

Asylum Support Partnership

newsletter

No 76



Welcome to the May Edition of the Asylum Support Partnership Newsletter. This edition features: The simplification Bill, UKBA's increase in immigration detention, MHL's new Chief Executive, Destitution in the Asylum System in Leicester, Alternative to Detention Update, Refugee Week and the Saving Sanctuary Report

For further updates asylum support policy and practice changes please visit the following ASP websites: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/ , <http://www.migranthelpline.org.uk/> , <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/> , <http://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/> , <http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/> ,

Simplification Bill

In June 2007 the Government began a project to simplify UK immigration law. Their objective is to make the UK's immigration system clearer, more streamlined and easier to understand.

In February 2008, the Government published Path to Citizenship: next steps in reforming the immigration system. The paper is available at: <http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/consultations/closedconsultations/pathtocitizenship/>

The UK Border Agency plan to publish a partial draft bill for pre-legislative scrutiny by the summer and will introduce a full bill to Parliament by the end of November 2008. It is intended that this Bill will consolidate and simplify UK immigration and nationality law.

The draft Bill will not allow for consultation on all the proposals contained in the Bill that will be presented to Parliament in November, however, the Path to Citizenship paper allows for consultation upon some of the proposals that the Government intend to include in the November Bill.

The Proposals include:

- reforming the scheme for providing housing and welfare support for asylum-seekers
- replacing "removals" and "deportations" with one process of "enforced departure"
- replacing "entry clearance", "leave to enter" and "leave to remain" with one status called "Permission"
- introducing powers to establish a biometric identity card system for immigrants

UKBA to increase immigration detention.

The UK Border Agency has announced plans for up to 60 per cent more immigration removal centre places.

The extra spaces will total between 1,300 and 1,500. The Home Office announced it will take forward planning applications at two possible sites; Bicester in Oxfordshire and Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire.

The new centre could be running within two years, and will come on top of a new centre at Brook House, near Gatwick Airport, which will add more than 420 beds when it opens next year, new wings at Harmondsworth Removal Centre, near Heathrow Airport, which will add a further 370 beds, and new spaces at both Dover and Oakington, which will add 100 spaces between them.

The additional detention space is intended to allow UKBA to process more asylum claims through the Fast track process.

Migrant Helpline appoints new Chief Executive

The Asylum Support Partnership would like to welcome Mike Emberson as the new Chief Executive Officer of Migrant Helpline.

Mike will be taking over from Annie Ledger from July 28th 2008.

Currently Mike is the Director of Research & Development for the Salvation Army, having previously held the position of CEO in the Scrine Foundation (a medium-sized charity providing 24-hour services for homeless people)

ASPT is a partnership project hosted by the British Refugee Council

British Refugee Council (commonly called the Refugee Council) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, [No. 2727514] and a registered charity, [No. 101445776] Registered office: 240-250 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BB, United Kingdom; www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Destitution in the Asylum System in Leicester

A report entitled *Destitution in the Asylum System in Leicester*, which has been commissioned by the Leicester Refugee and Asylum Seekers Voluntary Sector Forum (LVSF) and co-ordinated by Refugee Action, is being launched on Monday June 2nd.

This is the 3rd published report by the LVSF and out of 135 surveyed destitute asylum seekers, almost half had been homeless for a year and 73% did not have access to healthcare.

The forum is making a number of recommendations to local and national government policy-makers and the voluntary and community sector in Leicester to try to tackle this crisis.

The report shows that the reason most (67%) asylum seekers had become destitute was because their claims for asylum had been fully refused but they were too afraid to return home. Thirteen respondents were depressed and 15 were taking medication for mental health issues. Twenty-two people who were interviewed had dependent children.

Amanda Soraghan, the chair of the LVSF and area manager of Refugee Action Leicester, said: "A disturbing number of people have been coping with destitution for a very long time, with no idea about how to escape this poverty. Our research proves that making people homeless is not encouraging them to return to their home country, it is just forcing them to live a hand-to-mouth existence, outside of normal society, and this is unacceptable in 21st century Britain."

