

DILEMMA: SHOULD THE UK DO MORE TO HELP REFUGEES?



THE DILEMMA



In October, a family of four drowned in the English Channel as they tried to reach the UK.

Rasoul Iran-Nejad, aged 35, Shiva Mohammad Panahi, 35, Anita, nine, and Armin, six, were crossing from France to England in a small boat. The family were Kurds from the city of Sardasht in western Iran, and were seeking a new, safe life as refugees in the UK. Kurdish people face persecution (hostility, poor treatment and even jail or death) in parts of Iran.

Before the family got into the boat, Shiva Mohammad Panahi is thought to have sent a text explaining that she understood the dangers of

crossing the English Channel, but that “we have no choice”. She also said, “now that I have left Iran I would like to forget my past”.

The tragedy brought the refugee crisis into the spotlight. The UK is taking in a very small number of refugees from the Middle East compared to other European countries such as Germany, Sweden and Greece. Someone who wants to become a refugee in the UK can only apply once they are in the UK. But it’s very difficult for them to get here legally, so many end up paying a lot of money to get into unsafe boats crossing from France. Many are trying to be reunited with family members who are already in the UK.

More than 6,500 people have arrived in the UK via the English Channel so far this year. Many of these are picked up in the sea by Border Force officers. In September alone more than 1,400 migrants crossed the Channel.

The UK Home Secretary, Priti Patel, is against the crossings, but she hasn’t announced any plans for



Asylum-seekers on the way to England in the English Channel

making it easier for people to reach the UK safely. In fact, she is keen on making it harder: the *Financial Times* newspaper reported that Ms Patel had asked officials to look into the idea of processing asylum-seekers on Ascension Island, a British territory 6,700 kilometres away in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

Campaigners argue that the UK must help these migrants, who are desperate and have fled war or persecution in their home countries. Others say they should seek refuge in countries closer to their homes, and not in the UK.

Is it time the UK did more to help, or is the Government right to make it hard for asylum-seekers to reach the country?

OPINIONS

"We must not forget that children trying to reach the UK have fled war and persecution and tragically many continue to experience unimaginable dangers once they reach Europe."

– Lord Dubs, Labour Party politician and former child refugee



Getty

"I know that when British people say they want to take back control of our borders this is exactly what they mean. The number of illegal small boat crossings is appalling and unacceptably high."

– Priti Patel, the UK Home Secretary (responsible for immigration)



Getty

DEFINITIONS



This is how human rights organisation Amnesty International defines the different types of migrant:

Asylum-seeker

– This is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognised as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.



Getty

Refugee – A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection.

Migrant – Amnesty International understands migrants to be people staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum-seekers or refugees. Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study or join family, for example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances that exist there.

FACTS & FIGURES



Getty

According to the charity Refugee Action, **35,566** asylum applications were made in the UK in 2019. That's down from a high of **84,000** in 2002.

Four out of **five** applicants in the last three months of 2019 waited six months or more for their cases to be processed.

42% of asylum applicants were refused in 2019.

Since October 2019, the UK has paid for **45** French police officers to patrol the coastline to prevent people getting into boats.

Two men were jailed in France in December 2019 for helping organise a crossing in which a student from Iran drowned off the coast of Kent.

In January, 23 people were arrested in France and the Netherlands on suspicion of smuggling **10,000** Kurdish migrants into the UK in lorries and small boats.

The Home Office has said that, instead of crossing the English Channel, people should seek sanctuary in France, which is a "safe country with a well-functioning asylum system".

France, which has a similar population and economy to the UK, receives more than **three times** as many asylum applications.

Across the EU in 2019, the rate of asylum applications averaged **14** per **100,000** residents. In the UK, it was **five** per **100,000**.

In 2019, **29%** of asylum applicants around the world came from Asian countries, **27%** from Middle Eastern countries, **24%** from African countries, and **14%** from Europe.

There are **25.9 million** refugees around the world, according to Amnesty International.

84% of refugees are being hosted by developing countries.



WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE THEIR HOME COUNTRY?



Protesters in London defending refugees

It's a big decision for an individual or a family to leave their home and their home country and seek refuge somewhere else. They are leaving behind friends, family, jobs, studies and a way of life. They do it because they are desperate and unsafe.

