

Briefing Paper: Sanctuary in Parliament III: Standing up for the right to asylum

29th November 2016

[City of Sanctuary](#) and members of the [Sanctuary Alliance](#) are hosting an event in Parliament on the 29th November 2016 to share our vision of practical action and key policy changes that will ensure a culture of welcome for all refugees across the UK. The event will be held in Committee Room 14 between 12.00 – 3.30.

City of Sanctuary has over 70 groups active across the UK, from Stirling to Swansea, Blackburn to Bristol. Alongside our partners, we work together as a grassroots movement to welcome and support people seeking refugee protection in our towns and cities. For further information about this briefing note, contact Lorna Gledhill on vanth@regionalasylumactivism.org or 07557 982 498



Finding Safety: Safe and Legal Routes to the UK

More people than ever have been forcibly displaced from their homes. At the end of 2015, there were over [21.3 million refugees worldwide](#), half of whom were under the age of 18. Devastating civil wars and dictatorial regimes continue to force people from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan to seek safety from persecution. Yet despite the growing number of refugees globally, the number of people finding safety in Britain remains low. Lebanon – a country the size of Cornwall and Devon – hosted more than 1.1 million refugees from Syria and over 450,000 Palestinian refugees in 2015. The UK only received 34,000 applications for asylum and [resettled 1,864 individuals in the same year](#).

We welcome the UK's commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by May 2020 under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). However, Syrians are not the only nationality in need of refugee protection. The UNHCR estimates that despite increased offers of support from some countries, the [projected number of people in need of urgent resettlement in 2017 will surpass 1.19 million](#), a 72% increase on 2014.

With the exception of a small number of resettlement schemes, there are limited safe or legal routes for refugees to find protection in Europe. Consequently, refugees continue to drown in their thousands in desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety, while others struggle in camps or increasingly precarious living situations in Turkey, Greece and Calais. To date, [4,655 people have died crossing the Mediterranean in 2016](#); the deadliest year on record. Nobody makes these journeys unless they have to.

What's the solution?

In the face of the biggest refugee crisis since World War Two, the UK must play a greater part in providing sanctuary for people fleeing persecution. This includes expanding existing safe and legal routes to safety in the UK by widening refugee family reunion eligibility, as well as making better use of existing transfer responsibilities under Dublin III and the Dubs amendment:

Family Reunion: Whilst refugees in the UK have a legal right under UK and international law to bring their families over to the UK to join them, the process is costly, complicated, and not open to everyone. Since 2013, legal aid funding has not been available for family reunion in England and Wales and most new refugees cannot afford legal help. Importantly, adult refugees can only be reunited with their partner and children, but only if their children are under 18. Child refugees cannot sponsor their parents or family members to join them in the UK at all. This means that families are left torn apart by conflict, with some family members left with no other option but to take increasingly perilous routes to reunite with their family.

Refugee family reunion is a crucial mechanism to enable refugee families to find safety, security and stability in Britain. We believe that the eligibility for refugee family reunion should be significantly expanded to enable refugee children in the UK to be reunited with their parents.

Provide Sanctuary to Unaccompanied Refugee Children: In the first 7 months of 2016, [13,700 children crossed the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety in Europe](#). Many of these unaccompanied children are at risk in Europe right now.

To date, around 100 unaccompanied refugee children have been given sanctuary in the UK under the Dubs amendment, and over 320 children have been brought to the UK from Calais under Dublin III regulations. However, [recent news reports](#) estimate that almost 1 in 3 Calais child refugees are missing since the demolition of the Jungle.

Europe has a shared responsibility to ensure these refugee children are able to find safe routes to sanctuary. The UK has a key role to play to enable some of these children to travel safely to the UK, either because they have close family here who can look after them (Dublin III), or because of the Dubs Amendment to the Immigration Bill which states that some unaccompanied children in Europe who are extremely vulnerable will be offered asylum in the UK. We must ensure that our obligations towards these unaccompanied minors are upheld.

What can you do to support us?

- Attend the Refugee Family Reunion debate in Westminster Hall – 4.30pm on the 29th November 2016 and support the expansion of refugee family reunion rules.
- Call on the Government to proactively use the Dubs Amendment and Dublin III to provide safety for more vulnerable adults and children stranded in Europe.

Securing Sanctuary: A Fair and Just Asylum Process

The large majority of refugees in the UK will have been granted protection following a claim for asylum. The experience of people claiming asylum in the UK is starkly different to those who are resettled here. When people arrive in the UK seeking protection from persecution, they are often faced with another complex and traumatic journey before they finally secure sanctuary.

People seeking refugee protection in the UK are often forced into **destitution**, homelessness and poverty. Asylum seekers who have no other means of support receive only £36.95 per week, just over £5 per day, to pay for food, clothing, toiletries, transport and other essential living needs. They are also not allowed to work. In August 2015, support rates for children were cut drastically by 30%. [Asylum support under Section 95 amounts to barely 50% of Income Support](#).

[Single adult asylum seekers who are appeal rights exhausted can be left destitute with no access to statutory support](#). Often not able to access Section 4 but unable to leave the UK, many are left destitute and in limbo. The British Red Cross have supported more than 9,000 asylum seekers and their dependents in this situation in 2015. NACCOM projects – providing accommodation support to refused asylum seekers and refugees who have been made destitute – accommodated 789 people in 2016 alone.

The proposed changes to asylum support for refused asylum seekers – [outlined in the Immigration Act 2016](#) – are likely to result in increased levels of asylum-related destitution, especially among vulnerable children. Just because someone has been refused asylum, it does not mean that they do not need protection. Unreliable decision-making by the Home Office and asylum seekers' limited access to good legal advice can mean that many can reach the end of the process without their protection needs being recognised. Roughly 50% of all people who apply for asylum do eventually get some form of leave to remain in the UK.