The forum highlights the need for better provision of legal advice, solicitors and interpreters to help asylum seekers get the right decision. They are recommending that time-limited leave to remain should be granted to asylum seekers unable to return to their country at this time, granting them the right to work and support. They are also urging the UK Borders Agency to grant leave to remain to people fleeing situations like Darfur and Zimbabwe where widespread war and human rights violations are taking place.

Amanda Soraghan said: "It is essential that the government does something to end the policy of destitution as it has been proved to be inhumane and ineffective. The government needs to improve its decision-making to ensure asylum seekers who need protection are getting it."

From June 2nd the report will be available on Refugee Action's website www.refugee-action.org.uk.

Migrant Helpline –Alternative to Detention Update

There are currently 6 families resident in the Alternative to Detention Pilot in Millbank, Ashford, a further 10 families are due to enter the pilot shortly, 8 on the week of 3rd June and 2 on the week of 13th June.

The increase in referrals is due to the success of the UKBA roadshows, which involved trips to all NAM regions to discuss the A2D project with the NAM caseowners. The lack of communication and information provided to NAM caseowners was identified as the main obstacle to referrals being received by A2D.

Migrant Helpline is working to ensure the client receives as much contact from Migrant Helpline as possible prior to entry into the project. 10 – 14 days before Migrant Helpline pick up the client, a letter is sent from their key worker to introduce themselves and Migrant Helpline, and it also asks the client to call if they have any questions or do not understand anything. 3 days before collection by Migrant Helpline the Keyworker will call the client to offer support.

Medical facilities are now available on site, four times a week.

Currently, none of the clients have signed up for voluntary return, as all clients have been pursuing appeals, however, these should all be addressed shortly.

Refugee Council's Information Service

Refugee Council now have some sample pages of their information service online for you to check out this valuable resource.

Easy to use, authoritative and up-to-date, the subscription based Information Service contains over 240 pages of relevant policy information, best practice and illustrative case studies, as well as current lists of useful services, resources and organisations.

Subscribers receive 12 monthly update inserts, to keep their binder up-to-date, all for £100 (statutory bodies) or £50 (voluntary).

View the free sample pages at:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information-service

Celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Refugee Week with the following Activities

Refugee Action **Leicester** is holding an **International 6 a side Football Tournament** on Saturday 21st June at St. Margaret's Pasture's Sports Centre, St Margaret's Way, Leicester, LE1 3EA from 10am – 5pm. Deadline for entries is 1st June – to enter or for further information, please contact Rayhana Brydson on 0116 261 6200

World Costumes Exhibition - Linthouse & Govan Housing Associations **Glasgow**

Monday 16 June (Launch Event) / 6pm, the exhibition runs Tuesday 17 - Sunday 22 June / 1pm - 4pm

A dazzling display of costumes hand-made by people from all over the world who now live in the Govan area of Glasgow. LUV Gallery, 1226 Govan Road, Glasgow, G51 4RA
For more information please contact angela@linthouseurbanvillage.com

Celebrating Sanctuary - London

Sunday 15th June, Bernie Spain Gardens, Upper Ground, South Bank, SE1

Celebrating Sanctuary is a day long festival which gathers together established and emerging refugee musicians, dancers and artists to celebrate the positive cultural contribution of refugees to the UK.

Refuge In Films Festival

20th – 22nd June 2008 – **London** - a film festival dedicated to raising awareness about refugee and migrant issues. In 2008, the festival is being entirely developed by a group of young people. For further information please contact: Beatriz Villate +44 (0) 7903 494 703
E-mail: refugeinfilms@gmail.com

Refugee Week Radio is an online community radio project which:

- ~ gives a platform to refugee individuals and organisations
- ~ publicises and celebrates the events and activities of Refugee Week *and*
- ~ discusses some of the issues involved.