Violence, war, hunger, poverty, persecution and escaping the aftermath of natural disasters like earthquakes are the main reasons people flee. In many cases, it's several of these reasons combined.

Right now, many of the refugees in Europe come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Years of war and persecution in those countries have led to large numbers of people leaving. Some travel by land, while many cross the Mediterranean Sea in unsafe boats, arriving in Greece, Malta, Italy, Spain and Turkey. From there, some travel onwards through Europe. A small number try to make it all the way to the UK.

A HISTORY OF HELP

This is not the first time hundreds of thousands of people have moved through Europe after fleeing horrors in their home country.

Nazi Germany

After the Nazis came to power in Germany in the 1930s, they introduced a number of aggressive and deadly policies against Jews and other minority groups, such as gypsies, gay men and the disabled.

Fearing for their lives, many Jews and others fled Germany and countries that the Nazis invaded. Britain welcomed 10,000 Jewish children between 1938 and 1940 through a programme known as the Kindertransport ('Kinder' is German for children).

But the move to the UK came with strict rules: private citizens or groups had to pay for each child's care and education, and the children were expected to return home once it was safe for them to do so (as it turned out, most stayed here). In total, almost 10,000 children came to Britain from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Around 7,500 of these were Jewish.



An eight-year-old girl – one of the first to arrive in England from Germany in 1938

DILEMMA: SHOULD THE UK DO MORE TO HELP REFUGEES?

13 NOVEMBER 2020

Vietnam

Britain accepted around 19,000 people who fled Vietnam soon after the war that raged in their country between 1955 and 1975. Known as “Vietnamese Boat People”, hundreds of thousands left the country in fear of their lives. Several arrived in Hong Kong, which was then owned by Britain. Almost 20,000 were then brought to the UK to start a new life.



A group of Vietnamese refugees at Stansted Airport after being rescued by a British ship in the China Sea in 1978

Kosovo

After Serbia attacked the territory of Kosovo and its people in 1998, Britain and the US led an international attack on Serb armed forces. The war, which went on for about 80 days, saw the Serb leadership overthrown. Hundreds of thousands of Kosovans of Albanian descent fled the country, and some 24,000 of them were welcomed to the UK.



Ugandan Asian refugees arriving at Stansted Airport in 1972

Uganda

In 1972, the brutal dictator of Uganda, Idi Amin, expelled all citizens of Asian origin. He gave them three months to get out of the country. That same year, 27,000 Ugandan Asians were welcomed into the UK. From 1894 to 1962, Uganda was part of the British Empire.



Two children and their mother cry as they say goodbye to their family before leaving Kosovo for the UK

REST OF EUROPE

This is the number of people currently claiming asylum in European countries. The number per one million people gives you a sense of how many asylum-seekers there are as a proportion of the country’s population.



Afghans in Sweden stage a protest after immigration officials denied their asylum requests

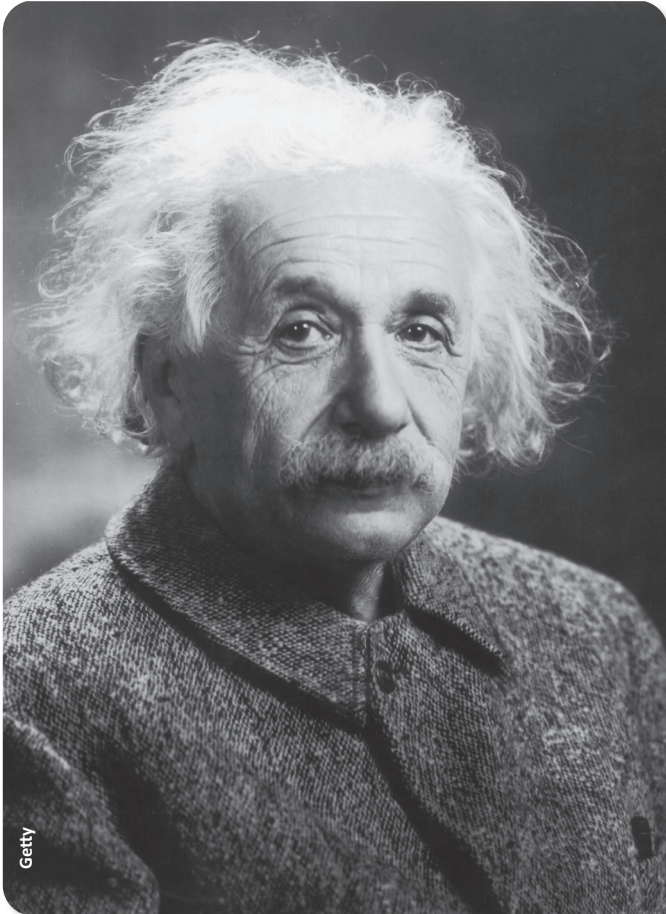
Country	Total number	Number per million	Home country of most asylum-seekers
Poland	85	2	Russia
Croatia	95	23	Afghanistan
Belgium	715	62	Afghanistan
United Kingdom	5,520	82	Iraq
France	8,920	133	Afghanistan
Spain	7,210	152	Venezuela
Germany	14,210	171	Syria
Sweden	2,420	234	Syria
Greece	4,030	376	Syria

