

Refugees and Scout heritage

UK and World Scouting has always supported displaced people and those in need, and Scouts is considered by the UN to be a core part of the world's emergency response and community resilience. Scouts is the largest contributor to the UN 2050 Sustainable Development Goals for Environment and Human Rights.

First World War

In August 1914 Belgian refugees, fleeing the advance of the German Army, started to arrive at ports on the south coast of the UK. In Folkestone, Scouts helped guide the new arrivals to the town hall so they could be registered and given the support they needed. Refugees were then sent across the country, and Scouts were asked to meet them at stations and provide them with help.

The Belgian Scout Association was given permission to operate in the UK so they could carry on supporting Scouts within the refugee community.

Spanish Civil War

In 1936 refugees from the Spanish Civil War arrived in the UK. A large camp was set up by some well-meaning volunteers, however they didn't have the experience to run it efficiently. Disease rapidly spread and the authorities had to step in. They asked Scouts Headquarters (HQ) to suggest some volunteers who could take over the running of the camp. It was recognised that Scout leaders would have the necessary skills to organise large groups of people, provide mass catering and introduce proper hygiene arrangements.

Kindertransport

Between 1938 to 1940 a scheme was organised to evacuate Jewish children from Nazi occupied countries called Kindertransports. Initially they came from Germany and Austria, and this was followed by Poland and Czechoslovakia. The UK received around 10,000 children and

young people, and other countries, including the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and France, also supported Kindertransports.

Scouts had been banned in Nazi occupied countries, but it was felt that the movement could provide a way of helping the new arrivals settle into their new homes. Scout groups were encouraged to reach out to the refugees and some Synagogues opened special Jewish Scout groups.



Robert Baden-Powell designed a thank you card for Scouts who welcomed refugees during the Second World War.

Scouting on the Home Front

During the Second World War Scouts adapted to the new challenges faced by those on the Home Front.

In 1939 the threat of air raids and gas attacks on British cities led to over one million children being sent to the countryside for safety. Many Cub and Scout groups moved with the children as they were evacuated. Scouts also helped with the evacuation process by organising groups of children, carrying luggage and offering comfort.



Scouts carrying evacuees' luggage

Scout International Relief Service

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, various organisations, such as the Red Cross, set up relief teams. These relief teams became members of the Government body, the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad, and were sent to assist refugees and displaced persons in areas of conflict. All relief work was coordinated by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).

In 1942, Scouts established The Scout International Relief Service (SIRS). Female Scout leaders had to be 25 or over, and male Scout leaders had to be 30 or over to be involved.

The first group of Scout leaders landed in Normandy in September 1944. Leaders were sent to various places of conflict during the Second World War, such as North West Europe, Italy, Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Hong Kong. They helped in the Displaced Persons Camps, which were temporary camps for either refugees or internally displaced people, who had not crossed a border to find safety.

There were three phases of work for the groups sent to North West Europe:

First Aid

- Giving help to a sick or injured person, such as bleeding, fractures, shock, heart attacks, burns and scalds

Emergency relief

- Providing emergency relief in the transit camp, which were places where refugees stayed in tents or other temporary structures when they had nowhere to live permanently
- Evacuating people to places of safety

Rehabilitation

- Helping to rebuild people's mental and physical strength
- Helping with repatriation, which is the return of someone to their own country

Members of the Scouts International Relief Service fitting a displaced Dutch family with new clothes.



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Scouting in Prisoner of War and Concentration Camps

Scouting also took place in Prisoner of War (POW) and Concentration Camps, and this was often started by prisoners who were Scouts.

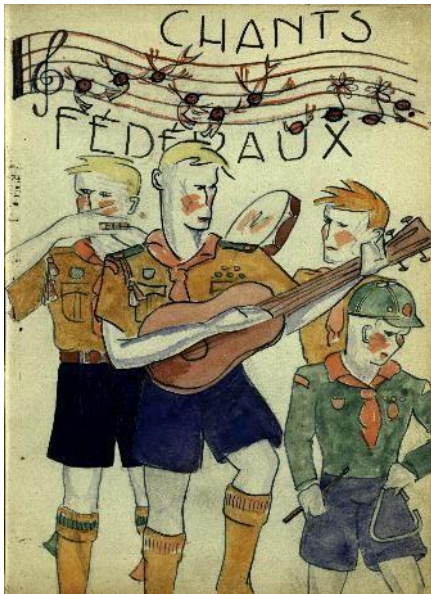
Prisoner of War Camps

In both German and Japanese POW camps, men from the allied armed forces set up Rover Scout Crews, which were for men aged 18 or over.