For more information please visit : <http://www.refugeeweekradio.net/index.htm>

For further information and events, please visit <http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/>

Asylum Advice and Information lines

Refugee Council

020 7346 6700 – General Information Line

020 7346 6777 –London Advice line

Open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays: 10am – 1pm and 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 2-4pm

0113 386 2210 -Yorkshire and Humberside advice line

Open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays: 9am – 4pm (closed Wednesdays)

01473 297 900 - East of England advice line

Open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays: 10am – 1pm and 2 – 4pm (closed Wednesdays)

0121 234 1950 - West Midlands' advice line

Open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays: 9.30 am - 4.30 pm (closed Tuesdays)

0207 346 1134 - Children's Panel advice line

Open Mondays to Fridays: 9.30am – 5.30pm

Migrant Helpline

01304 203977 fax **01304 203995** Kent Office

0208 774 0002 fax **0208 774 0003**

Croydon Office

01304 218 710 mob **07976 450324** or

07971 868424 OSS Kent

01424 461225 fax **01424 434879** OSS (St. Leonards)

01273 723223 fax **01273 723227** - OSS Sussex (Brighton)

Welsh Refugee Council

029 2048 9800

Scottish Refugee Council

0800 085 6087 (free from Landlines)

Saving Sanctuary IAC Report

On the 20th May, The Independent Asylum Commission, funded by The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, launched *Saving Sanctuary*, the first of three reports outlining conclusions and recommendations regarding the UK asylum system. The remaining two reports of recommendations will be published later in 2008.

The commission's key findings are as follows:

- The Commission concludes that there is grave misunderstanding in the public mind about the term 'asylum' which if not addressed threatens to undermine support for the UK's proud tradition of providing sanctuary to those fleeing persecution; and recommends that immediate action is taken to win hearts and minds and long term public support for sanctuary.
- Following its public CITIZENS SPEAK consultation, the Commission concludes that there is a mainstream consensus on the five key values that should be foundation principles on which policy relating to those seeking sanctuary should be based; and recommends that current and future government policy be brought into line with those values.
- The Commission concludes that in recent years there have been significant improvements in the way we decide who needs sanctuary, for which we commend the UK Border Agency; and recommends that the UK Border Agency takes steps to address remaining flaws, and engage with the 48 recommendations we make to improve still further the way the UK decides who needs sanctuary.

Public concern about asylum is strongly linked to perceptions of the effectiveness of the asylum system itself. When asked what would make them feel more positive towards asylum seekers, the most popular suggestion was 'a more effective asylum system' - cited by 43.8% of opinion poll respondents. And while 65.4% of opinion poll respondents were 'very' or 'quite' proud of the UK's tradition of providing sanctuary to people fleeing persecution, 58% said that that the UK should reconsider its commitment to providing sanctuary.

The full report is available at:
<http://www.theworkcontinues.org/downloaddoc.asp?id=45>

Refugee Council has launched Right to Work Campaign

The Refugee Council has launched a new campaign alongside the TUC to allow asylum seekers to work, remembering that trade unionists across the world have fought for the right to work and that many asylum seekers have faced persecution for their union activities.

In 2002 the government made it illegal for people claiming asylum to work.

These are men and women who have fled persecution in their own countries looking for a place of safety here. While they are in the UK they want to work, to support themselves and their families, to pay taxes and contribute to the economy. But they are being denied this opportunity.

For more information please see:

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/letthemwork>

Asylum Support Partnership Multilingual Website

For translated client information relating to Asylum Policy and Support, please visit the Partnership's multilingual information pages, where the information is available in up to 19 languages, hosted by the Refugee Council.

<http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Many Roads to Paradise

The British Institute of Human Rights is proud to present a special performance and post-show discussion of a new play *Many Roads to Paradise* on Wednesday 2nd July at Finborough Theatre, London

Please contact (ethomas@bihr.org.uk for more information.

Please send articles that you would like to appear in the next edition of the Asylum Support Partnership Newsletter to:

Helen Curry
Information Officer
Asylum Support Partnership Team
Refugee Council
240-250 Ferndale Road
London SW9 8BB
Tel: 020 7346 1154 Fax: 020 7737 3306
Email: Helen.Curry@refugeecouncil.org.uk