



City of Sanctuary UK

Guide to Use of Language

Why did we produce this guidance document?

We have produced this suggested guide as a working document to encourage consistency and a mindful approach to the use of non-dehumanising language in line with our values (Inclusiveness, Openness, Participation, Inspiring and Integrity) and principles (see the [City of Sanctuary Charter](#)) across all City of Sanctuary content.

Who is this guidance for?

An opportunity to reflect...

This document can be used by anyone supporting our vision of welcome and sanctuary for all, and we encourage the network of groups and sanctuary awarded organisations to see this as an opportunity to reflect on their use of language in the spirit of openness and our intention to include people seeking sanctuary in all our activities including decision making.

The basics - terminology of migration

The terms refugee, asylum seeker or migrant can be experienced as dehumanising because they define a person according to their immigration status.

Whilst we recognise that there are times when we need to use these legal terms in order to be meaningfully understood in our conversations and written content (for instance in the Lift the Ban campaign), there are alternatives which we suggest in point 2 below.

Our suggested terms*

1. We work with... We use the word working **'with'** as opposed to **'for'** or on behalf of people seeking sanctuary. Working **'for'** can be experienced as patronising and disempowering. It can undermine the engagement of people seeking sanctuary in leadership positions within the network, which is one of our core principles.





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2. People seeking sanctuary - preferred term in most contexts as this focusses on **people** first as opposed to their immigration status. It emphasises that people are seeking sanctuary (safety and protection), not specifically asylum. We avoid using acronyms such as **RAS** (Refugees/Asylum Seekers) or **ASR** (asylum seekers and refugees). We also avoid using '**sanctuary seekers**' since this is little different to the term asylum seekers. **The emphasis is on people not on reducing them to labels** so the use of any of the following or similar is encouraged: families who are seeking sanctuary, students with a sanctuary seeking background, children who have sought sanctuary, women who are stuck in the asylum process or simply people, women, students... We also try to avoid using '**our**' in front of **people seeking sanctuary**. Many of us often refer to '**our**' people... or '**our**' asylum seekers. On reflection, we realise that the use of '**our**' may be experienced as patronising and potentially dehumanising as it suggests ownership. It does not add to meaning and can usually be dropped without changing the grammar of the sentence. If additional meaning is required then suggested alternatives include 'people with whom we are working', or 'people using our services' or 'families we know.'

3. Separated children and young people seeking sanctuary is preferable to the use of the acronym / abbreviation **UASCs** (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) or **UAM** (Unaccompanied Minors) . It can be dehumanising to be referred to as an acronym. Unaccompanied can imply a deliberate decision to send lone children into danger and does not reflect the fact that many lose their families in the chaos of fleeing war and other dangers.

4. Experts by experience - refers to people providing testimony, leaders or advocates (this is preferred and more empowering than saying asylum seekers or refugees). Alternatively we use the term **with lived experience** of seeking sanctuary thereby deferring to those whose lived experience is **the** story. The best persons to tell the story, to consult for advisory support or to lead are the **experts** due to their **lived experience**.

5. We are part of the movement - The City of Sanctuary network of groups and awarded organisations (schools, libraries, theatres etc.) is a **network**, sometimes referred to as the City of Sanctuary movement in its own right - however it is **not the movement**. We are part of the wider movement for sanctuary, and our work across the network and working in partnership with others is a significant **contribution** to the growth of widespread grassroots support for welcome.

6. Sanctuary Ambassadors – generally refers to people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary who have agreed to volunteer with City of Sanctuary. This could be talking to the media, public speaking, involvement in appraisal of Sanctuary Awards, etc. Often they are graduates of the Sanctuary in Politics course and could be on the Operational Advisory Group for City of Sanctuary UK or members of Sanctuary Streams steering groups. Local Sanctuary Ambassadors interested in working with us across the UK are welcome to register with us at [this link](#).





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7. Recognition is the preferred word to use rather than **status** when referring to a Sanctuary Award. Status is a Home Office term and also refers to rank or social standing. Sanctuary Awards reflect **recognition** and celebration of an organisation's commitment to welcome and inclusion.

8. Culture of welcome and safety for all is preferred because it encompasses much more than does the concept of '**hospitality**' - seen as a gift that can be given or taken away.

9. Person refused asylum or person who is appeals rights exhausted - is preferred to **failed** asylum seeker. We also need to vigorously call out the use of **illegal asylum seeker**, which is an oxymoron. There is no such thing since there is the legal right to claim asylum regardless of the circumstances of arrival. No-one is illegal - a person without documents or leave to remain may be denied legal rights but they are not in themselves illegal.

10. We are not comfortable with the increasing use of the term BAME - We have already decided not to use acronyms but there is also an issue with using Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups as a phrase which lumps diverse communities together. Please see the [Voluntary Action Leeds position](#) on this which helpfully informs developing discussions.

Any questions? Contact us!

We welcome further discussion and reflection on terminology.

In the meantime, we aim to be **mindful**, **specific** and **sensitive** in our use of language which we accept is constantly evolving and that there are no "correct" terms. If you have any related queries or would like to share your group discussions

or suggest changes to this guide as a result of local consultation (especially with people seeking sanctuary), please email info@cityofsanctuary.org.

Suggested terms*

These terms have evolved over years of discussions across the network at regional and national events/conferences/away days/Network Voice meetings and other occasions, and within the City of Sanctuary UK team of staff and trustees.

