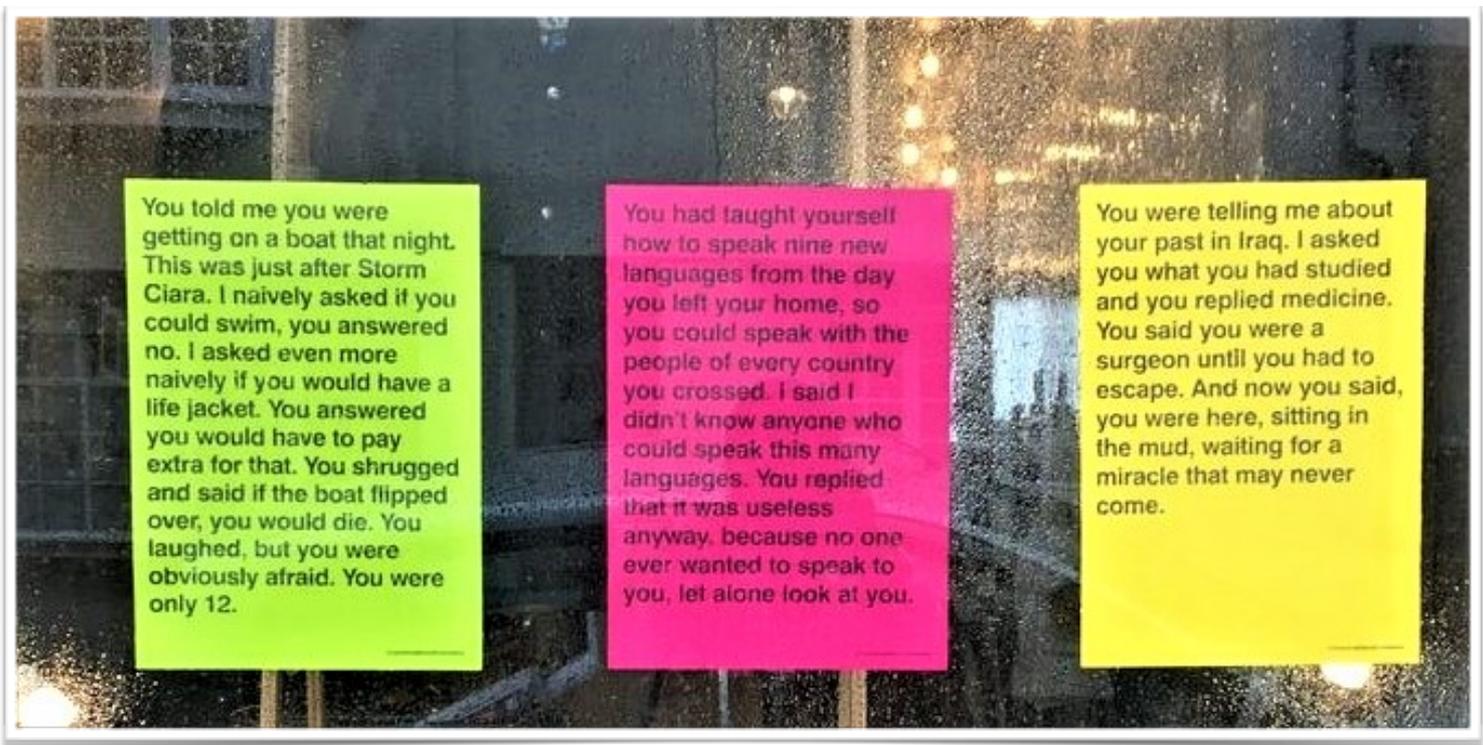


Welcome to our Summer Newsletter, JUNE 2021

A Refugee Week Update

Hot off the Press! Just launched! Fundraiser to help refugees in Calais and Greece: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/hastings-supports-refugees>

The first 30 people to donate £20 or more will get a free set of the amazing [Conversations from Calais](#) postcards that we showed as huge posters all over town last year.



Since our last [Newsletter in October](#), our Hastings Community of Sanctuary team has continued on through the repeated lockdowns, with some intensive campaigning as things become increasingly more difficult for people seeking sanctuary - both in terms of hardship

through the pandemic, and of the new Home Office plans to change asylum law, currently starting their journey through Parliament. See our recent articles, framed by stories of desperation, tragedy and also the humanity of those seeking asylum, and those who do welcome to our shores anyone who needs refuge: <https://hastingsonlinetimes.co.uk/hot-topics/campaigns/refugee-support-groups-unite-to-oppose-patels-hard-line-against-asylum-seekers> and <https://www.hastingsinfofocus.co.uk/2021/06/14/refugee-week/>.