Source: Eurostat

FAMOUS REFUGEES

Albert Einstein

The great scientist fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and settled in the United States as a refugee. Einstein was Jewish and at great risk of persecution and murder from Nazi authorities. He remained in the USA, where he died in 1955.



Rita Ora

The singer, whose real name is Rita Sahatçiu, was born in Yugoslavia in 1990. The country was beginning to break up and fall into a horrendous war. When Rita was just one, her parents brought the family to the UK where they got refugee status.



M.I.A. (Mathangi Arulpragasam)

The rapper and singer fled war in Sri Lanka when she was just nine years old. She and her family settled in the UK. She said her debut album, released in 2005, aimed to "make every refugee kid that came over after me have something to feel good about".



YES, THE UK SHOULD DO MORE TO HELP REFUGEES



1. IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO –

Sometimes the media can be very negative about people who are fleeing war, persecution and poverty in search of a better life. The truth is they are desperate people, and many of them have no choice but to flee. The UK is a rich country and it's the right and proper thing to welcome refugees into our society.



2. MOST OF EUROPE IS DOING MORE THAN US – Other European countries, such as Germany, France and Sweden, are welcoming far more refugees than the UK. It's only right that the UK pulls its weight and helps more. It's not fair to say people should seek asylum in mainland Europe but not in the UK.

3. UK POLICY IS PUTTING LIVES AT RISK – The fact it is currently very difficult for asylum-seekers to reach the UK to claim refuge is driving thousands of people to make the risky crossing in unsafe boats. It's high time the UK allowed people a safe route to the country, where their asylum claim can be processed properly and fairly.

