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# Welcome to Advocacy Network newsletter

October 2017

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This is the October newsletter of the Refugee Council's Advocacy Network. The aim of the Advocacy Network is to provide a direct link between the Refugee Council's Advocacy Team and other individuals and organisations working with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. The network is based on a principle of information sharing and collective working to achieve positive policy change for refugees and asylum seekers.



## **Latest asylum and refugee statistics**

We are facing one of the biggest global displacement challenges in the living memory. **Over 65 million people around the globe have had to flee their homes – that's like the entire British population having to leave. There are currently 21 million refugees,** 3 million asylum seekers and over 40 million internally displaced persons. According to the UNHCR only 17% of people who are displaced are being hosted in Europe. Despite the need for protection being greater than ever, according to Government [migration statistics](#) covering the period up to June

2017 **asylum applications in the UK actually decreased by 25% to 27,316 in the year ending June 2017.** [Read our Top 20 facts](#) and [latest statistics Briefings](#) for more information.

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### **Private Member's–Bill on Refugee Family Reunion**

In February 2017, the Refugee Council in partnership with Amnesty International UK, the British Red Cross and Oxfam released the report [Together Again: reuniting refugee families in safety](#). The report laid out twelve recommendations for the UK Government to make it easier for refugee families to be reunited with their family members. The Refugee Council and partners urged supporters to encourage MPs to enter the Private Members' Bill ballot, and to introduce a Bill on refugee family reunion. We are delighted that, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017 Angus MacNeil, an SNP MP for the Western Isles introduced a Private Member's Bill about [Family Reunion in Parliament](#). The second reading is scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018. There is also another Private Member's Bill on Refugee Family Reunion going through the House of Lords at the moment. It was introduced by Baroness Hamwee on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and is currently

awaiting its second reading. **We will keep you up to date on ways you can support this important campaign to allow refugees to be reunited with their families in the UK.**

Please contact us on [parliamentary@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:parliamentary@refugeecouncil.org.uk) if you would like to discuss or support our work around the Family Reunion Bill.

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**“The government grants refugee status without granting  
refuge”**

The Guardian commissioned the Refugee Council to conduct a [survey](#) of newly recognised refugees in the UK. Through our integration services we asked questions about documentation, accommodation, employment and welfare benefits to 54 refugees granted refugee status since 2016. You can also read the Guardian article based on our research: [“Destitution is routine”](#):

[refugees face homelessness even after gaining asylum](#)'.

As has been highlighted in previous research on this subject, the survey found high levels of homelessness. More than half (31 people) had slept rough or in hostels or night shelters, and none of the people who were living in asylum support accommodation had managed to find secure accommodation by the time they were evicted at the end of the move on period. People were forced to rely on charities, food banks, friends and family once their asylum support was terminated, in order to meet their basic needs. We will continue to push for policy change on these issues, and will be working closely with the panel that ran the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees' *Refugees welcome?* Inquiry to do so.

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## **Follow up on forms for recognising resettled Syrians as refugees**

In our June newsletter we shared some good news with you: [thanks to calls from the Refugee Council](#) and other partner organisations, the Government has finally agreed to recognise resettled Syrians as refugees. As a consequence anyone who arrived to the UK under the two resettlement schemes: Syrian Vulnerable Person's Scheme and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme prior to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017 can ask for their status to be converted (from humanitarian protection to refugee protection). All they need to do is to fill in the [form](#) (Request to Change Humanitarian Protection Status to Refugee Status) and send it back to the Home Office.

**CALL FOR EVIDENCE:**

We would like to hear what your experience of helping people to complete Request to Change Humanitarian Protection status to Refugee Status application form is like. Please get in touch with us by e-mailing Kama Petruczenko on [kama.petruczenko@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:kama.petruczenko@refugeecouncil.org.uk)

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### **Changes to ASPEN card for people on section 4 support**

In May 2017 the new asylum support card: ASPEN (Asylum Support Enablement) was rolled out across the country. Unfortunately ASPEN card did not bring any improvement to people on section 4 support: they were still restricted to shopping in a small group of selected stores. The Refugee Council raised this as a problem with the Home Office. In August 2017 the Home Office confirmed that people on section 4 support are able to use their ASPEN cards at a wide range of retail outlets as long as these accept debit cards. We welcome this improvement, and it is a step in a right direction.

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## **Safeguarding**

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016 the Department for Education and Home Office (the two departments responsible for policies affecting unaccompanied children) issued a written statement to Parliament, announcing a forthcoming safeguarding strategy which is available [here](#). The strategy has not yet been published due to the calling of the General Election in June but officials have indicated it should be out soon. The statement indicated that the strategy would outline plans in a number of areas including specific mention of updating the statutory guidance for social workers, and of the need to ensure that children are kept safe when being brought from Europe to join family (under the Dublin regulation). The Refugee Council is particularly interested to see guidance on this issue as we have been calling for guidance on Dublin III since it came into force in 2014; we are also acutely aware of the issues faced by some of the families brought together in the UK and some of the difficulties accessing statutory services. We'll let you all know when the strategy is published and what we think of it.

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## **Staff updates**

My name is Kama and I have recently started as the Advocacy Network Co-ordinator at the Refugee Council. As this is the first newsletter update I am sharing with you, I would be grateful for any feedback and suggestions you may have. I would also like to encourage you to be in touch with me ([kama.petruczenko@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:kama.petruczenko@refugeecouncil.org.uk)) if you like to flag up any policy issues around rights and experiences of people seeking asylum and refugees in the UK. Over the next few months I will be planning to visit organisations and forums, organising events and meetings. I will let you know how you can be involved in these activities.

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### Coming up next:

Advocacy Network is a platform that we at the Refugee Council would like to share with you: individuals and organisations working with refugees and people seeking asylum. We would like to introduce a section in every issue of our newsletter which is dedicated to you, we want to hear what you are up to, what are your plans and challenges you experience. Please be in touch with Kama on [kama.petruczenko@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:kama.petruczenko@refugeecouncil.org.uk) if you like to contribute to the next edition of this newsletter.



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