Changi POW Camp was set up by the Japanese in Singapore in February 1942. It was the main camp for the captured British and Commonwealth forces, and a Rover Crew was formed at this Camp. They held meetings, where they learned from each other, and even completed leader training courses. Activities had to be conducted in complete secrecy, as all organised meetings of these types were banned, and participants would be punished if discovered. The men kept a log book, and they made their own scarves, membership badges and wristbands from pieces of stolen canvas and scrap metal.

Concentration Camps

A Rover Scout Crew was set up at Spanish Concentration Camp called Mirandade Ebro. The members were Scouts who had fled Nazi occupied countries and made their way to Spain. They came from countries including Poland, Denmark, Belgium and France. Whilst they were in the camp, they kept a logbook and they wrote about scouting, their countries and their personal stories. We believe most of these Scouts eventually came to the UK and joined the Armed Forces.



An illustration from the Camp Miranda log book introducing Scout songs from various countries.

Appendix 5: Scout responses

Deep Sea Scouts

Founded in 1928, the Deep Sea Scouts enabled young people across the UK and living on UK allied ships and ports around the world to continue scouting, even after they had been drafted into service in Royal or Merchant Navy. After the Second World War, the Deep Sea Scouts helped to rebuild scout groups and scouting links internationally. They also established new Land and Sea Scout groups and projects globally, with an aim to create friendships and peace through international scouting.

Refugees at Gilwell Park



From November 1956 to January 1957 Gilwell Park welcomed 250 Hungarian refugees. Over 200,000 Hungarians fled their country following a revolution against Soviet imposed policies, and 11,000 of them came to the UK.

Gilwell provided a temporary home while more permanent accommodation was found. Some of the refugees worked on the estate while they waited to be housed.

Scouting in Exile

Countries, such as Tibet, which are under occupation since the 1950s have set up 'Scouting in Exile' projects to continue with scouting in their own cultural way in their host countries.

Scouts of Kuwait

In the invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s Scouts delivered emergency medical triage to those crossing borders, created shelters and equipment at camps for displaced people to stay in.

Syrian Refugees

Scouting in Syria has continued as best as it can. Young people are now sharing inspiring stories of how scouting has helped to save their lives as refugees.

Many Scout associations from across the world have helped to provide leaders, training and financial support to help ensure scouting continues to provide support for young people.

Myanmar Refugees

Refugees from Myanmar genocides are frequently met by Scouts in receiving countries, such as Bangladesh, where Scouts have established camps, safe spaces and providing early medical triage.

Venezuelan Refugees

Scouts neighbouring the Venezuelan refugee crisis have perhaps orchestrated the greatest movement of young people to help respond to a refugee crisis.

Scouts of Brazil have now not only created a national committee for refugees, but they are highly active in every refugee camp providing medical aid, scouting activities for young people and all forms of non-formal education provision.

Beach welcomes in Europe

Scouts in Greece have been meeting refugees arriving via sea, on the beaches and landing sites, for over four years now. They have provided care, clothing, water and support.

Their project has come under much political criticism, but they have maintained that helping to save lives of adults, children and young people in need is the right thing to do.

Open Arms Sea Scouting

The brave crew of the Open Arms Project famously had their ship shot at and damaged by the Italian Navy while carrying 500 refugees in 2018.

They are mostly formed of adults who met through Sea Scouting links, and the ship's current captain has spoken to Sea Scout events across southern Europe about the work they undertake rescuing people in the Mediterranean Sea.

In 2018, they invited around 60 Sea Scout leaders from across Europe to join them on board to tour the ship and hear about their work as part of the EuroSea18 conference.

World Scouting Refugee Conference

In late 2018, World Scouting organised an impromptu conference in Brussels to discuss the many thousands of national Scout projects taking place around the world. These included Scout leaders from Asia, South America, Africa, North America and Europe, including the UK.

This conference has led to many new international links and the joining up of Scout projects to create an international collaboration across scouting to assist refugees and migrants. Leaders and young people from the UK are playing a vital part in this too.

Climate refugees

In 2019, four Scout groups, two of which are in British Scouting Overseas territories, became some of the first Scout groups to become climate change refugees. Their groups were being disbanded or relocated due to rising sea levels. The numbers of climate refugees are expected to outnumber economic, war and humanitarian crisis origin refugees within the next 25 years.

Scout Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Helping to raise awareness, actively help or simply discussing any of these refugee activities helps towards the greater human plan of sustainability goals. This pack helps to meet the following SDGs:

For more information visit <https://sdgs.scout.org/>

