

IAP NEWS

No 72

The newsletter for the Inter-Agency Partnership January 2008

Welcome to the January Edition of IAP News. This edition features:

asylum
support
programme

Change Of Procedure Regarding Section 4 Accommodation

In response to concerns raised about the apparent increase in the number of Section 4 applicants being dispersed out of region, BIA have reviewed this practice and have decided to change internal procedures as a result.

From now on BIA will seek to keep applicants in the region where they were previously in receipt of asylum support, where applicable, except for London cases. However, Section 4 policy remains that accommodation is offered on a no-choice basis. Accommodation will be offered subject to availability in a given area, and in some cases a lack of availability will necessitate moves to another town or region.

With regards to London cases, the practice is to offer accommodation elsewhere to those who are on Section 4 support, unless they can demonstrate a special circumstance that requires them to be accommodated in London.

This change will mean that a greater number of people will be able to stay within their current region.

Case Resolution Directorate Update

The 18th December was an important milestone for resolution of the legacy of unresolved asylum cases.

From 18 December, all legacy cases have been allocated to one of around 60 case owners. The case owners will be responsible for all aspects of the case, and will work closely with colleagues from across BIA – for example appeals and regional enforcement colleagues, to resolve their allocated cases. Once work has started on a case, it will be processed through to conclusion.

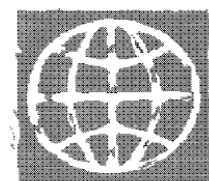
Case owner allocations have been determined, as far as possible, by BIA's regional boundaries, which they believe will help them to build up relationships at a local level.

BIA will continue to conclude cases in line with its priorities (ie cases who may pose a risk to the public, those receiving support, those more likely to be granted some form of leave and those more easily removed). Only in very exceptional or compassionate circumstances will case owners action a case outside of these priorities.

If you think a case justifies being taken out of turn on those grounds, you should write to the Border and Immigration Agency. In all other cases, BIA ask that you only contact them to update a change of address or if there are significant changes in circumstances (eg the birth of a child).

As BIA case-owning teams begin to work through their allocated cases, BIA will work with stakeholders in the following ways:

- Through the National Asylum Stakeholder subgroup on case resolution issues, which is part of the National Forum, but dedicated specifically to discussing case resolution issues. This has been running since September.
- Regional colleagues and senior managers within the Agency will, in the first quarter of 2008, be in touch with key local stakeholders via the regional links already in place to discuss how to best plan the conclusion of cases going forward and to minimise impact on local services.



**MIGRANT
HELPLINE**



Migrant Helpline's Alternative to Detention Project - Update

In June 2007 the Home Office announced the introduction of an alternative to detention pilot project. The Border and Immigration Agency identify the rationale and key drivers for the scheme as follows:

- To assist families to contemplate and plan for return
- To provide information to support voluntary return
- To ensure, as far as possible, a dignified removal process through co-operation
- To reduce the number of children experiencing a stay in a detention centre

A staff model has been agreed, recruitment for the project has been completed and the 12 month pilot, began in November 2007. Staff undertook a period of intensive training which included input from Refugee Council, Refugee Action and IOM as well as visits to Yarlswood detention centre. The project team are also currently working towards accreditation from OISC for level 2 advice services.

As a charity Migrant Helpline provides independent support and advice to enable people to make their own choices and decisions. Each family will be allocated a dedicated Key Worker who will assist them with:

- An initial assessment of the families' needs
- Individual support and information to families on all aspects of the returns process
- Case management
- Referrals to other agencies, if appropriate
- Assistance with application for voluntary return
- Accessing and supporting education entitlements through consultation with Placement Officers and Family Liaison Officers

Question and answer clinics are provided by Support Workers, who will also assist with:

- Providing information about the local neighbourhood
- Booking medical appointments
- Travel information

Families will stay in existing Migrant Helpline accommodation and continue to have freedom of movement. The accommodation is not detention, or in any way intended to be a secure setting. Migrant Helpline staff will be on site 7 days a week to provide support to the families. A Youth Worker and a Children's Activities Coordinator will also coordinate educational and recreational activities for children aged between 3 and 16.

The families will be accommodated for an average of 8 weeks, during which time they will work with Migrant Helpline's dedicated advisers who will explain the procedure for voluntary return and liaise with the IOM to facilitate their return.

If you would like further information about the alternative to detention pilot, please contact the Migrant Helpline Information Department on 01304 218 747.

REFUGEE AGENCIES' NEWS

Refugee Action Supports Christmas Story With an Asylum Twist

Whatever your religious beliefs, the Christian Nativity story has an obvious resonance with the experience of asylum seekers hoping for refuge in the UK, who find all too often that there is 'no room at the inn'.

So Refugee Action was proud to support 'Liverpool Nativity' - an hour-long BBC production broadcast on the BBC on Christmas day, which updated the story to reflect some of the moral questions facing contemporary Britain.

