ASK THE REFUGEE QUESTION

A local campaigning guide for the General Election 2017

Promoted by Mariam Kemple Hardy on behalf of Refugee Action, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB
Dear supporter,

The 2017 General Election campaign is now well under way. Like every election, we know that core issues, such as the NHS and the economy, will be the focus of much debate.

But we also know there are other issues which matter just as much to people – including the welcome and support offered to people fleeing war and persecution.

We need to ensure that candidates standing for election hear that how we treat refugees really matters to voters. After all, many of these candidates will go on to form our new Parliament and Government.

At Refugee Action, we want the next five years to see Britain maintain and extend its welcome for refugees and asylum seekers – and we know you do too.

That’s why it’s so important to make your voice heard and help build those relationships with future MPs, Government ministers and opposition leaders now.

This pack sets out how you can encourage your next political representative to care about what happens to refugees and asylum seekers, just like you do.

Thank you for your continued support – together, we’ll make sure the voices of refugees are heard during this election campaign.

Best wishes,

Stephen Hale
Chief Executive, Refugee Action
The most important thing is that you let your local candidates know that you care about refugees and asylum seekers, and want to hear their opinions on the subject.

You don’t need to be an expert – nor do you need to get drawn into long and detailed discussion, or work hard to convince them of your views. Instead, what counts is that you’re a voter who cares about what happens to people seeking safety here in Britain.

There are many ways to make your voice heard with your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) over the course of the election campaign.

**CONTACT PPCS DIRECTLY**
Write to your PPCs directly to tell them you care about refugee protection and ask them what they think about this issue. We’ve drafted a template letter you can download here and adapt for your PPCs. You can find contact details for your PPCs here.

Refugee Action, together with Refugee Council and Scottish Refugee Council, is asking all PPCs to sign the ‘Refugees Welcome Pledge’. Check here to see if your PPCs have signed the pledge. If they have, you may want to reference this in your letter. If they haven’t, your letter is another opportunity to ask them to do so.

**QUIZ YOUR CANDIDATE**
You’re likely to have candidates and members of their team canvassing by knocking on your door. This is a great opportunity to ask the refugee question, to hear their views on supporting and protecting refugees in Britain.

Cut out the doorhanger below as a reminder of the kind of questions you might want to ask canvassers.
WELCOMING REFUGEES
Britain should remain an open and tolerant nation. What will they do to ensure all refugees are treated equally, regardless of how they arrive and where they come from?

PROTECTING RIGHTS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS
How will they ensure that the UK has a fair and effective asylum system?

EXPANDING RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES
Will they seek to expand refugee resettlement programmes that provide a safe way for the most vulnerable refugees to reach Britain?

IMPROVING ACCESS TO ENGLISH CLASSES
All refugees should have free and immediate access to English language classes. How will they support this?
ATTEND A LOCAL HUSTINGS
A hustings is a meeting at which candidates address and take questions from voters on a range of subjects. Attending a local hustings is a great way of seeing several candidates at once. There’s certain to be at least one taking place in your constituency – you’ll be able to find the details online or in your local paper. Go along if you can and ask the refugee question!

ENGAGE ON SOCIAL MEDIA
You can use social media to contact your candidates – all of them are likely to have Twitter or Facebook accounts during the campaign. Social media isn’t ideal for getting drawn into long, detailed discussions. But it’s a great way to make initial contact with your PPCs, by using a tweet such as:

.@[yourcandidate] what would you do if elected to protect refugee rights?
#RefugeePledge #RefugeesWelcome #GE2017

WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL PAPER
Local media becomes especially important during an election. Writing to your local paper is therefore a great way to get the attention of PPCs. Download our template letter to editors here, which you can adapt for your local paper.
Parliamentary elections in the UK are governed by electoral law – so it’s important to make sure you’re familiar with a few key points on what you can and can’t do:

- Refugee Action is a charity, and is politically impartial. We operate under strict charity law, and do not support or favour any political party or candidates – instead, we work with representatives of all mainstream parties.

- You are not contacting your PPCs as a Refugee Action representative. Instead, you’re a concerned member of the public who supports Refugee Action, and is using information supplied by us to inform your questions.

- Whatever your own political views or allegiances, it’s good to contact representatives of all the main parties.

- It’s important that you only contact PPCs who are standing for election in your parliamentary constituency. PPCs in neighbouring constituencies are unlikely to engage with you as they’re not standing for election in your seat.

- Even if you think you can be fairly certain about who’ll be elected in your area – remember, politics can be unpredictable! Plus, unsuccessful candidates may well stand in a more winnable seat at the next election and end up being elected to parliament – the conversation you had with them about refugees and asylum seekers could stay with them.

- Most PPCs will be happy to be contacted – but some may not respond. If so, not to worry – the most important thing is that you have tried to contact them all.
We’d like to say a huge thank you for taking action to speak up for refugees during this election campaign – and to ask you one last thing.

Knowing how many PPCs have heard from our supporters, and what they had to say, will give us insight into the new parliament.

If you’ve had contact with any of your candidates, we’d really appreciate it if you could tell us about it.

- You can email us some notes on what you’ve done and how you’ve got on at campaign@refugee-action.org.uk.

- If time allows, we’d be very grateful if you could complete this feedback form.

Thank you again for your support.

Together, we can make sure the voices of refugees are heard during this election campaign and beyond.