

Asylum Support Partnership newsletter

No 78



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

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

Government Policy, Reports and Changes in the Asylum System

Government to lift condition on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The Government has recently announced its intention to lift the immigration condition on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

When the UK ratified the Convention in the early 90's it included an opt-out clause which restricted the rights of child migrants and asylum seekers, allowing them to be detained indefinitely and without judicial process. In signing up to the convention, it will ensure that it becomes obligatory to put migrant children's welfare and rights first.

Changes to Asylum Support Policy

Recently, UKBA has held a series of consultation workshops about making changes to asylum support policy. It is expected that when the Immigration and Citizenship Bill (the so-called Simplification Bill) is issued in October, it will include a general duty to provide asylum support.

This will be followed by draft regulations giving more detail about the proposed changes. A key concern for UKBA is how to increase the uptake of voluntary return among families, so it is expected that the proposed changes to support will be aimed at encouraging families to return. UKBA will be consulting stakeholders on the draft regulations.

Consultation on Immigration Appeals Process

UKBA have published a consultation on proposed reforms to the immigration appeals process. The reforms are designed to streamline the system. The Government believes that once fully implemented, the reforms could reduce the amount of time taken for asylum appeals by nine weeks.

The consultation document 'Immigration appeals: Fair decisions, faster justice' is on the UKBA website, together with details of how to respond to it. Responses to it should reach UKBA no later than 16 October 2008. Please go to:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/consultations/current/>

UKBA Publish New Border Strategy

On 21st August UKBA published 'A strong new force at the border', their 3 year strategy for ensuring that the UK "continues to have one of the most secure borders in the world." This document sets out UKBA's plans for change and describes how they will use new powers from the Borders Act introduced earlier this year. The strategy aims to create a series of triple checks including: stronger checks overseas, a new force operating the frontline, and more effective checks in the UK.

The strategy can be found at:

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/managingourborders/astrongnewforceattheborder/

Change to NASS 1 Forms

UKBA Asylum Operational Policy Unit has advised that NASS1 Forms will need to be downloaded from the Home Office website from 1 October 2008.

UKBA released a statement saying "It is appreciated that this practice may already exist but please note that from 1 October 2008 there will no longer be the facility for an organisation or person to request that NASS 1 Forms and their accompanying Guides be delivered to them by the Home Office business partner Broadsystems."

Home Office Asylum Statistics - 1st Quarter are published

The Home Office has published its latest quarterly immigration statistics. These statistics can be found at:

<http://homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>

Enquiries about the statistics should be made to Simon Woollacott, Tel: 020 8760 8274

Key findings were:

As at the end of March 2008, the total number of asylum seekers in receipt of asylum support was 33,865, 31% lower than at the end of March 2007 (48,800)

As at the end of March 2008, 9,365 applicants, excluding dependants, were in receipt of Section 4 support (31% of those supported).

The top 10 nationalities supported as at the end of March 2008 were (in order) Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Dem. Rep of Congo, Somalia, China, Ethiopia and Congo.

The number of applications for asylum in the UK, excluding dependents, was 16% higher in Quarter 1 2008 (6,750) compared with Quarter 1 2007 (5,680).

Implementation of the National Identity Scheme and the launch of Identity Cards for Foreign Nationals

The implementation of the National Identity Scheme moves a step closer with the launch of Identity Cards for Foreign Nationals in November 2008. The Identity Card for Foreign Nationals is the first part of the NIS and will be rolled out on an incremental basis over the next three years to all foreign nationals. From 25th November 2008, the UK Border Agency (UKBA) will start issuing compulsory identity cards to foreign nationals who apply for further leave to remain in the UK within certain categories (student and marriages/civil partnerships).

The card provides evidence of the holder's nationality, identity and status in the UK. It will also be an additional form of confirming identity and right to work and access public services for individuals who have entered the UK. It is expected that by 2014/15 90 per cent of foreign nationals will have an identity card.

If you have any questions about the scheme please send them to the UK Border Agency Identity Management Team at: identitymanagement@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Detention – UKBA Statistics on Self Harm and HM Inspector of Prison Report

UKBA received a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for information on how many incidents of self harm were reported at 10 detention centres across the UK. To see these statistics please go to: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information/released-information/>

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has published a Report on an announced inspection of Tinsley House and Yarlswood Immigration Removal Centre carried out in March 2008. http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspect_reports/

News from the Partnership Agencies

UKBA Funded Programme for Refugee Integration & Employment to start in October

Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Scottish Refugee Council, Welsh Refugee Council and North England Refugee Service (NERS) will all be launching new services for refugees in October. The programmes, funded by the Home Office, aim to provide support for refugees in their first year after receiving leave to remain. The programmes are called Refugee Integration and Employment Services (RIES) and will be providing:

- An advice service for 6 months
- An employment service for up to 12 months
- An individual mentoring service which can be accessed in the first 12 months, and which lasts between 6 - 12 months.