In the reworked story pregnant teenager Mary falls in love with asylum seeker Joseph, but their future is threatened by Herodia, a paranoid minister desperate to cling to power who ordered a crackdown on immigration.

To research the role, Kenny Thompson, who played Joseph, spent time with volunteers at Refugee Action's [Refugee Awareness Project](#), which offers local groups the opportunity to learn more about asylum in the UK by talking to trained speakers from the local community, including refugees and asylum seekers themselves.

Welsh Refugee Council strengthens links with Asylum Justice to improve legal advice for asylum seekers

Asylum Justice is a charity which provides legal advice to asylum seekers in Swansea, Cardiff and Newport and is run entirely on a voluntary basis: there are no paid employees, lawyers or administrators. The charity was formed in May 2005, and has always worked within the legal framework of the Welsh Refugee Council, as a sister charity providing services not accessible to the WRC. Recently, the team has been set up as the "Asylum Justice Division" of the Welsh Refugee Council, and its work continues on that basis.

Roger Warren Evans, Founder of Asylum Justice said:

"We are committed to righting a single wrong, namely the withdrawal of Legal Aid from asylum seekers who are considered to have "less than 50% chance of success". If you have a strong case, you get a lawyer, on Legal Aid: if not, not. That is called the "Merits Test", and is applied throughout England and Wales. As a lawyer, it is for me unacceptable that Legal Aid should be manipulated in this way, for political ends. We try to step in, to fill the gap. That is our objective."

Fflur Jones of Asylum Justice was recently awarded the Law Society's Young Probono Lawyer of the Year prize for her voluntary work with the charity. She said: "It's great that this kind of award brings attention to the plight of asylum seekers in Wales and hopefully will encourage other lawyers to get involved in giving legal advice for free"

BIA NEWS

BIA promises stronger relationships with stakeholders

The December 07 edition of Asylum News includes an interview with Justin Russell, BIA's new Director of Asylum Policy. In it he explains:

'Staff right across Asylum Policy are already interacting with stakeholders on a daily or weekly basis and I'm keen that we build on these existing strong relationships as we take forward a whole new range of policy projects.'

To subscribe to BIA Asylum News, email: asylumcommunicationsteam@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Fall in Asylum Applications and Voluntary Returns

Asylum applications are at the lowest level for 15 years, according to statistics published by the Home Office at the end of November. Between January and September 2007 there were 16,520 principal asylum applications lodged, this represents a seven per cent fall in applications compared to the same period in 2006. It is the lowest number of applications since 1992.

Although total numbers of enforced removals and voluntary returns (including foreign national prisoners) increased by 15% between July and September, the number of failed Asylum Seekers who were either removed or Voluntarily returned fell during this period.

Bulletin Board

Refugee Children's Consortium briefing on case resolution on asylum applications made by unaccompanied children and young people seeking asylum

This information briefing is aimed at those working with unaccompanied children or young people who applied for asylum as unaccompanied children.

Its purpose is to explain how the Case Resolution Directorate's work on clearing the backlog of asylum claims by July 2011 applies to these children and young people. It looks at the action that advisers may need to take to ensure that the young people are able to fully engage with the Case Resolution exercise.

Published in December 2007.
The briefing is available on the Refugee Council website.

Adjournment debate on the JCHR report on the treatment of asylum seekers

On 13 December there was an adjournment debate in Westminster Hall on the report by the Joint Committee on Human Rights on the Treatment of Asylum Seekers, published in March 2007. The debate also concerned the governments response to the JCHR report.

The transcript of the debate is available on the Hansard website at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm071213/halltext/71213h0001.htm#07121373000001>

Destitution Monitoring

For a month from mid- November to mid-December the IAP agencies monitored the number of their clients who are destitute. The results should be available for the next edition of IAP news.

Final Hearing for Independent Asylum Commission - 3 December 2007

The Independent Asylum Commission aims to "take a fresh and impartial look at the system and make credible recommendations for reform that will ensure that the UK continues its proud history of sanctuary while restoring public confidence in the system." See www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk for more details. The IAC issued a call for evidence in January 2007, which closed at the end of November 2007.

The last of a series of public hearings examining asylum policy in Britain was held on the 3rd December.

The UK Deputy Representative for UNHCR, Jacqueline Parlevliet, laid out a cogent argument for the retention and relevance of the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention. She stressed the importance of recognising the spirit as well as the principles of the Convention, and expressed concern about the increasingly restrictive interpretation of it by the UK.

Destitution, access to legal aid and restrictions to health care were all raised as concerns.

The Commission will now assess its findings, and initial findings are due to be published in early spring 2008.

Please send articles that you would like to appear in the next edition of IAP News to:

Sarah Fullegar
Administrative Officer
Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team
Refugee Council
240-250 Ferndale Road
London SW9 8BB
Tel: 020 7346 1154 Fax: 020 7737 3306
Email: sarah.fullegar@refugeecouncil.org.uk