NO, THE UK IS DOING ENOUGH TO HELP REFUGEES



1. THE UK TAKES MORE REFUGEES THAN OTHERS –

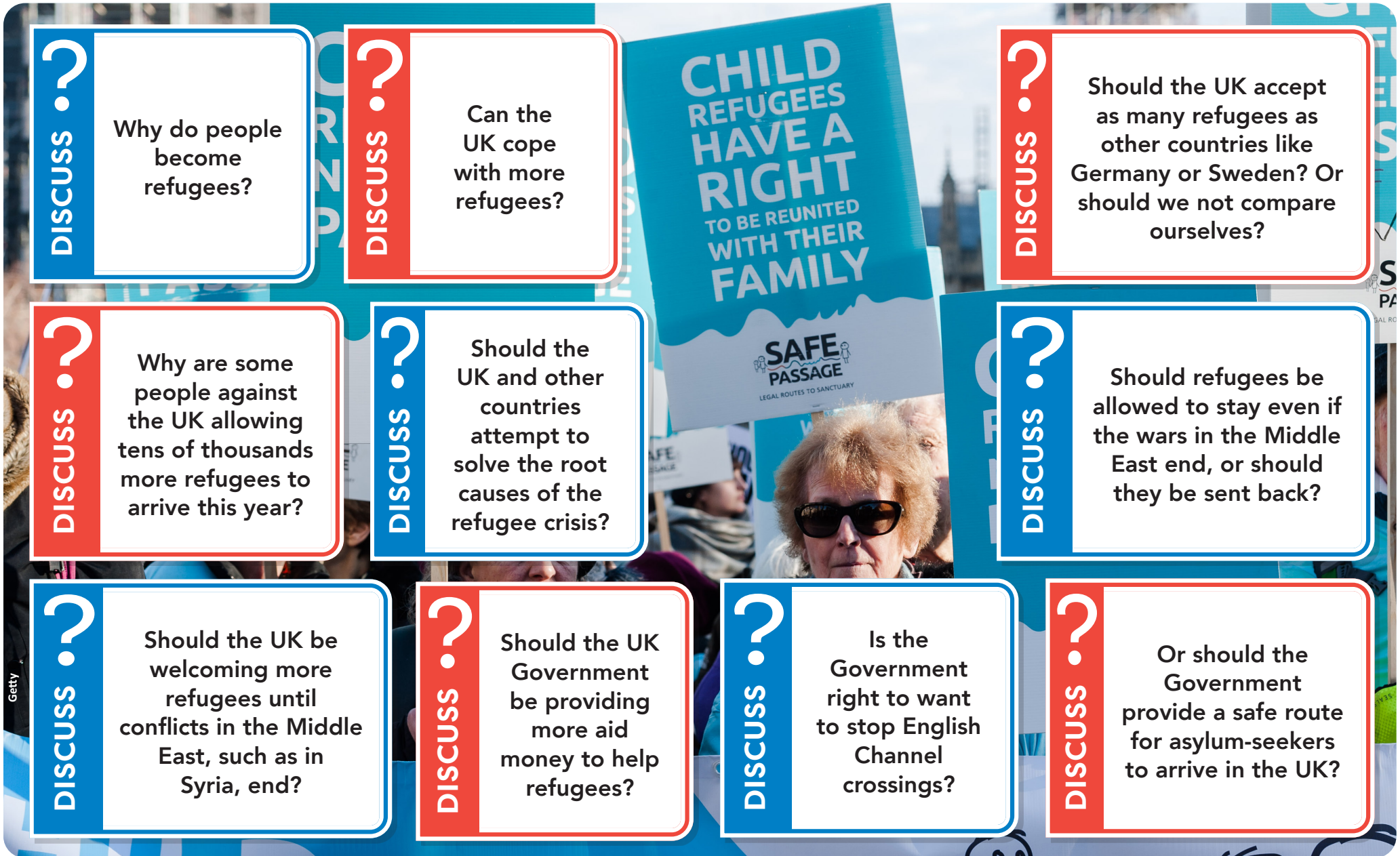
Compared to some countries, including Poland and Croatia, the UK takes in way more refugees. The Government is doing what it can, balancing the needs of refugees with those of UK citizens.



2. ENCOURAGING MORE CROSSINGS IS DANGEROUS –

If the UK decides to allow in many more refugees, it will encourage more people to make the dangerous and sometimes deadly first journey across the Mediterranean Sea into mainland Europe. It's not a safe long-term solution.

3. DEALING WITH THE ROOT CAUSES IS BETTER – Nobody wants to be a refugee. People flee their home because they are subjected to great suffering. The Government should therefore be dealing with the root causes of the refugee crisis. That means spending more on aid to Middle Eastern and African countries, and also helping find solutions to the conflicts that have been fought in countries like Syria for so long.



DISCUSS • ? Why do people become refugees?

DISCUSS • ? Can the UK cope with more refugees?

DISCUSS • ? Should the UK accept as many refugees as other countries like Germany or Sweden? Or should we not compare ourselves?

DISCUSS • ? Why are some people against the UK allowing tens of thousands more refugees to arrive this year?

DISCUSS • ? Should the UK and other countries attempt to solve the root causes of the refugee crisis?

DISCUSS • ? Should refugees be allowed to stay even if the wars in the Middle East end, or should they be sent back?

DISCUSS • ? Should the UK be welcoming more refugees until conflicts in the Middle East, such as in Syria, end?

DISCUSS • ? Should the UK Government be providing more aid money to help refugees?

DISCUSS • ? Is the Government right to want to stop English Channel crossings?

DISCUSS • ? Or should the Government provide a safe route for asylum-seekers to arrive in the UK?