



RCD Women's News

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Refugee women: knowing your legal rights in the UK

By Sanchita Hosali, Policy Officer at Rights of Women¹

It is important that all women know their legal rights and remedies; by knowing what protections and entitlements are available, women can be empowered and make informed choices. This is especially important for refugee women and women seeking asylum who need information about the asylum laws in the UK. It is also essential that refugee women know about the rights and protections they are entitled to under UK law because it may be very different from the law in the country they have left. Like all women, refugee women need legal information about common issues such as medical treatment, the legal system or their children's rights.

It can be difficult for refugee women or women seeking asylum to access information about asylum laws and legal information about everyday issues, because of the barriers they encounter. It is often the case that the people they seek assistance from will focus only on issues relating to asylum law, or that they do not understand the legal rights that refugee women and/or women seeking asylum have under UK law.

At Rights of Women, a national (England and Wales) voluntary feminist organisation, we are dedicated to ensuring that all women are informed, educated and empowered with regard to their legal rights and remedies. We do this by providing free legal advice on our advice lines¹ and by producing publications, such as practical legal handbooks and guides. Our services are open to all women, including refugee women and women seeking asylum. *W's* case is an example of how women can use Rights of Women's services to learn about their legal rights and the remedies.

W came to the UK because her family tried to force her to undergo female genital mutilation. *W* telephoned the Rights of Women free legal advice line for information about her legal rights in the UK. *W* also ordered Rights of Women's book: *From A to Z: A woman's guide to the law*. This extensive and accessible book covers a wide range of legal topics and contains several sections on refugee and asylum law in UK, setting out the law and the protections that are available. *From A to Z* provided *W* with further information about her claim, such as protections she has under European human rights law and the rights that are associated with refugee status. As the book covers many different areas, *W* was also able to use it to learn about housing, access to education and, as she was granted refugee status, her right to work and the rights she has against discrimination in the workplace.

There are many women who need access to legal information, but in reality, they often find it difficult to access that information, this is particularly true for refugee or seeking asylum women. This is why Rights of Women has produced *From A to Z: A woman's guide to the law*. The book covers asylum and immigration law; criminal law; discrimination and employment law; the English legal system; family law; housing; human rights law; and welfare and consumer rights.

For more information, including how to buy a copy visit, www.rightsofwomen.org.uk or contact Rights of Women on **020 7251 6575/6** or info@row.org.uk.

¹ See further at, www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

¹ General legal advice: 020 7251 6577 Tuesday – Thursday 2-4pm and 7-9pm and Friday 12-2pm.

Funding

City Parochial Foundation and Trust for London are launching their new project: *Tackling poverty in London* which aims to: improve employment opportunities for disadvantaged people; promote the inclusion of recent arrivals to the UK; and promote social justice.

Closing dates for proposals: **7 February 2006**. For further information contact **Bharat Mehta** or **Mubin Haq** on **020 7606 6145** or visit, www.cityparochial.org.uk/cpf/grants.html

Award for campaigners

The Sheila McKechnie Foundation was formed to encourage and support future campaigners. They are now inviting applications to their awards scheme. The awards are for people who can show they have campaigning potential but who would benefit from additional support and guidance. Application deadline: **18 December 2006**

For further information call **020 7770 7892** or email awards@sheilamckechne.org.uk

Why be a member of the Refugee Council?

Help shape debate. The Refugee Council policy and campaigning team work in consultation with members to ensure that refugee issues are at the forefront of the political agenda and handled in a measured and sensible manner. Members also benefit from:

- 25% discount on Refugee Council publications
- 10 reduced priced members' places at Refugee Council Conferences
- The potential to lead the Refugee Council as a member of the Board of Trustees
- Voting rights at the Refugee Council's Annual General Meeting.

Visit, www.refugeecouncil.org.uk for more information or call, **020 7346 6709**

Training

The Islington Domestic Violence Project Team is offering free training courses to voluntary and statutory sector services in Islington. The courses aim to support front-line workers who work with clients affected by domestic violence.

- Housing and legal options for clients experiencing domestic violence: Two day training on **13 and 14 February** or on **14 and 15 March 2007**.

For further information contact Kim on **020 7527 3431** or email kim.lawrence@islington.gov.uk.

New publications

Domestic violence

As part of its gender sensitive casework, the Refugee Council has published a new information leaflet on what is considered to be domestic violence and what women can do to get help if they are faced with domestic violence.

The leaflet is available in 20 languages on the Refugee Council's multilingual website. The top right corner states the language of the leaflet.

You can access the Refugee Council's multilingual website at, <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Health needs

A new booklet: *Somali women in Leeds: their health and well being* has been produced following research conducted by Bradford Resource Centre and Community Statistics Project on Somali women's complex health needs, both psychological and physical. The booklet is helpful for anyone working with black and minority ethnic women, especially around health issues.

The full research report can be downloaded from www.brc-net.org.uk. A Somali version of the research summary is available upon request. For further information, contact **East Leeds Health for All** on **0113 248 4880**.

To submit any articles about women's asylum issues, email penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk