



RCD Women's News

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Women's National Commission Migration and Asylum Sub Group

By Shelly Dowrich at the Women's National Commission.

The Women's National Commission (WNC) is the UK umbrella body that represents the views of women and women's organisations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It was established in 1969 as the 'official independent advisory body giving the views of women to Government.' It is the only UK women's organisation that is fully funded by Government, but it is independent in its views. The WNC brings the voice of women to Government through: a website; regular newsletters; consultation exercises; meetings with Government Ministers and officials; and quarterly meetings of the Board of Commissioners and working groups, for example, Violence Against Women. In recent years, the voices of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women have been put on the agenda.

Women that are forced to flee their country of origin, often do so for reasons that differ from male refugees. They are often victims of sexual violence and flee from oppression and persecution from society rather than the state. The state is often unable or unwilling to protect these women. About 50 per cent of women claiming asylum in the UK have been raped and many are traumatised due to their experiences. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of awareness among officials and caseworkers about women asylum seekers' special circumstances.

On 6 September 2005, the WNC organised a roundtable meeting on migration and asylum. The meeting gathered key experts from various backgrounds to share their knowledge and identify possible issues for the WNC to take forward. The key aims of this meeting were to:

- identify the key issues and gaps in UK Government policy for women migrants and asylum seekers;
- and suggest practical recommendations on how the WNC could support and add value to the activities of the migrant and asylum sector.

Many issues were identified from the roundtable meeting, for example: the health status of refugee women and the restrictions on health care for undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers; insufficient country of origin information for officials concerning women's issues such as Female Genital Mutilation and concerns about women who are in detention or destitute at the end of the asylum process.

The WNC established the **Migration and Asylum Sub Group** at the end of 2005 to take forward specific issues concerning migration and asylum as identified at the September roundtable event. Members come from a wide background and the group is currently prioritising: Citizenship & Integration; Immigration; the Asylum and Nationality Act and the points-based system for managed migration for the focus of the group.

The Group meet quarterly and since its inception have undertaken a number of activities, for example: writing to the Secretary of State for Health regarding inadequate maternity care for failed asylum seekers and undocumented migrant women; and meeting with Lin Homer (Chief Executive of Borders and Immigration Agency) in December 2006 to discuss trafficking, Home Office Gender Guidance and no recourse to public funds for asylum seeking women.

If you would like to become a partner of the WNC or would like further information about the work of the WNC go to: www.thewnc.org.uk or e-mail: wnc@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

Funding

Grants for Women Students

The Elizabeth Nuffield Educational Fund (ENEF) gives grants to women studying to improve their employment prospects. Grants are currently given to:

- women in higher education (by **5pm Monday 10 September**)
- women in further education. 15 Colleges of Further Education across the country will offer ENEF grants to support students meeting the Fund's criteria.
- refugee women through RETAS
- other projects of interest to the Fund that address the financial needs of adult women learners.

Contact, **Suzanne Berry** or **Bernadine Chelvanayagam** on: **020 7631 0566** or go to: **www.nuffieldfoundation.org/go/grants/enef/page_81.html**

Asylum Aid launch: Asylum Rights Watch

Asylum Aid launched ***Asylum Rights Watch*** - a new online initiative that enables people to share their experiences of the UK's asylum system.

Asylum Aid welcomes entries from asylum seekers as well as from anyone involved with the asylum system.

Visitors to the website are invited to complete a short, confidential online form to describe their experiences of the UK's treatment of asylum seekers. Visitors can remain anonymous if they wish, and the submissions are not visible to other website visitors.

To access the page, click on the link from the homepage at: **www.asylumaid.org.uk**.

The submitted information will contribute to Asylum Aid's ongoing research, policy and campaigning work.

The first report on the effects of recent asylum policies will be published in **October 2007**.

Conference (London)

Rights of Women: The Law and Violence - Where's the Justice?

This one day national conference for women on **26 September 2007** will examine recent and forthcoming laws on domestic violence, sexual violence and abuses predominately experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic and/or Refugee Women (BMER). The focus on BMER women is not about singling out certain communities, but about recognising that BMER women experiencing violence are a specific group that have been marginalised and often denied access to justice.

Attending this timely conference will provide a unique opportunity to hear highly respected speakers and experts. This conference will provide a comprehensive grounding in the law and legal rights of BMER women and women seeking asylum who are experiencing violence. It will also provide an opportunity for women with existing expertise to receive updates on key topics and to contribute to important discussions about accessing changes and campaigning for reforms.

Time: 9.30- 4.45pm

Venue: Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, WC1H 9BD

Conference fees:

Women's organisations, Charities, CABx, Law Centres: £100 and all others: £200

For more information contact **Rights of Women** on: **020 7251 6575/6** or email: **conference@row.org.uk**

Leaflet for women asylum Seekers

The Refugee Women's Resource Project has revised its leaflet that explains the Home Office policy for deciding women's asylum claims. The leaflet now includes information on the New Asylum Model.

To download a leaflet go to:

www.asylumaid.org.uk or email: **deboras@asylumaid.org.uk**

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