

RCD News



Newsletter from the Community Development Team

New Asylum and Immigration Act 2004

The Asylum and Immigration Bill 2003 received Royal Assent on 22nd July. With 50 sections, the new Act is nearly twice as long as when it was first published in November 2003. Nearly all of the measures in the Act will need to be approved by Parliament before they come into force. The Refugee Council is concerned that the Act introduces even more tough legislation on asylum seekers, and will continue to campaign on key issues.

One key concern is around failed applicants. The Act makes non-cooperation with the removals process a criminal offence punishable with a two year prison sentence. It also makes it easier for the Government to withdraw support from families with children, by making co-operation with the removal process a condition of support. Other failed applicants may need to undertake community activities in order to qualify for support.

The Refugee Council is also concerned with plans to establish lists of safe third countries. The first list designates 26 European countries as safe for the purposes of asylum and human rights. The second list allows applicants to be removed to states (currently unspecified) with which they have no connection, but which are safe for the purposes of asylum and human rights. The removal could happen before the asylum claim has been decided. A third list allows applicants to be removed during the claim process, but only to countries that interpret the Refugee Convention correctly. In addition, the Act also makes it a criminal offence to arrive in the UK without documents demonstrating identity and nationality without good reason.

The Act also replaces the existing two-tier appeals structure by a new single tribunal, the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT). Applicants whose cases are rejected by the AIT will be able to go to the High Court, but only on paper rather than in person. It will be extremely difficult to qualify for legal aid to do so.

Regarding support, the Act establishes a local connection between asylum seekers and the area to which they are dispersed, which means successful asylum seekers are likely to only be able to claim housing benefit in their dispersal area. The Act also removes the Government's duty to backdate benefit payments to people once they are recognised as refugees. This has been criticised by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

A detailed briefing will soon be available on the Refugee Council website

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

The Act is available on the HMSO website

www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040019.htm



Photo: Graduation from a SWAN parenting skills course.



News Round Up

UK organisations set out principles for new asylum system

Eleven refugee, human rights and legal organisations have published a new working paper, "Refugees - Renewing the Vision", which sets out fundamental principles for a new asylum system. The report is a partnership between the Refugee Council, Amnesty International UK, Immigration Advisory Service, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Justice, Medical Foundation for the Care of the Victims of Torture, Oxfam GB, Refugee Action, Refugee Legal Centre and the Scottish Refugee Council. The working paper outlines an approach to the asylum system based on ensuring protection to those who need it. This includes a fast-track recognition scheme for asylum-seekers who are clearly refugees and a more independent decision-making process. It also examines the global causes of refugee movement. The paper can be downloaded from

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/publications/pub007.htm#renewing

Home Office publishes draft strategy on refugee integration

The Home Office is now consulting on "Integration Matters" - its draft integration strategy. The strategy covers England only, as a strategy already exists in Scotland and one is intended for Wales. A major element is to develop personal integration plans for all newly-recognised refugees, under the "Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services (Sunrise)". Sunrise will be piloted in one region in 2005. Comments on the draft strategy must be sent by 20th October. The strategy is available from

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/consultation_documents/current_con

The Refugee Council has also published an "Agenda for Integration", which aims to shape emerging policy and practice on refugee integration. A major difference to the Home Office strategy is that the Refugee Council believes integration begins at the point of arrival, not when refugee status is granted. Copies can be downloaded from the Refugee Council web-site. Go to 'publications', then 'policy papers'. Comments should be sent by 30th September to bharti.patel@refugeecouncil.org.uk For more information contact Bharti Patel on 020 7820 3104.

ILR Family Exercise broadened

In October 2003 the Home Office began a one-off exercise to allow families with dependent children who applied for asylum in the UK before 2nd October 2000 to receive permission to stay indefinitely. They are now asking people to contact them if they think they are eligible and have not yet heard. The closing date for applications is now 31st December 2004.

The policy has also been slightly broadened, to include people who already have limited leave to remain and people who came on the Kosovan HEP before October 2000 and did not apply for asylum. It also includes those who have had a child, or were joined by a dependent child, between 2nd October 2000 and 24th October 2003, and also provided any dependent was under 18 on either date.

To apply, people should write to the Home Office at PO Box 1541, Croydon CR9 2YS with details of their name, date of birth, HO reference and explain why they are eligible. For more information go to www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home

Funding News

Big Lottery Fund consultation

The Big Lottery Fund is the result of the merger between the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund. It is currently consulting with organisations and members of the public on the type of activities it should fund and the kind of grants programmes it should develop. It has developed a consultation questionnaire and an on-line forum. One of the most popular topics for debate is the funding of activities for refugees and asylum-seekers. To participate, go to www.biglotteryfund.org.uk Comments must be submitted by the 30th September 2004.