The RIES programmes aim to integrate refugees into the UK by providing them with all the advice they need to start to re-build their lives including, how to find employment, how to access English language classes, education or training courses and housing advice.

The services will not be available for existing refugees or new refugees who are given status through the Case Resolution Programme. Only those asylum seekers that have been granted refugee status through the New Asylum Model (NAM) or Humanitarian Protection from 1 October 2008 will be eligible.

North of England Refugee Service Middlesborough Office Moves

The new Middlesborough offices address is:
3rd Floor, Sylvan House
12-16 Woodlands Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 3BE

Please note the telephone number has remained the same: 01642 217 447

Update on Refugee Council and the TUC's 'Right to Work' campaign

The Refugee Council's campaign with the TUC to allow people seeking asylum to work has been progressing well. At the TUC Congress 2008 held in Brighton a motion supporting the campaign was passed – and separately leaders of 21 Trades Unions representing over 5 million workers pledged their support.

Those who endorsed the campaign included Unite, Unison, GMB and the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teacher union. Lib Dem Home Affairs Spokesman Chris Huhne MP has also added his personal and party support for the campaign stating "It is almost incomprehensible to me how the government continues this policy of preventing asylum seekers from working".

The campaign has been much helped by the personal commitment of the TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber who stated "The Government must think again and change the rules so that asylum seekers are allowed to work and no longer forced to survive on benefits alone."

Closure of Migrant Helpline's 'Alternative to Detention' Pilot Project

The Alternative 2 Detention pilot was launched in November 2007 and was due to last for a year. The project was aimed at keeping children in local schools while encouraging their families - who have exhausted their asylum appeals - to voluntarily return home. The pilot project has now closed. For further information please contact Migrant Helpline at mhl@migranthehelpline.org

Lin Homer, Head of UKBA has authorised the development of a new project in Scotland, run by Scottish Refugee Council and consideration is also being given to develop a separate project in the South East.

Migrant Helpline Appoint New Chief Executive

Migrant Helpline have recently appointed a new Chief Executive – Mike Emberson. Mike comes to the post from five years as Director of Research and Development at The Salvation Army where he worked on various social and community work projects around the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Refugee Action – Refugee Realities Training Project Update

The Refugee Realities Training Project began in September 2005 and has raised the awareness and understanding of refugee issues to over 3000 people from a wide range of organisations. Sessions are co-delivered with refugees and are designed to encourage engagement and change through a mix of interactive activities which cover key issues such as the difference between asylum seekers and refugees; why people seek asylum in the UK; the process following arrival; destitution; asylum decision making and detention. A key aim of the training is to tell the truth behind the headlines and challenge negative attitudes about asylum by opening up an honest debate about the issues. Evaluation shows that, for many participants, learning about the realities of refugees and asylum has completely changed their negative opinions. For more information about the project please contact; Anna Webster annaw@refugee-action.org.uk

Destitution Tally

At the end of last year, the Asylum Support Partnership carried out a count of all the destitute people seen by its services over 4 weeks. This was used to produce a short report called 'the Destitution Tally'. In October, the exercise will be repeated, and this time the Red Cross and a few smaller refugee organisations are taking part. The results should be ready by the end of the year. For more information please contact: kate.smart@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Upcoming Partnership Agency Conferences, Courses and Training

Scottish Refugee Council Conference, 'Simplification, Sanctuary and Scotland' – The Conference will be held in Glasgow on 10th October and will look at developments in UK asylum policy and their effects on asylum seekers and refugees living in Scotland. The speakers will include Lin Holmer, Chief Executive UKBA and Kenny MacAskill MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, the Scottish Government. For more information on how to attend please contact:

Graeme.corbett@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

Refugee Council - 'Working with Interpreters' – A one day training course to be held on the 12th November for anyone who uses interpreters on a regular basis. The course offers guidance on good practice when working with interpreters to ensure staff are acting within the law and in the best interests of clients. For more information or to book please email: training@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Welsh Refugee Council Conference: 'Mental Health Does Matter – Issues for Asylum Seekers and Refugees' - A conference in Swansea on 10th December on mental health issues for asylum seekers and refugees. The programme will include talks from charities such as the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture and GOFAL. Email info@welshrefugeecouncil.org for more information.

