

Sanctuary in Parliament II

'Sanctuary – Creating Safe and Legal Routes to Welcome in the UK'

1st December 2015

We've put together this briefing paper to provide everyone with some key facts, figures and proposed next steps for MPs to take regarding the 3 overarching themes of Sanctuary in Parliament II: Destitution, Detention, and 'Safe and Legal Routes.' If you want more information on any of the topics, we've put together a list of further reading at the end.

Destitution

What's the problem?

Asylum seekers who have no other means of support receive £36.95 a week, or just over £5 a day, to pay for their food, clothing, toiletries, transport and other essential living needs (accommodation and fuel bills are paid for separately for those who have nowhere to live). In August 2015, support rates for children were cut drastically by 30%.

Asylum seekers spend many months on this support, living well below the poverty line. At the end of June 2015, more than 3,500 asylum seekers had been waiting more than six months for an initial decision on their application, but they have no alternative to the support offered as they are not allowed to work to support themselves.

Single asylum seekers who have had their application refused and are at the end of the process are usually left destitute without any statutory support at all. The British Red Cross have supported more than 10,000 asylum seekers and their dependents in this situation so far in 2015. This is 1,000 more than 2014.

Many newly granted refugees also fall into destitution as they are only given 28 days to transition from Home Office support onto mainstream benefits. More than 1 in 10 of Red Cross clients receiving emergency destitution support have actually already received refugee status.

Proposals in the current Immigration Bill threaten to increase destitution amongst all refused asylum seekers, including families with children. This will leave vulnerable children at risk of harm, transfer significant costs to local authorities and undermine immigration controls as the Home Office will lose contact with asylum seekers who are at the end of the process.

What's the solution?

- Increase asylum support rates to 70% of Income Support, or any increase that brings us closer to this goal.
- Provide asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute with support until they are given status in the UK or are returned to their country of origin.

- Ensure asylum seekers are not denied a right of appeal against a decision by the Home Office to refuse or discontinue support (currently more than 60% of appeals to the Asylum Support Tribunal are either successful, remitted back to the Home Office to be retaken or are withdrawn by the Home Office because they are flawed).
- Give asylum seekers permission to work if they have not had their cases resolved in six months.
- Ensure that asylum decisions are taken promptly and are right first time so that refugees are quickly recognized and can begin contributing to society.
- Properly resource the Home Office asylum decision-making process to ensure that this happens.

What can your MP do to support us?

- Advocate for these policies within their parties and in the House of Commons
- Write to the Immigration Minister and urge him to support these policies
- Support relevant amendments to achieve these goals during the passage of the Immigration Bill
- Work at a constituency level with all relevant stakeholders including local authorities to try and alleviate the destitution of asylum seekers

Detention

What's the problem?

The UK routinely detains people indefinitely and detains more migrants than any other European country except Greece. Despite receiving over four times as many asylum applications, Germany detained only three people for every 20 that the UK detained. The UK is alone in detaining them indefinitely, without time limit, without trial and sometimes for years on end. The UK is alone in detaining large numbers of asylum seekers, simply for administrative convenience in processing their cases. The UK is also the only country in Europe which routinely detains migrants in prisons, a practice considered unlawful in the rest of the EU.

At the end of June 2015, 3,418 people were in detention, 11% higher than the number recorded at the end of June last year. Despite the increase in numbers detained, there has been a continuing decline since 2011 in the proportion of detainees being removed from the UK following their detention. Equally, in 2013/14 the cost of running the immigration detention estate was £164.4m. Fundamentally, the current use of detention for immigration purposes is inhumane, ineffectual and incredibly expensive.

What's the solution?

In February 2015, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration released the findings of their inquiry into immigration detention. They made the following recommendations for change (amongst others):

- No-one should be detained for longer than 28 days in an Immigration Removal Centre.
- Pregnant women and victims of rape and sexual violence should never be detained.
- The government should learn from international best practice and introduce much wider range of alternatives to detention.

What can your MP do to support us?

- Support the recommendations outlined in the Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention.
- Use amendments during the passage of the Immigration Bill to call for a time limit on detention for immigration purposes.

