uk)

# Exploring perspectives on racism

THIS edition's bookshelf comes courtesy of October Books, a co-operative, radical neighbourhood bookshop and community hub in Portswood Road, Southampton.

Founded in 1977 and independent of any political organisation, October Books is a not-for-profit business that aims to promote the value of reading, writing, imagination and creativity.

It is a space to promote books and ideas that challenge the status quo and promotes and supports books, groups and organisations working for social, economic and environmental equality and justice.

Recently it promoted an exhibition at Southampton's John Handsard Gallery of Alaa Abu Asad's *Wild Plants of Palestine*. It showcased Abu's ongoing research project, *The dog chased its tail to bite it off* (2019–present), which uses Japanese knotweed as a metaphor for exploring xenophobia, migration, and cultural acceptance.

The exhibition drew compelling parallels between the aggressive rhetoric used to describe the plant and similar language directed at human migrants, questioning why certain non-native species become national treasures while others



remain perpetually foreign despite their remarkable resilience.

It also allowed October Books to highlight how these issues relate to the summer's hotel protests, displays of flags, and calls for the 'invasion to end' – with three book recommendations that address them in different ways.

The first is: *The Conversation: How Seeking and Speaking the Truth about Racism Can Radically Transform Individuals and Organisations* by Robert Livingston. The book provides a compass for those seeking to begin the work of anti-racism.

In *The Conversation*, Robert Livingston addresses three simple but profound questions: What is racism? Why should everyone be more concerned about it? What can we do to eradicate it?

October Books' second rec-

ommendation is *Extinctions: How Life Survives, Adapts and Evolves* by Michael J Benton, who considers the idea of 'invasion' from a scientific standpoint. He examines how global warming, acid rain, ocean acidification, erupting volcanoes, and meteorite impacts have affected conditions on Earth, the drastic consequences for global ecology, and how life, in turn, has survived, adapted, and evolved – often through migration, a natural course of biology.

The final recommendation, *How Migration Really Works* by Hein de Haas, tackles the big issues head-on, such as migration being at an all-time high, immigration and crime rates, and the misconception we don't need migrant workers – among many more, including questions on global warming.

Migrants face heartbreak-

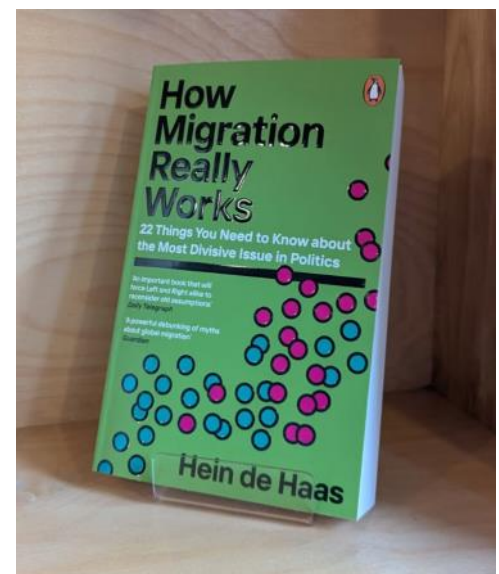
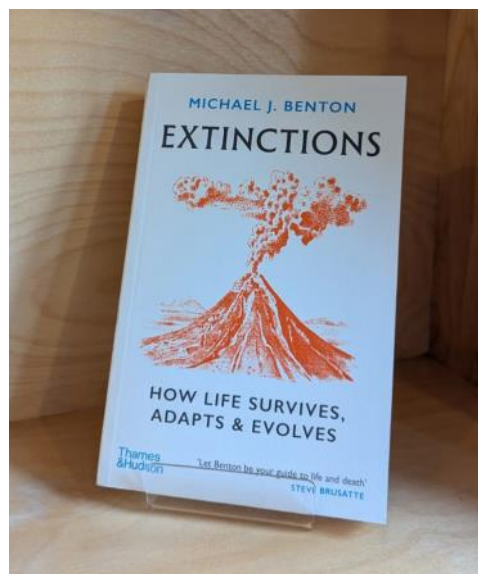
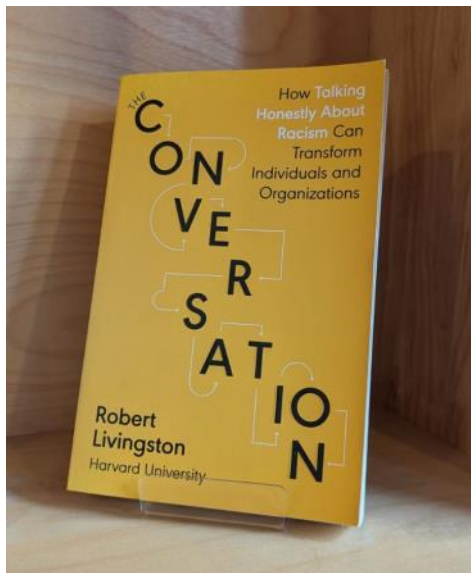
ing decisions to leave the countries they are in. The book provides facts and figures about how migrants can be a source of human power to boost a country's economy, how people reach the decision to migrate, and why migration is not simply leaving one country for another.

Vera, the promotion and marketing lead for October Books, said: "As we explore the ideas of existence, migration, and racism, we find a variety of books discussing these topics from all perspectives and terminologies. We have chosen three books as suggestions for anyone interested, but the list is endless.

"Exploring these ideas doesn't have to be heavy or deep – there are works of fiction, poetry, and comics that make the subject more personal and relatable.

"No matter your gender, race, age, sexual identity, or personality, we all sometimes feel out of place. If we are welcomed by others – through a simple British gesture like a smile, a nod, or asking 'How are you' – the world becomes a much more welcoming place, and we can focus our anger on real issues."

All the books here are available through the October Books website at: [octoberbooks.org](http://octoberbooks.org)





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