Welsh Refugee Council – 'Introduction to Working with Asylum Seeking Children & Young People' - A one-day introductory course on 14th October in Carmarthen or 19 November in Llandudno. The course aims to develop participants understanding of the key policy and practice issues that impact on asylum seeking children and young people in Wales. More information can be found about this and other courses at:

info@welshrefugeecouncil.org

News from outside the Partnership Agencies

Update on the work of the Immigration Advisory Service (formerly UKIAS)

The Immigration Advisory Service (formerly UKIAS) has been in existence since 1970 providing advice and representation to people experiencing difficulties in establishing their immigration or asylum status. From 2000 UKAIS have developed their services to encompass provision of advice and representation to those who wish to apply for, and have been refused asylum in the UK. Funded by the Legal Services Commission, UKAIS have offices across the county which offer a range of services including, 'drop in's', 'home visits' and telephone advice (and referrals) via the Police Station Pilot.

All UKAIS trainees are given the opportunity to take the relevant training to become accredited caseworkers. The courses developed by UKAIS are now open to external candidates. Full details are available on the UKIAS website: www.iasuk.org

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) launch housing rights website

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) have launched the first housing rights website to be specifically aimed at answering housing rights queries for new migrants. The site has specific information for: refugees, EEA workers and other EEA nationals and family members, A8 nationals, Bulgarians and Romanians, work permit holders, people fleeing domestic violence and people with social care needs.

To view the site, please go to:

www.housing-rights.info

For more information about site, go to:

<http://www.hact.org.uk/article.asp?PageId=42&ArticleId=34>

or to:

<http://www.cih.org/news/view.php?id=949>

London Advice Services Alliance announces closure of Appeals Team

The London Advice Services Alliance (LASA) appeals project is no longer taking referrals and the team will be closing at the end of October due to funding constraints. Please be advised that they will still be operating the Advice Line for London based advice workers on 020 7247 1735, Monday and Tuesdays 10.30am – 12.30pm and Thursdays 2pm – 4pm.

The Metropolitan Support Trust Commission New Research

Refugee Support, the refugee arm of the Metropolitan Support Trust has recently commissioned research in to how refugee community and mainstream organisations assist and support disabled refugees and asylum seekers in London. The objectives of the research are to:

- map existing work; assess unmet need;
- identify barriers to accessing services,
- explore the concepts of disability and address the shortfalls in service provision.

Research findings will be available in November and released at a dissemination event at City Hall in London on 14th November 2008 (attendance is by invitation only).

For more information about this research contact Charlotte Keeble, Research and Consultancy Manager on 020 7501 2214.

Updates from Immigration Law Practitioners Association

The Immigration Law Practitioners Association has published several new papers on recent changes to immigration law, including Article 8 and Immigration control, subject access requests and long residence rules.

For further information on these updates please go to: <http://www.ilpa.org.uk/>

Upcoming Courses, Training and Workshops - offered by organisations outside the Partnership agencies

Children's Service Network Conference - 'Are Asylum Seeking Children Safe in the UK?'

The conference is to be held on Tuesday 14th October in London. It will examine the "tension between asylum legislation and policies designed to support and protect vulnerable children", with speakers from UKBA, IOM and other bodies. For more information please go to:

<http://www.csn.info/csn/events-detail.jsp?&id=187&md=0§ion=events>

Centre for Parliamentary Studies, Government Exchange Training Programme - Training Opportunities on 'Effective campaigning/lobbying of Government.'

The Government Exchange Training Programme offers a wide range of courses which are led by highly experienced practitioners, and speakers include a range of experts including MPs, Lords and other senior Government officials. For more information please go to the website, <http://governmentexchange.co.uk/>.

Joint training event on Statutory Review and Reconsideration Orders

Glasgow Immigration Law Practitioners Association will hold the training event on 24th November in association with the Murray Stable and Scottish Refugee Council. Lord Reed is scheduled to be the keynote speaker. For more information, please go to:

http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/GILPA_Training_Event

Ethnic Society - Conference on Domestic Violence.

The conference is due to be held on 29th Oct in London. There are reduced rates for community, voluntary sector orgs. The conference will address the following issues:

- Refugee Women, Asylum Seekers; Victims of violence; Access to Justice and Human rights.
- Refugee; protecting children and children's rights.
- Social and cultural aspect among refugee communities- implications for abuse of women.

For more information please go to: <http://www.ethnicsociety.com/pages/conference.aspx>

Refugee Week Conference

The Conference is due to be held on 21st November in London. The conference aims to provide a forum where those involved in events this year can share their experiences with others. The workshops are to help participants celebrate their achievements with regards to Refugee Week, learn from others in a supportive setting about models of good practice, input further into the overall evaluation of Refugee Week and discuss with the central Refugee Week team issues of concern and future support needs. For more information please contact <http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/Events/conference-2008/>

Newsletter Survey Reminder

The Asylum Support Partnership Team is reviewing the Asylum Support Partnership newsletter and would greatly appreciate it if you could fill in the online survey that was sent to you. It is only a short survey that takes a couple of minutes to complete. The link is: <http://surveys.refugeecouncil.org.uk/newsletter/newsletterevaluation.htm>