

Asylum Support Partnership newsletter

No 77



Welcome to the July Edition of the Asylum Support Partnership Newsletter.

For any articles to be included in the next edition please email Helen Curry, Information Officer
Asylum Support Partnership Team at helen.curry@refugeecouncil.org.uk

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

Section 4 Transition comes to an end

The Section 4 Transition to Target Contracts project, which was established to manage the integration of service users (those using the accommodation) into accommodation provided under new target contracts, has now come to an end. The transition is complete, and c7000 service users have been successfully moved over to target contract. All section 4 service users are now in target contract accommodation.

The second phase, now almost complete, was to transfer section 4 service users in London to accommodation in the regions unless they could show that they had a genuine need to remain in London as defined in policy bulletin 31. This transition is expected to be completed by the end of June 2008 and The Transition Team will be disbanding from the 30th June 2008. The s4 Transition mail box and the transition helpline will also close from that date.

Around c400 service users were transitioned to the regions and a further c400 failed to travel. The service users who failed to travel will all have been issued with a failure to travel letter and the majority of these service users have been evicted from their accommodation in London. The provision of continued support was dependant upon them moving to, and residing in, the new accommodation offered to them in the regions. Should these service users wish to take up the offer of support in the future then the CRD Distribution Hub (formally the Accommodation Booking Team) will deal with these cases.

Local Immigration Teams to be introduced across the UK

New local immigration teams are being introduced across the UK as part of a major refocus of the work of the UK Border Agency (UKBA). Around 7,500 UKBA officers and staff up and down the UK will be re-organised into 70-80 Local Immigration Teams with a mission to focus on local immigration crime. The Government's plans, set out in 'Enforcing the Deal' published 19th June 2008, outlines the plan to "introduce automatic deportation for serious offenders, over 1,000 extra immigration staff focused on enforcement duties, action against employers who break the law and new partnerships with local authorities and enforcement agencies to shut down the privileges of the UK to those breaking the rules." Each local team will enforce the full range of immigration laws, concentrating on intelligence gathering, the disruption of illegal activity, tracking down and detaining immigration offenders and failed asylum seekers, and tackling illegal working. For a copy of the Enforcement business plan please go to:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

OBE for Former Chief Executive of Scottish Refugee Council

Sally Daghlian, former Chief Executive of Scottish Refugee Council, has been awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List, for her services to human rights. Sally left Scottish Refugee Council in early April and is now Chair of ECRE, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles.

'Unreasonably Destitute' – a new report from Asylum Support Appeals Project

A new report from the Asylum Support Appeals Project, 'Unreasonably Destitute' identifies how UKBA are failing to support failed asylum seekers unable to leave the UK through no fault of their own. The report primarily focuses on the difficulties of obtaining Section 4 support for by those refused asylum seekers taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK.

The report finds that:

- Section 4 support is not accessible to the vast majority of refused asylum seekers. This is mainly due to the narrowness of its criteria and the fact that it fails to take into account the various problems asylum seekers face when they come to the end of the asylum process in the UK.
- UKBA is refusing to acknowledge the barriers many undocumented asylum seekers face when trying to leave the UK. UKBA's narrow criterion places an unrealistic demand on failed asylum seekers to prove they are taking all reasonable steps to return. This prevents many people from accessing the support they are entitled and causes many thousands of refused asylum seekers to be made destitute.
- There are significant pressures that are placed on individuals to prove an ongoing entitlement. As there is no realistic understanding of what constitutes 'taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK', individuals are often subjected to a 'one size fits all' approach by UKBA.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the report please go to:

<http://www.asaproject.org/web/index.php> or email Helen Curry at the Asylum Support Partnership Team.
Helen.curry@refugeecouncil.org.uk

'More Destitution in Leeds' by Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'More Destitution in Leeds' has found that the number of refused asylum seekers living destitute in Leeds has more than doubled over the last 18 months. The report builds on the Trust's 2007 Destitution Inquiry reports 'Moving on: from destitution to contribution' and 'Destitution in Leeds'.

According to the report "the problem is chronic, with more vulnerable people lacking either the safety net of support or the right to work." The report found that problems have been exacerbated by mistakes in the implementation of new asylum model (NAM) and the biggest reason for destitution was error or delay in allocation of section four grants. Zimbabweans formed the biggest group in the survey at 21%, followed by Iranians (16%) and Eritreans (12%). Please find the full report at:

<http://www.jrct.org.uk/text.asp?section=0001000200030006>

'Good intentions - A review of the New Asylum Model and its impact on trafficked women claiming asylum' by POPPY Project and the Refugee Women's Resource Project

This report considers all the asylum claims made by women who were trafficked into the UK and subsequently supported by the POPPY Project during 2007 and who went through the New Asylum Model process. The report identified that "whilst improvements were found on procedural issues such as providing female case owners and interpreters, the rate of success at appeal showed that the quality of initial decision-making remains an issue." To read the full report please go to:

http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/data/files/publications/83/Good_Intentions.pdf

North of England Refugee Service – Move On Advice Project

The North of England Refugee Service's (NERS) Move On Advice Project began in April 2008, with a three-year Big Lottery Fund grant. It includes 3 advice workers who help to meet the integration needs of people granted leave to remain – focusing particularly on the transition from asylum support to mainstream provision, on benefits, housing and employment, and geographically in the Newcastle/Tyneside and Middlesbrough/Tees Valley areas.