Here is a brief summary of the Government's proposed, and fundamental, changes to current law:

First, the right to asylum for anyone entering the country by an unapproved route will be removed. This is in direct contravention of international law which stipulates that irrespective of mode of entry, [people may legally claim asylum](#) and have their case considered. Under the new rules, not one of the men, women and children arriving along the south coast would be deemed admissible, no matter how strong their asylum claim might be.

Second, they are now to be held in mass 'reception centres', while the Home Office finds another country that will accept them. This could take many months, or more, although the rhetoric is that they will be deported immediately.

Third, even where leave to stay is granted to anyone whom it proves impossible to remove, they will have to reapply for protection every 30 months. They will never be able to settle, never properly make a new life, and the threat of removal will hang over them forever. Trafficked women, and people forced into slavery will be among them, the most vulnerable of all.

Together with Refugees

In the swelling opposition to these plans, six major high profile organisations including The Red Cross, Freedom from Torture, Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Asylum Matters and Scottish Refugee Council have now formed a coalition, the Asylum Reform Initiative (ARI), and recent launched their campaign [Together with Refugees](#).

They seek an alternative "fair and humane approach to the UK's refugee system, including with new safe routes, so that people don't have to risk their life taking dangerous journeys" – noting that most people who claim asylum here simply do not have access to "regular" routes: their *only* option is to enter in small boats or the back of a lorry. There will be a [profoundly adverse effect](#) of the proposed legislation upon women and children, two thirds of whom would be turned away under the proposed new rules.

We're calling
for a kinder, fairer
approach to
supporting refugees



#WhoWeAre

Hastings Community of Sanctuary has joined this campaign, along with more than 200 groups, including the many NGOs working in this field, and grassroots groups like ours. We were honoured to be invited to speak at three of their national events, including a mobilisation workshop during Refugee Week, with our colleague Safwa Chowdhury presenting her inspirations behind her [Instagram campaign](#) about immigration detention. Please do look - and join Safwa if you would like to contribute to her campaign!

Napier Barracks

Since last autumn, we have become deeply involved in the campaign to close Napier Barracks, where 400 people were held from September last year, through the cold winter, in extremely harsh conditions. In January nearly two hundred residents [contracted Covid](#), and while they were ill, there were power outages affecting the heating. We know that there that there was virtually no medical care offered - not even paracetamol. Recently, a high court judgement confirmed what medical, legal and support groups, and eventually the independent Inspector for Borders and Immigration, had been reporting – that the use of these barracks was inhumane, unsafe, and in fact unlawful. However, although the original

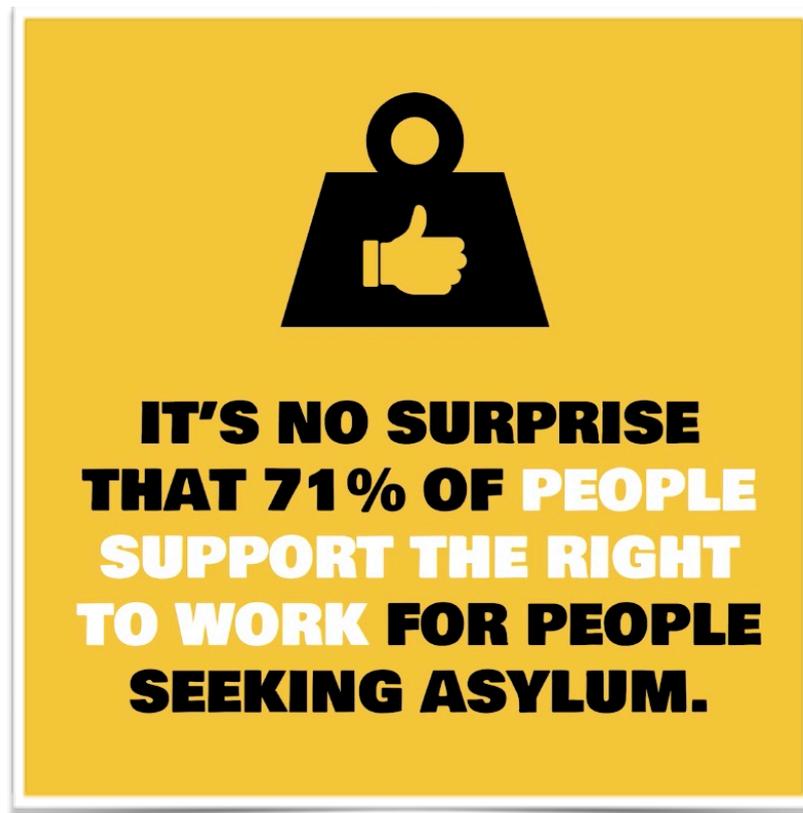
cohort has now been relocated, more people have been moved to the barracks; currently there are approximately 270 residents, still crowded together and still at risk of Covid. See our statement on this development [here](#).