Safe and Legal Routes

What's the problem?

We are facing the biggest refugee crisis since WWII. There were 19.5 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2014. Yet despite the growing number of refugees globally, the number of people finding safety in Britain remains low. By the end of 2014, the UK was hosting just 0.6% of the world's refugees, and a whopping 86% were hosted in developing countries. With 25,771 applications for asylum made in the UK in the year ending June 2015, the number of refugees, pending asylum cases and stateless persons still only equates to just 0.24% of the UK population.

Over the last year, refugees have drowned in their thousands in a desperate attempt to cross the Mediterranean sea in search of safety, while others struggle in camps in Turkey, Greece and Calais. Nobody makes these journeys unless they have to. What many of us do not realise is that with the exception of a small number of resettlement schemes, it isn't possible to apply for refugee protection from a distance; there is no choice but to find your way - often against great odds - to a safe country to make an application.

With an unprecedented number of refugees arriving in Europe, some of our European neighbours have welcomed them with open arms, while others have only wanted to build the walls of fortress Europe higher. Yet all - with the exception of the UK - have agreed to work together to redistribute refugees who have already arrived in Southern Europe.

What's the solution?

We welcome the UK's commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next 5 years. However, there are many more ways we can play our part in responding to the European refugee crisis and helping refugees around the globe. Here are some key solutions:

- UK to commit to taking a fair proportion of refugees who are already in Europe.
- Expand Gateway Resettlement scheme for all nationalities, alongside Syrian resettlement programme.
- Introduce Humanitarian Visas to allow people to travel to the UK to apply for asylum.
- Expand the criteria for Refugee Family Reunion so that more vulnerable family members can join their loved ones in the UK.

What can your MP do to support us?

- Advocate for these policies within their parties and in the House of Commons.
- Write to the Immigration Minister and urge him to support these policies.

- Sign EDM 561 calling for Family Reunification for Refugees.
- Support New Clause 1 to the Immigration Bill 2015, tabled by Yvette Cooper, calling for an extension of family reunion criteria.

Other things to ask your MP to do

As well as taking action in Parliament, there are other practical things you can ask your MP to do in your constituency.

- Invite your MP to meet with your group/service.
- To display a 'We Welcome Refugees and Asylum Seekers' sticker in their constituency office.
- To commit to challenging misconceptions about people seeking sanctuary when working in the constituency.
- Take a photograph with a 'Proud to Protect' sign at Sanctuary in Parliament.

Want to find out more?

There's lots of information out there about our key themes. Click on the following links below to do a bit of further reading...

Destitution

[Asylum-related Destitution: What is it?](#) *Regional Asylum Activism, October 2015*

[Refugee Council Briefing on the Second Reading of the Immigration Bill](#), *Refugee Council, October 2015*

[Destitution: Unchecked, Unbalanced. Home Office Decision Making on Asylum Support](#), *ASAP, September 2015*

[The Move-On Period: An Ordeal for New Refugees](#), *Red Cross, 2014*

[Briefing on Asylum Support Rates](#), *Refugee Action, April 2014*

[A Question of Credibility: Why So Many Initial Decisions are Overturned on Appeal in the UK](#), *Still Human Still Here/Amnesty International, April 2013*

Detention

[The Immigration Bill 2015 and Immigration Detention](#), *Detention Forum, October 2015*

[The Immigration Bill and Detention: Schedules 5 and 6](#), *Detention Action, October 2015*

[The Report of the Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the UK](#), *APPG on Refugees & the APPG on Migration, 2014*

[Detained: Women Asylum Seekers Locked up in the UK](#), *Women for Refugee Women, January 2014*

[Detained Lives: The Real Cost of Indefinite Immigration Detention](#), *Detention Action, January 2009*

Safe and Legal Routes

[Not So Straightforward: The Need for Qualified Legal Support in Refugee Family Reunion](#), *Red Cross, 2015*

[A Protection Based Response to the Crisis in the Mediterranean](#), *Refugee Council, July 2015*

[The Sea Route to Europe: The Mediterranean Passage in the Age of Refugees](#), *UNHCR, July 2015*

Got any further questions or want to find out more? Get in touch with

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