

# UK FOR REFUGEES

*Embracing voices and telling stories*

“

*What I like most about my life in the UK is celebrating the kind individuals and organisations who have helped me and my family throughout my refugee journey. Some of them have become lifelong friends, and we have shared many important occasions, laughter, sadness, joy and struggles.*

WILLIAM, BANGLADESH page 4 ▶

”



ISSUE 02

## REVIEW OF 2024

### **Journeys of resilience and brewing hope:**

Putting a spotlight on refugee stories

### **CONGREGATION:**

Portraits of hope and stories of strength

### **Advocacy in Action:**

A collaborative effort to amplify women's struggles in Afghanistan

### **Inspiring change:**

Refugee voices at UK for UNHCR events

# Welcome to the Second Edition of UK FOR REFUGEES!

As we reflect on 2024, we're filled with gratitude and inspiration. Over the year, we hosted tea-and-talk events during Refugee Week across three cities in the UK, bringing together communities and six of our incredible Storytellers. We also had the honour of seeing 50 Storytellers join stage artist Es Devlin for CONGREGATION, her powerful installation in collaboration with UK for UNHCR.

[Click here for more information about CONGREGATION](#)

These moments highlighted the transformative power of storytelling in building empathy and connection. We're so excited to share these unforgettable experiences with you in this edition.

Our Storyteller Programme, UK for Refugees, remains a vibrant and welcoming space, amplifying the voices of those who have

experienced forced displacement. Today, we proudly work with Storytellers from over 20 countries worldwide who have built new lives here in the UK.

[Click here for more information about our Storyteller Programme, UK for Refugees](#)

“

*Despite the challenges, the UK has given me hope and shaped who I am today.*

”

TEEM, EAST AFRICA page 4 ▶

[Click here to find out more about Cuppa Hope](#)



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# 2024 RECAP

## 1. JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE AND BREWING HOPE: Putting a spotlight on refugee stories

In 2024, we shared the inspiring journeys of many of our Storytellers who came to the UK in search of safety and new beginnings.

“  
*Both my love to  
Ukraine and my love  
to England are what’s  
filling up my heart.*”

MARIA, UKRAINE



One such story is Maria and Sergei, a Ukrainian couple from Mykolaiv. They moved to Bedford in 2022 due to the war in Ukraine. In Ukraine, they ran an art studio and organised exhibitions.

Since arriving in the UK, Maria has been teaching art, showcasing her work in the British Parliament and participating in festivals, while Sergei handles logistics.

Their passion for volunteering and giving back strengthens community ties, as they embrace both their roots and new home.

[Click here to read their full story](#)

© Anastasiia Makhmutova

Refugee Week 2024 brought powerful stories of resilience, hope and community. Six of our amazing Storytellers – Hessam, Yana, Teem, Mouhyedin, Tania and William – led our Cuppa Hope tea-and-talk events in Edinburgh, London and Bradford.



[Click here to find out more](#)



Hessam's story



Yana's story



Teem's story



Mouhyedin's story



Tania's story



William's story

All photos: © UK for UNHCR/ Pinpep

These events were about sharing stories and pieces of home. Each Storyteller shared their journey to the UK, their new lives here and the tea traditions from their home countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, East Africa, Syria and Ukraine.

Guests savoured authentic teas and snacks while connecting through meaningful conversations with Storytellers, building a small but profound connection to the cultures and experiences that shape our community.

“  
*Settling in the UK felt like finally being home.*  
”

HESSAM, AFGHANISTAN



© UK for UNHCR / Anthony Devlin / Pinpep

During that time, we highlighted the story of Tania, a Ukrainian refugee mother, local charity worker and co-founder of 2BWell CIC, in a feature published in *Metro* newspaper.



[Click here to read Tania's story on our website](#)

[Click here to read Tania's interview with \*Metro\*](#)

“  
*At the beginning of the war in Ukraine, my friends and I guessed the date we thought it would be over by and put them in my diary. Some people optimistically said it would last a few weeks or months, while others predicted a year or so.*

*As the days went on, I felt a pang of sadness and pain in my heart whenever I'd get a notification that another deadline had passed.*

TANIA, UKRAINE

”



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# 2024 RECAP

## 2. CONGREGATION: Portraits of hope and stories of strength

In October 2024, renowned artist Es Devlin unveiled **CONGREGATION**, a stunning choral installation created in partnership with **UK for UNHCR, The Courtauld and King's College London**.

The installation featured powerful chalk and charcoal portraits of 50 Londoners who have experienced forced displacement. Each portrait was co-created with the Storytellers, capturing their reflections on life in London and their remarkable journeys from over 25 countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Syria, Sudan and Rwanda.

CONGREGATION wasn't just an artwork; it was a celebration of resilience and a poignant reminder of the stories that unite us.

“

*I work as a cinematographer in London. My big break was when I was asked to work on the film The Swimmers – to make sure the stories were authentic.*

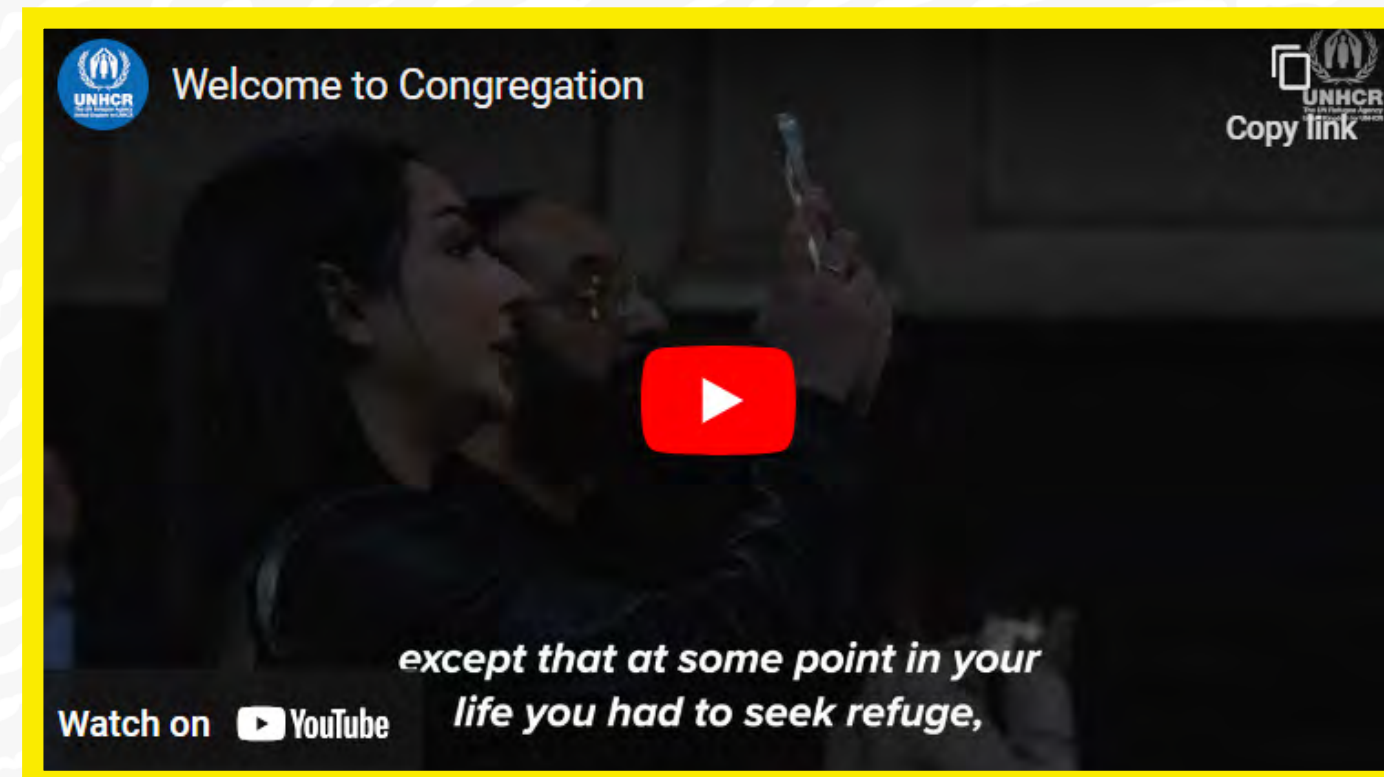
*I love filmmaking because I want to tell stories like mine and from others that are not being told.*

”

AYMAN AL HUSSEIN,  
SYRIA



© Es Devlin



[Click here to learn more about CONGREGATION](#) ▲



© UK for UNHCR/ Caroline Irby

We spotlighted Waleed, a **CONGREGATION** Storyteller and founder of Yemen Land Ltd, who shared his journey from Aden, Yemen, to building a new life in the UK.

Forced to flee due to ongoing conflict, Waleed faced immense challenges, including separation from his family and adapting to new environments. Despite these hardships, his resilience and determination have paved the way for a new chapter filled with purpose and hope.