Our friend Erfan was held in the barracks and was one of those who had Covid there. Here is his [response to this](#).

On February 15th we held a Zoom event '[Challenging the Barracks](#)' to provide information about the conditions and circumstances of Napier Barracks. Over 60 people participated. We also made a petition calling for all barracks to be closed, and the people given humane accommodation and legal representation. You can sign it [here](#).

Lift the Ban

Our [Lift the Ban](#) campaign continues: there is increasing cross-party support for this, especially at a time when so many people seeking asylum could have significantly assisted in medical and care roles, as well as many other relevant jobs which the UK desperately needs help to fill. Our Campaign Lead for LtB, Jay Kramer, attended the recent national coalition meeting; as in previous meetings, our group was asked to make particular contribution given our success in gaining council support for right to work, both at borough and county council level, and for increasing awareness in our town of this aspect of asylum. Overwhelmingly we find that people support this change to the rules, regardless of political affiliation. You can watch the brilliant new animation from LtB [here](#).



Hastings Supports Refugees

[HSR](#) continues its Facebook activity to keep information visible, and to support refugees in mainland Europe. The new [fundraiser](#) will collect desperately needed funds for people in refugee camps in Calais and in Greece.

On 1st November HSR and HCoS held a [vigil on the Stade](#), to mourn the tragic family who drowned while trying to make the Channel crossing. Nearly 100 people came on a cold wet night: we knew hundreds more were with us in spirit.

On 12th December, HSR and HCoS worked with local artist Rosa Torr in [The Lighthouse Project](#), to create a living "human Lighthouse to send a light out for those who might need it that are making the treacherous journey across the channel to seek lawful asylum." Around 60 people gathered that black night on Rock-A-Nore beach, silently shining torches across the sea as a symbolic gesture to stand together with refugees, as proclaimed in the [Together with Refugees](#) campaign.

Festival by the Lake

Our [main Refugee Week event](#) has had to be postponed again because of Covid restrictions: however, we now have a new date, **Saturday 12th September**, at the Hastings Museum - for this year's accordingly designated 'Festival at the Museum'. Please save the date for a day to celebrate - in music, art, food, workshops, and dance - our community of sanctuary and everyone who enriches it.

Links

The [Links project](#) has recently re-started, after forced closure during a year and more of Covid-lockdowns. During this time, every effort was made to try to keep supporting the people who come for community support of so many kinds; as with people seeking asylum all over the country, their vulnerability was particularly acute throughout, and it is very good news that personal contact in the project is once again available. The Project is now relocated to Central hall in Hastings, as before running every Wednesday.

Refugee Buddy Project

The [Refugee Buddy Project](#) is now a fully-fledged charity and recently was awarded significant funding from the National Lottery which will enable their work to continue for the next few years. RBP has recently left Hastings Community of Sanctuary to pursue their independent work as a strong, established charity, but they have signed our Pledge of

Support and we will keep in close touch. We wish them well in their crucial work in and beyond Hastings.

Ongoing

We have continued to make representation to our MP Sally-Ann Hart, with whom members of our Campaigns team have met on four occasions since September 2020. We have also continued to develop our association with the borough council, HBC, meeting with the Leader and several councillors and council officials earlier this year. We learned in that meeting that Hastings is widely seen as a town with a very strong 'voluntary backbone', which the council is not only grateful for but reliant upon to help them support the approximately 200 people living here: about one hundred of whom arrived here in the resettlement programme, and another approximately 100 people at any one time staying with us while their asylum claims are processed - often an extremely lengthy process.

We conclude this Newsletter with this 'letter to the people of the UK', written by Erfan as he sat in the barracks wondering how he could reach out to people of good will across our country, and share his thoughts. You can access a moving conversation between Erfan and our campaign team member Safwa Chowdhury here for the rest of Refugee Week (until Sunday 20th June), and read his eloquent words here. His rhetorical culminating question to us all is poignant and acute: *I hear politicians repeatedly saying that the United Kingdom has a proud history of protecting the vulnerable people, but the question is; will the United Kingdom have a proud future of protecting those who are in need? Will the students and children of this country be proud or ashamed by what has been happening now?*



We regularly update the [website](#) with news and events so please visit!

You can also follow us on [Twitter](#), and like the [Hastings Supports Refugees Facebook Page](#) for regular updates.

National City of Sanctuary information can be found on their [website](#).

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