# British citizenship doubts grow after government blocks refugees who entered illegally



On 9 February 2025, Ayman Alhussein, a refugee cinematographer from Syria, was filled with hope as he prepared to apply for British citizenship. Just one day later, his aspirations were shattered by a shocking policy shift that will affect not only him but also an estimated 71,000 refugees currently residing in the UK. The government’s recent announcement stipulates that those who have entered the UK illegally—often through dangerous and desperate journeys—will now “normally” be denied the right to apply for citizenship, despite their contributions to society and their legitimate status as refugees.

This draconian policy is an affront to the values Britain is purported to uphold. The government's rationale, hinging on the notion that individuals entering through perilous routes fail to meet the "good character" criteria, is not only shortsighted but fundamentally unjust. Alhussein’s plight encapsulates the profound disillusionment among many refugees who, having experienced unimaginable trauma, are now being treated as lesser citizens. “Now people like me who have never committed a crime will be treated worse than criminals,” he lamented, underscoring the discriminatory nature of this approach.

The implications of this policy extend far beyond individual cases. Stella Creasy, the Labour MP for Walthamstow, has vocalised her opposition to this clause, which blatantly undermines both national and international legal commitments regarding the treatment of refugees. Her proposed amendment seeks to disallow the application of the good character requirement in ways that contravene the UK's international obligations. Yet, it is crucial to question why a Labour government is perpetuating such divisive policies that abandon the very tenets of compassion and humanity that should govern our approach to those seeking refuge.

Alhussein's escape from Syria in 2017, after enduring imprisonment for protesting against the Assad regime, is emblematic of the desperation faced by many refugees. Although he received refugee status in 2019 and has actively integrated into British society—working in film and speaking fluent English—the sudden policy change places his future in jeopardy. Despite his contributions and commitment to British society, he is now confronted with the grim reality of uncertainty. “I have always found British people to be friendly,” he recalled fondly, yet it is alarming that a government purportedly for the people is adopting measures that alienate those who contribute positively.

The faulty legal framework underpinning this policy is rooted in the hastily updated 'Good Character' guidance issued by the Home Office. This guidance effectively bars those who have breached immigration laws or entered the UK unlawfully from ever achieving citizenship. Such rigid criteria not only ignore the nuances of individual circumstances but also reflect a troubling lack of understanding of the refugee experience. Legal experts, like Jed Pennington, head of public law and human rights at Wilsons solicitors, have pointed out that this misguided approach ignores the compelling evidence suggesting that harsh measures do little to deter dangerous crossings.

The response to these changes has been swift, with human rights organisations denouncing them as a retroactive punishment of individuals fleeing life-threatening conditions. The alterations to citizenship guidelines have sparked a legal challenge led by a Syrian refugee friend of Alhussein, who argues that this new rule violates established protections in the UN Refugee Convention. The outcome of this challenge could have significant repercussions for the fate of refugees in the UK, demanding a reassessment of citizenship policies in accordance with global human rights standards.

In facing an uncertain future, Ayman Alhussein’s story mirrors the larger struggle of thousands of refugees navigating life in the UK. “When I arrived, I was full of hope,” he remarked. “Now I feel trapped, expected to live with this uncertainty forever.” His narrative stands as a stark reminder of the urgent need for policies that embody compassion and understanding rather than exclusion, shedding light on a pressing social justice issue that should rally all who believe in the values of fairness and dignity.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/11/i-can-no-longer-see-a-future-in-the-uk-new-citizenship-guidance-shuts-out-refugees> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/11/i-can-no-longer-see-a-future-in-the-uk-new-citizenship-guidance-shuts-out-refugees> - An article from The Guardian detailing how new UK citizenship guidance, effective from 10 February 2025, denies refugees the right to apply for British citizenship if they entered the UK illegally or via dangerous routes. The Refugee Council estimates that at least 71,000 refugees will be adversely affected by this policy. The piece highlights the personal story of Ayman Alhussein, a Syrian refugee who arrived in the UK nine years ago and now faces uncertainty about his future in Britain due to these changes.
* <https://www.ach.org.uk/news-and-features/achs-response-changes-good-character-guidance-british-citizenship-applications> - A response from ACH, an organization supporting refugees, to the UK's updated 'Good Character' guidance for British citizenship applications. The guidance, effective from 10 February 2025, states that individuals who entered the UK illegally, particularly through dangerous means like small boat crossings or concealment in vehicles, will normally be refused British citizenship. ACH argues that this policy will prevent thousands of asylum seekers from attaining UK citizenship and creates an unjust two-tier system for those with refugee status.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-character-nationality-policy-guidance/good-character-requirement-accessible> - The official UK government publication detailing the 'Good Character' requirement for British citizenship applications. The guidance outlines factors considered when assessing an applicant's character, including criminality, financial soundness, and immigration-related matters. It specifies that individuals who have entered the UK illegally or have breached immigration laws may not be considered of good character, potentially leading to refusal of citizenship applications.
* <https://qarn.org.uk/good-character-guidance-amended-to-block-refugees-from-naturalisation/> - An article from the Queer Asylum Seekers Network (QARN) discussing amendments to the UK's 'Good Character' guidance that could block many refugees from naturalising as British citizens. The changes, effective from 10 February 2025, state that individuals who previously entered the UK illegally will normally be refused citizenship, regardless of the time that has passed since the illegal entry. The article highlights concerns that these amendments could adversely affect a significant number of refugees seeking citizenship.
* <https://righttoremain.org.uk/new-home-office-policy-seeks-to-bar-refugees-from-british-citizenship/> - An article from Right to Remain discussing changes to the UK's 'Good Character' policy guidance for British citizenship applications. Effective from 10 February 2025, the changes state that individuals who entered the UK illegally or arrived through dangerous routes will normally be refused citizenship. The article highlights concerns that these changes will have a significant negative impact on people with refugee status who apply for British citizenship after this date.
* <https://www.visaverge.com/news/uks-new-good-character-rule-for-citizenship-faces-legal-challenge/> - An article from VisaVerge Network discussing the UK's updated 'Good Character' policy, effective from 10 February 2025, which refuses citizenship to applicants who entered the UK illegally or via 'dangerous journeys.' The article notes that critics argue the stricter rules violate the 1951 Refugee Convention and retroactively punish refugees without safe legal entry options. A High Court legal challenge has been launched against the policy, which could mandate changes to the rules with significant implications for UK citizenship and refugee protections.