[Click here to watch Waleed's story](#)



“  
*Through my journey, I've learned that home is not just a place but where you find peace, dignity and your true self.*  
”

WALEED, YEMEN

# 2024 RECAP

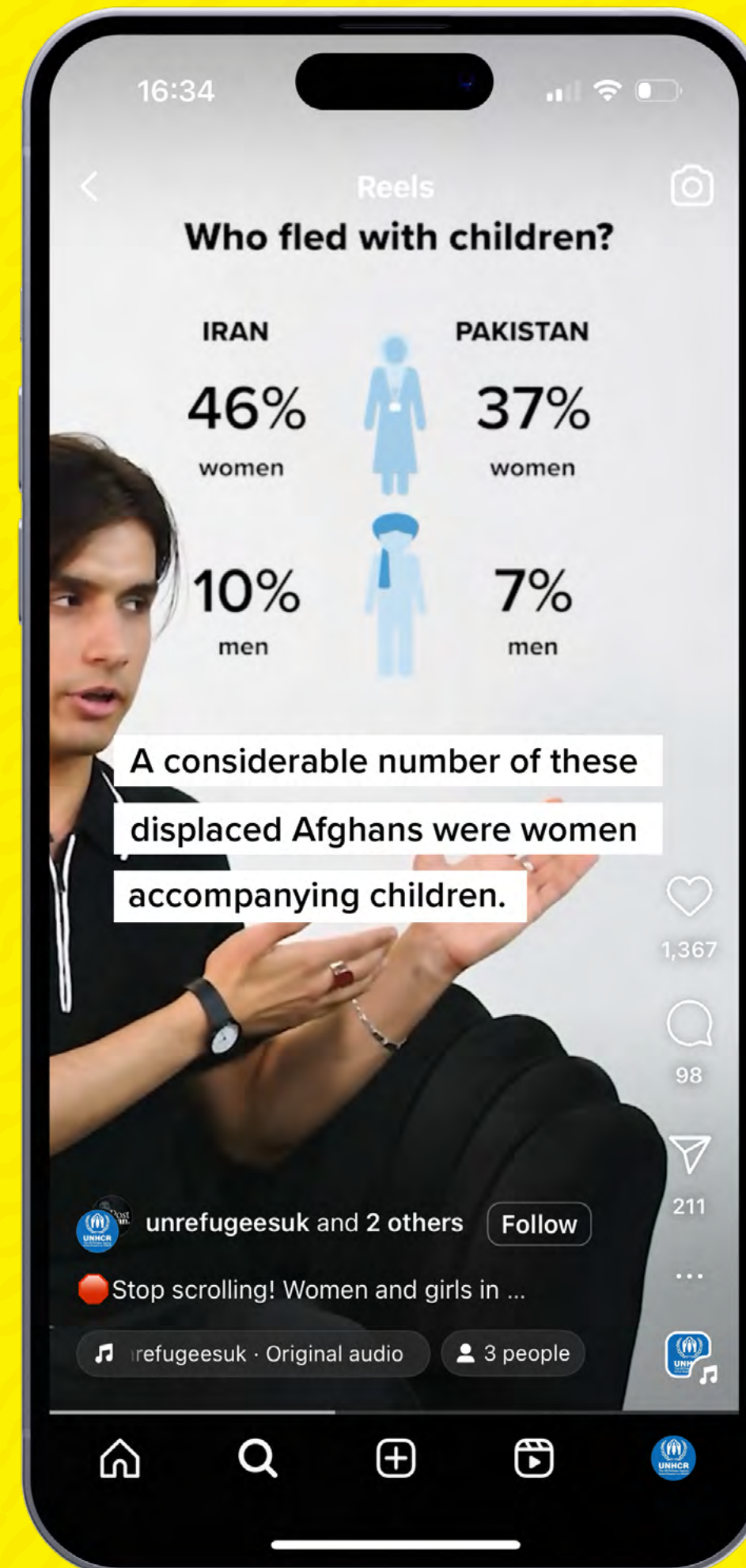
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*In March 2022, girls were banned from attending secondary schools and universities, affecting millions of young girls and women. Later in April 2023, a ban was imposed on female staff working in humanitarian organisations such as NGOs and UN Agencies.*

