



Chapter 2

Displacement and migration

Creating a society where people seeking asylum can truly say they have found refuge

Introduction by Godwin Akinyele, VOICES Ambassadorⁱ

The afflictions that refugees and people seeking asylum are subjected to cannot be understood by anyone who has not walked in their shoes. And this list of afflictions is endless. When the act of seeking asylum is presented by some as a crime, we see the needless incarceration of helpless and hopeless people. We see hunger strikes in places of detention; modern slavery; and people falling into untold destitution for fear of being detained, prosecuted or deported

if they ask for help. These experiences are extremely worrisome and debilitating.

After my application for asylum a few years ago, I applied for accommodation and subsistence support, but it took 10 months for my application to be approved. In those 10 months, I survived on the support I received from the British Red Cross's destitution fund (£10 a week and food parcels). I received no support from the Home Office and I have never been given an explanation for the delays to my application.

ⁱ The VOICES Network, supported by the British Red Cross, is a nationwide association of people with refugee backgrounds providing a platform on which to share the challenges they face and raise those issues to decision-makers.

I know from personal experience that the asylum system in the UK is harsh. And I am yet to meet a person seeking asylum who is not struggling to survive or relying on the support of charities or others in the community. However, although it may be tough, it is better than what I and so many others have left behind. Those seeking asylum keep looking ahead to the day when it will finally be granted. But even then, once they are recognised as a refugee, they must face the further challenges that come with a period of transition and integration. Are these the best conditions the UK can provide for those who are trying to rebuild their broken lives? I think not.

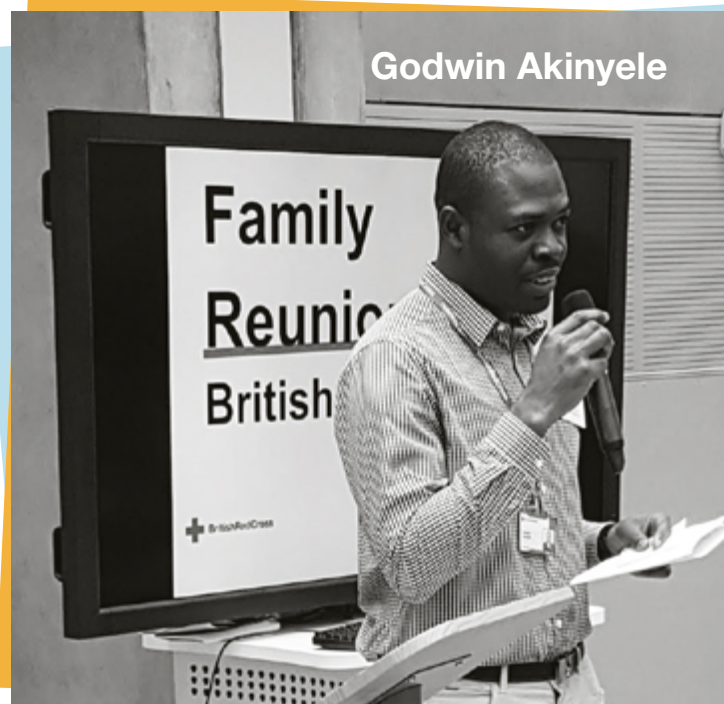
The work of the British Red Cross in supporting refugees and people seeking asylum positions the organisation as first among its equals. Thousands of people have benefitted from the organisation's destitution funding, including myself.

From 2016 to 2017, when I could not access any statutory support and the institution saddled with that responsibility turned its listening ear away from my cry for support, the British Red Cross filled that void.

I started volunteering for the British Red Cross in 2017, because I wanted to spend my time doing something worthwhile. I had seen the way that the charity took care of me and so many other people, and I wanted to contribute as a way to give back to my new community. Volunteering with the British Red Cross has also given me the chance to access training and other opportunities which I hope will help me in the future.

As the Nigerian proverb goes, when the wind knocks down the trees in the forest, it is logical to clear the top of the pile first.

Godwin Akinyele



The essays in this chapter rightly investigate some of the trees that sit at the top of the pile of afflictions impacting those who are migrating or displaced. The first essay, by Alison Phipps, argues that refugee integration should start from the moment a person arrives in the UK, and not after their asylum application has been approved. The second essay, by Sabir Zazai, shines a light on the value that people seeking asylum can bring to the UK beyond their skills, and the importance of welcoming and nurturing them. The final essay, by Sir Iain Duncan Smith, recalls the enactment of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and states what is needed now for the environment itself to discourage the practice of modern slavery, apart from criminalising it.

These are topics that are very close to the amazing efforts of the British Red Cross to create a society where people seeking asylum can truly say they have found refuge. And these well-reasoned essays and their empathic inspiration help us all to see beyond the surface of what people who are seeking asylum go through.