[Many new refugees also fall into destitution as they are only given 28 days to transition from Home Office support onto mainstream benefits](#). This has been identified as an acute problem in recent reports from the Refugee Council, British Red Cross, the Select Committee for the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Detention is a constant fear for people seeking refugee protection. The UK routinely detains people indefinitely and detains more migrants than any other European country except Greece. Despite receiving over four times as many asylum applications, Germany detained only three people for every 20 that the UK detained. The UK is alone in detaining them indefinitely, without time limit, without trial, and sometimes for years on end. At the end of June 2016, [2,878 people were in detention](#). Numerous reports – both [Parliamentary](#) and from the [charitable sector](#) – have heavily criticised the use of immigration detention for administrative purposes and have called for a time limit on immigration detention.

What's the solution?

People seeking refugee protection should not have to endure poverty, homelessness and the threat of detention as they state their case for protection from persecution.

Asylum Support Rates & Permission to Work: We believe that people seeking asylum should be able to meet their essential living needs whilst waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. Asylum support rates should be set at 70% of Income Support and those waiting for over 6 months for a decision on their asylum application should be granted permission to work. Importantly, support should be provided until an individual is granted status in the UK, or they are returned to their country of origin.

Alternatives to Detention: Detaining people indefinitely and without charge is an affront to our judicial system. Additionally, detention doesn't work; there has been a [continuing decline since 2011 in the proportion of detainees being removed from the UK following their detention](#). We call on the government to end the inhumane practice of administrative detention by securing a 28 day time-limit on detention and investigating alternatives to detention.

What can you do to support us?

- Call on the Home Secretary Amber Rudd to increase asylum support rates to 70% of Income Support when setting the rate for 2017/18
- Read the [Alternatives to Detention report here!](#)
- Ensure that the regulations accompanying Section 95a of the Immigration Act protect and safeguard vulnerable refused asylum seeking adults and children.

Building a Culture of Welcome: Integration and Settlement

For many new refugees, receiving their leave to remain is the first step towards rebuilding their lives in the UK free from persecution. However, the move-on period and long-term integration can be another long and difficult journey. Many of the problems faced by new refugees are often rooted in their experience of claiming asylum in the UK.

Language is key to successful integration, however people seeking asylum cannot access mainstream English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision until they have been in the country for 6 months. Many are excluded from provision for longer due to long waits for enrolment dates (many courses only enrol students in September) or because of long waiting lists for courses. Even for new refugees, demand for courses often far outstrips provision.

Many refugees also struggle to access employment. Excluded from the labour market for the duration of their asylum claim, refugees can face difficulties accessing employment relevant to their skills, both due to problems having qualifications recognised in the UK and having a lack of UK-based work experience.

Access to university is denied to many students who have sought refugee protection in the UK, including Syrian refugees being resettled to the UK through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS), those who have been given limited leave to remain or discretionary leave and those still seeking asylum. The barriers are financial as these students are not allowed to apply for a student loan; some are even charged higher "international student" fees.

What's the solution?

Integration is a two-way process. We must ensure that we create a welcoming environment for new refugees to rebuild their lives here and thrive as part of our communities. Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into the UK is the first step towards successful integration from day one:

Expand English Language Provision: We welcome the recent allocation of a further £10m funding from the Home Office for ESOL for resettled Syrian refugees. However, this will only benefit a small number of refugees, and leave many behind. We support Refugee Action's calls for increased funds for ESOL provision, the publication of an ESOL strategy for England, better provision for women and the provision of free English language teaching for asylum seekers. See Refugee Action's ['Let Refugees Learn'](#) campaign for further information.

Equal Access to Higher Education!: People seeking refugee protection should be able to study as home students. They should also be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable people, and should be given the same access to additional support such as bursaries. Students and universities themselves are taking the lead in this work; over 40 universities have now provided scholarships and fee waivers for these refugee students. See [Student Action for Refugees' 'Equal Access' campaign](#) for further information.

Integration Strategies: Fundamentally, integration should begin from the day of arrival, rather than from the date someone receives leave to remain in the UK. There is no integration strategy for new refugees, either at a national, regional or local level. The Government should commission a national refugee integration strategy and look to the [New Scots strategy](#) and [previous integration strategies](#) as models of good practice.

What can you do to support us?

- Support the [amendment to the Higher Education and Research Bill](#) that offers the opportunity to remove the barriers to higher education for resettled Syrian refugees, and those who have been given limited leave to remain or discretionary leave. You can help these young people begin the journey of rebuilding their lives by continuing to push that amendment as the Bill progresses through the House of Lords. For further details please contact Alicia Coupland at Student Action for Refugees equalaccess@star-network.org.uk
- Call on the government to establish a fund to specifically support **all** refugees learning English, not just resettled Syrian refugees.
- Support the development of a national refugee integration strategy which supports the integration and welcome of all refugees, regardless of their routes to the UK.

Find Out More

[Red Cross](#) – [Report on Destitution in South Yorkshire](#) (2015)

[Refugee Action](#) – [Let Refugees Learn](#) (2016)

[Amnesty International](#) – [Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Campaign](#)

[Refugee Council](#) – [England's Forgotten Refugees](#) (2016)

[Safe Passage](#) – [Concise Overview of Dublin III Rules](#)

[Detention Action](#) – [Without Detention](#) (2016)

[Student Action for Refugees](#)

[City of Sanctuary](#)

[NACCOM Network](#)

[Freedom from Torture](#)

[Detention Forum](#)

[Citizens UK](#)