OMAR, AFGHANISTAN

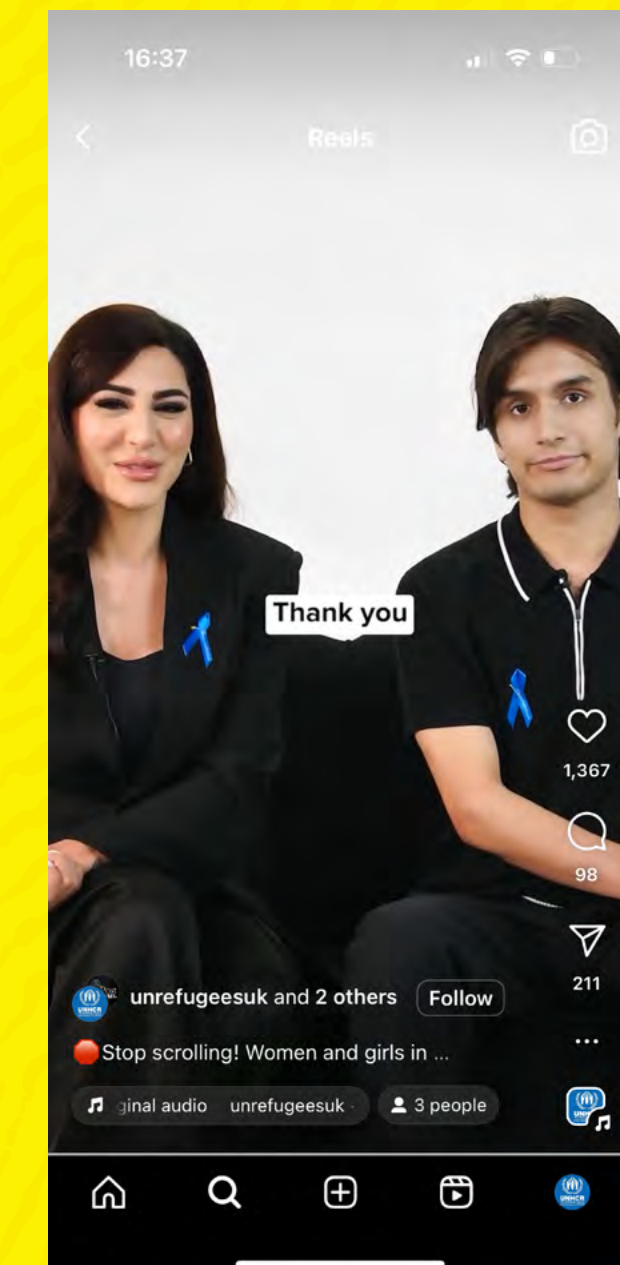
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## 3. **ADVOCACY IN ACTION: A Collaborative Effort to Amplify Women’s Struggles in Afghanistan**



Our former Digital Communications trainee and content creator, Omar, teamed up with WOMAN POST to create a compelling video raising awareness about the ongoing challenges faced by women and girls in Afghanistan.

Through this partnership, the video highlights the urgent need for global attention and support for those most affected by the crisis.





**UNHCR High Profile Supporter JJ Bola joined 49 Storytellers for CONGREGATION, bringing his unique perspective and powerful voice to the installation.**

During the project, JJ shared his journey to London and reflected on what home truly means, offering a deeply personal and inspiring insight into the themes of resilience and identity.



◀ [Click here to watch JJ Bola's story](#)

“

*I remember one day I heard them say to me they come here to take our jobs they need to go back to where they came from not knowing that I was one of the ones who came. I told them that a refugee is simply someone who is trying to make a home. So next time when you go home tuck your children in and kiss your families goodnight, be glad that the monsters never came for you in their suits and ties.*

”

JJ BOLA, REFUGE: THE COLLECTED POETRY OF JJ BOLA.



# 2024 RECAP

## 4. INSPIRING CHANGE: Refugee voices at UK for UNHCR events

In 2024, our Storytellers brought their powerful journeys to life at UK for UNHCR events, inspiring and connecting with our partners and supporters through their stories.

Our Storyteller, Eid, was invited in March to Adyen, one of our corporate partners, for a Breakfast and Learn session with Adyen's employees. Eid shared his inspiring journey as a student, swimmer and Syrian refugee, offering a powerful perspective on resilience and determination.

“

*Participating in these events pushed me out of my comfort zone, enhanced my public speaking and deepened my appreciation for collaboration and storytelling with UK for UNHCR. These experiences enriched my personal growth, career in finance and work toward meaningful goals.*

EID, SYRIA

”



In November, our Storyteller Kana Josée, a CEO and author, joined us for Sip for Solidarity, an interfaith afternoon tea event.

She shared her remarkable journey, highlighting how her faith has been a source of strength and comfort. Her story of leadership, resilience and the unifying power of solidarity left attendees inspired and moved.

“

*I enjoyed sharing my story as a way of giving back to UNHCR. After the event, I had meaningful conversations with people who shared that my story inspired them to consider becoming supporters of UNHCR.*

”



Kana Josee

“

*Participating in Sip for Solidarity with UK for UNHCR gave me the opportunity to share my experience with the audience about how faith supports both refugees and those assisting them.*

”

KANA JOSÉE, BURUNDI



**2024 was truly extraordinary, thanks to the incredible support and inspiring stories shared by our Storytellers. Your voices have touched hearts and made a real difference in our work. Thank you for being such a vital part of our journey!**

*If you'd like to join our Storyteller Programme and take part in meaningful projects, we'd love to hear from you. Email us at [mystory@unrefugees.org.uk](mailto:mystory@unrefugees.org.uk) to get involved and share your story with the world.*

***Let's continue creating change together!***



**UK FOR  
REFUGEES**