The Project Coordinator Tim Kell says “We regularly see the different challenges faced by ‘legacy’ and ‘New Asylum Model’ clients. Though likely advantaged by having been in the UK for a number of years, the former may be hindered by prolonged ‘institutionalisation’ within the asylum support system – or by the effects of destitution. By contrast, more recent arrivals, passing rapidly through the asylum process, may have had no time to build support networks or gain language skills before being granted leave – and truly being thrown in at the deep end of move on and integration.”

The project works closely with NERS' One Stop Service, who often ‘hand over’ long standing clients. Externally the project works closely with voluntary and statutory sector partners, and is working with Jobcentre Plus at a regional level, to develop its provision for refugees. For more information please visit www.refugee.org.uk

Refugee Action Advice and information Lines

Nottingham: 0115 941 8552

Leicester: 0116 261 6223

North West – Liverpool: 0151 702 6300

North West – Manchester: Free client advice line, 0800 917 2719: Advice line for Organisations, 0161 233 1215

South Central – Portsmouth: 023 9229 7407

South West – Bristol: 0117 941 596

Housing Advice and Advocacy for Refugees from Scottish Refugee Council' Housing Team

Scottish Refugee Council's Housing Team provides direct advice, information and advocacy to refugees regarding their housing rights. Housing is a key concern in the process of settlement and integration and it is paramount that refugees are aware of and exercise their rights.

In Scottish Refugee Council's casework experience they have seen over fifty refugee households annually (singles and families) wanting to move away from where they were dispersed to find housing and settle down in England. At the same time they have seen nearly 100 refugees dispersed in England presenting in Scotland to settle. In addition to this, they have seen refugees who have left to go to England but who have returned to Scotland mainly due to issues with housing. Housing advice within this context is extremely important due to the major differences in Housing law between Scotland and South of the Border.

The difference has emerged mainly due to the Asylum & Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act where it amends Section 199 of the Housing Act 1996, such that asylum seekers who are provided with accommodation under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 establish a local connection with the district of the local housing authority where the accommodation is provided, this did not amend the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, where asylum seekers are not seen as having a local connection with the dispersal area. The Housing team would like to see a national network on housing advice for refugees to enable them to make the right choices about settling in another area and enable them to be more informed regarding their rights to homelessness services and housing rights.

For more information please contact the Housing Team at Scottish Refugee Council[

Home Office quarterly asylum statistics have been published

The Home Office have produced the 1st set of quarterly asylum statistics. One of the key findings shows that Top Ten nationalities accounting for the highest number of asylum removals in Q1 2008 (principal applicants) were: Afghani (270), Iraqi (205), Turkish (190), Chinese (185), Pakistani (185), Jamaican (105), Iraqi (95), Iranian (75), Eritrean (65) and Sri Lankan (55). The statistics have been broken down into easier to read charts by the Asylum Support Partnership Team.

If you would like to receive this information then get in contact with Helen Curry – Information Officer at the Asylum Support Partnership Team who can add you to the mailing list.

Please email:

helen.curry@refugeecouncil.org.uk

The Welsh Assembly Announce their Refugee Inclusion Strategy

The Welsh Assembly has launched its new Refugee Inclusion Strategy. The Strategy sets out how the Government will support and enable refugees to rebuild their lives in Wales and make a full contribution to society. It also documents the progress made to date in achieving refugee inclusion in Wales. Social Justice Minister, Dr Brian Gibbons said: "The Welsh Assembly Government has introduced programmes across key services such as housing, health and education and has also funded a range of voluntary sector initiatives aimed at promoting refugee inclusion. This strategy demonstrates the Welsh Assembly Government commitment to develop effective responses to the barriers refugees and asylum seekers face in Wales. I recognise that working in partnership is essential and will be working with refugee organisation's to deliver our vision of refugee inclusion." For the full report go to:

<http://wales.gov.uk/>

Refugee Action in Nottingham has moved office.

The new office of Refugee Action, Nottingham will open on Monday 28th July 2008.

The address is:

Castle Court,
59 Castle Boulevard,
Nottingham,
NG7 1FD

The telephone and fax number may be subject to change but are currently:

Tel: 0115 941 8552

Fax: 0115 950 9980

The Independent Asylum Commission publish the final two reports of its review on Asylum Seekers

The Independent Asylum Commission has published its second and final reports of conclusions and recommendations. These are 'Safe Return - how to improve what happens when we refuse people sanctuary' and 'Deserving Dignity' – Final conclusions and recommendations.