Awards for All newsletter

Awards for All is a Lottery grant scheme for amounts of between £500 and £5,000. The London office is now actively seeking to encourage more applications for projects that benefit asylum seekers and refugees. The latest issue of their newsletter explains how funding refugee and asylum seeker groups is now a priority, referred to as a 'regional focus', and how hundreds of refugee community groups across London have already benefited from Awards for All funding - to date over 1,300 projects have received more than £5.9 million. The newsletter also contains useful information on how to correctly fill in the application form and avoid common mistakes. For a copy go to http://www.awardsforall.org.uk/england/london/London_news.html or contact 020 7370 5019, jason.leavey@jlmedia.co.uk.

Sharing Experiences

RCO News talks to Mulki Omar from the Somali Women's Advisory Network (SWAN)

The Somali Women's Advisory Network grew out of the Somali Social Development Committee, founded in 1997. The organisation focuses on parenting and family issues, and on education. According to Mulki, Somali women suffer from a language barrier and poor knowledge of their rights. Also, many are here as single mothers and have so lost the traditional support of their extended families. In a needs analysis carried out by the organisation, the community identified housing and their children's education as their key concerns. Mulki also sees a lack of cultural awareness amongst social services and schools as a pressing issue.

SWAN runs regular courses in parenting skills, adapted to the particular needs of Somali parents. There is a six week foundation course and then a 13 week course on "Strengthening families, strengthening communities" which is also offered to non-Somali parents and focuses on a Muslim family environment. The organisation also works together with Sure Start to provide support to parents with very young children. The aim is to empower the women and enable them to become effective parents in the UK. SWAN also runs pre-ESOL level English language classes, which is a very basic level for the non-literate, as well as other ESOL and basic skills activities. SWAN works with local primary schools to establish Somali parents' groups, which run activities for the parents, inform them about the UK education system and try to establish positive links between the home and school environment. The organisation is now working to set up a similar group in a secondary school.

SWAN is keen to work with the whole family - not just mothers - and is currently developing a fathers' group!

For more information contact Mulki Omar on 07956016392





CDT update

Gabriella Oakley has now left the Community Development Team. Recruitment for the post of Community Development Worker (Information) will begin in September. In the meantime, please direct any information enquiries to Calvin Armstrong on 020 7840 4429, or cdt@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Jobs at the Refugee Council

If you would like to be sent regular email updates of current vacancies at the Refugee Council, please send your details to cdt@refugeecouncil.org.uk with "RC jobs" in the subject box. All Refugee Council vacancies are also advertised on the web-site www.jobsincharities.co.uk

Get Cycling!

Are you interested in developing a cycling project? This could be anything from learning how to ride a bike, to planning group cycle rides to learning new skills in cycle maintenance. For free advice, information, assistance and support in helping your community get cycling contact Lucy Davis at London Cycling Campaign on 020 7928 7220, lucy@lcc.org.uk

New report on youth and drugs

The Mayor of London, the Greater London Alcohol and Drug Alliance and other organisations have produced a report on young refugees and asylum seekers and drug use. It highlights young people from various communities and examines contributory factors, such as housing, health and the environment. For a summary visit www.london.gov.uk or call 020 7983 4100.

New ICAR reports

The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR) has published two new reports. The first is "The Somali Community in the UK: what we know and how we know it" and the second is "Media Image, Community Impact: assessing the impact of media and political images of refugees and asylum seekers on community relations in London". For copies go to www.icar.org.uk or contact beth.crossland@kcl.ac.uk

Useful web-sites

www.bilingual-supplies.co.uk

Provides resources for teaching bilingual learners. Available in Albanian, Bengali, Farsi, Portuguese and other languages.

www.ncvo-sfp.org.uk

For advice on sustainable funding solutions for your organisation.

Computer Offer

Tools for Schools is an educational charity that provides computers at £95 for learners, including schools, community groups and charities. They operate by persuading large companies to donate PCs to them. Tools for Schools refurbish the computers, wiping data and giving them a thorough health and safety check. All systems come with full warranty, Windows operating system and one-month's subscription to an IT support helpline. Delivery is free for orders of ten computers or more, with discounts available for orders of over 20 or 50. For more information call 020 7689 1990 or visit www.tfs.org.uk

For further details, please contact the Community Development Team on 020 7840 4429 or visit our website at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