Key Findings of the Safe Return report suggest that the system for dealing with refused asylum seekers still in the UK has serious weaknesses and does not yet pass the key tests of practicality and effectiveness, public confidence, and humanity. The recommendations, mainly on returns, aim to address the failings of the system from the moment claimants are first interviewed, and include speeding up the handling of claims, putting an end to locking up children, pregnant women and torture victims in detention centres and changing the "unnecessarily violent and careless" way deportation raids on failed asylum seekers are carried out. Deserving Dignity concludes the research and makes 90 recommendations to UKBA.

To read the full reports please go to:

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

Asylum Aid reports on its Asylum Rights Watch

Asylum Aid launched its Asylum Rights Watch Survey in 2007 so that people who experience the UK's asylum system can have the chance to discuss their experiences. In May 2008 Asylum Aid launched three new dossiers reflecting the issues most frequently highlighted by survey respondents between October 2007 and April 2008. These three dossiers highlighted

- A widespread lack of confidence amongst survey participants about how the system treats asylum seekers and decides on their claims for protection in the UK.
- Responses that reflect the growing problem of destitution amongst asylum seekers
- Respondents opinions on the restrictions on permission to work for asylum seekers

The dossiers can be downloaded from the Asylum Aid website www.asylumaid.org.uk.

Scottish Refugee Council Caseworker on secondment to Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA)

Maria Macdougall will be on 6 months secondment to the post of Counter Trafficking Development Officer at TARA from her position as caseworker in the Scottish Induction Service. TARA provides comprehensive assessment of needs and offers a range of support services, including crisis accommodation. The service is funded by the Scottish Government. Women may be eligible for services if they:

- Are over 18 years;
- Have been commercially sexually exploited in the UK;
- Have been brought into the UK or have been moved around the UK.

TARA is located within the Violence Against Women Section of Glasgow Community and Safety Services, 4th Floor, Westergate, 11 Hope Street, Glasgow, G2 6AB.

Email: corporatevaw@drs.glasgow.gov.uk

Home Office and DCSF signal duty on UKBA to protect children

The Home Office and the Department for Children, Schools and Families have announced their intention for UKBA to have a legal duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children as part of the forthcoming Immigration Bill.

In a joint statement to Parliament, agreed by Ed Balls and Jacqui Smith, it was explained that those responsible for running the immigration system should share the same responsibilities as agencies which are subject to Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, for ensuring the safety and welfare of children.

Speaking at Committee Stage of the Children and Young Persons Bill, Beverley Hughes, Children's Minister said, "Having considered the arguments fully, we have agreed that aligning the UKBA with those agencies which are already subject to the Section 11 duty is the right thing to do. Government is today giving a public commitment to pursue now a Section 11 duty for UKBA. We intend to do so in a forthcoming Immigration Bill, a partial draft of which will be published in July 2008."

Refugee Action's have launched a new Refugee Awareness Project (RAP) website

The Refugee Awareness Project have launched a website which acts as an inspirational 'toolkit' for the many people nationwide who support refugees in their communities and want to make their voices heard. The interactive website is the offspring of a three-year project operated by Refugee Action in Liverpool, Nottingham and Bristol, which has reached out to hundreds of community groups ranging from schools and businesses to sports clubs and tenants' associations.

For more information, visit the website: www.raproject.org.uk

Upcoming Courses, Training and Workshops

Refugee Council:

The following courses are running at Refugee Council in the next few months. For further information about course content and booking go to their website: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

24th Sept: An introduction to working with unaccompanied children

15th Oct: Age assessment awareness and working with age-disputed young people

12th Nov: Working with interpreters

19th Nov: Emotional wellbeing of refugee children and young people

Welsh Refugee Council:

WRC are running free training courses for Refugee Community Organisations (RCO's) throughout the summer at their Cardiff office. For more information Contact Sam McAlister on:

Tel: 029 2043 2979

E: sam.mcalister@welshrefugeecouncil.org

9th August: Governance and Financial Control and Management

23rd August: Fundraising

6th September: Strategic Planning and Partnership Working

20th September: Running Successful Projects

Leeds Workshop: What is a Good Asylum System?

Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network (LASSN) together with Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds are holding their first joint workshop on Saturday 18th October 2008. The groups have formed a working partnership to further the national debate about what a good, fair, just asylum process would look like for the UK.

The workshop will be held at Leeds Metropolitan University, Civic Quarter Campus, Leeds, LS1 3HE. The Workshop Outline/Call for Contributions, and a Registration Form, can be downloaded from

<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/cpv/hr/downloads/GoodAsylumWorkshopCall.doc> .

Upcoming Review of the Asylum Support Partnership Newsletter

The Asylum Support Partnership Team will be reviewing the Asylum Support Partnership newsletter in mid-late August and would greatly appreciate it if you could fill in the survey form that will be sent to you in due course.

All feedback is always greatly appreciated. If you have any comments on the Newsletter and its value to you and/or your organisation that you would like to share please contact Helen Curry, Information Officer at:

E: Helen.curry@refugeecouncil.org.uk