



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

APRIL NEWSLETTER FOR LD4SOS

This newsletter covers the time from early March to mid-April, and much has changed and much has happened that affects those seeking sanctuary with us here in the UK. Our MPs and the campaigning sector have been extremely busy, and we need to continue the work being done by signing the petitions, and sharing work done by Lib Dems on Facebook and Twitter, if you use them. We have highlighted in yellow all the items that need YOUR action.

As you aren't spending time on campaigning in the usual way, please turn to adding your voice to these petitions, we have signed all that we could as Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary. A good way of staying home and staying safe!

DETENTION CENTRES – THEY NEED TO BE EMPTIED NOW

There has been a call from Christine Jardine to the Home Office in the current Covid-19 crisis to release urgently those in immigration detention centres. The cross party letter she has sent to the Home Office calls for the release of over 400 detainees who are at risk of catching and spreading the virus. There are huge personal and public health risks, and there is no basis for keeping anyone in detention when there is no prospect of them being returned to countries of origin in the near future. The call has been written about in the [Independent](#).

Sign [this petition](#) from Detention Action to **take immediate steps to review and release all those held in UK immigration detention centres, to prevent serious harm and loss of life.**

HEALTH AND NHS ISSUES

NHS HEROES MUST HAVE THE RIGHT TO STAY. Thousands of doctors, nurses and paramedics are risking their lives, and working day-in, day-out to save lives and protect us all during the Coronavirus crisis - and many don't have the right to stay. "Britain should do right by our NHS heroes and grant them all indefinite right to stay," argues Christine Jardine. You can sign the petition to Give non-British citizens who are NHS workers automatic citizenship both [here](#) and [here](#).

RIGHT TO WORK IN THE NHS. Campaign to allow doctors trained overseas to work in the NHS

A campaign has been launched by Imix, RefuAid and Help Refugees, who are calling on the General Medical Council to issue temporary work visas for doctors who were in the process of medical registration before COVID-19 hit - many of whom are refugees. They have done a mass "sign on" letter from existing NHS doctors to the General Medical Council. Please share it with any doctors in your networks and ask them to share it with their networks. The letter can be found [here](#). Also there is a [petition](#) to sign and share. If on social media use the hashtag #QualifiedtoHelp. Ed Davey called on government to expedite matters so that fully qualified doctors from other countries would be able to help out in the NHS. "The government must fast-track these highly qualified professionals so they can work in the NHS. They are able and willing to play their part in tackling this pandemic," he told [the Guardian](#). "The veto on asylum seekers working is outrageous. If we have asylum seekers who are qualified doctors why not bring them forward?"

The Guardian highlights how Germany is calling on migrant doctors with medical qualifications to come and work in their health service [in this article here](#).

NHS FUNDING. [This article](#) tells how the proposal to increase the Immigration Health Charge from £400 to £624 was hidden in the budget. Layla Moran says "Tories are increasing the immigration health surcharge. So migrant workers who we desperately need to staff vital services pay more, even though

they contribute on average MORE to the economy.” We say this is shameful and will rebound on us all if we lose these migrant workers. We are also concerned that money raised in this way might not go to the health service, as it isn’t ring fenced.

CORONA VIRUS TESTING. Wendy Chamberlain has called on the government to guarantee that for the sake of public health no data will be passed from the NHS to the Home Office during the coronavirus crisis. Under the hostile environment, there is a real risk that people who find themselves gravely ill with Covid-19 will be too scared to seek treatment in case it leads to questions about their right to live in the UK. This fear risks putting people off going to hospital for testing, which in turn may lead to more people catching the virus in the wider community.

CALLS FOR THE NHS CHARGING REGULATIONS TO BE SUSPENDED. We have signed [this letter](#) to the Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Health and Social Care calling for the suspension of NHS Charging Regulations because it is critical that everyone currently within the UK is included in nationwide public health measures if we are to eliminate the virus. The World Health Organization has stressed the importance of ensuring all migrants and refugees have equal access to health services. Following the tragedy [here](#) of an undocumented migrant dying of the Corona virus as he was afraid of contacting the NHS, there has been a cross party letter from 60 MPs. Christine Jardine, said it was “vital” that no one who needs medical help is prevented from accessing healthcare, especially during the coronavirus pandemic, adding: “Sadly, after the awful experience of the Windrush scandal, far too many migrants are put off seeking treatment.”

OTHER ISSUES AFFECTING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES DURING THE CURRENT CRISIS

INCOME. There are extra costs for those on low incomes during the Corona Virus lockdown, and so we have signed Freedom from Torture’s [petition](#) calling on the government to increase the weekly asylum allowance during the Covid-19 crisis. The virus doesn't discriminate, and neither should we.

NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS (NRPF) FAMILIES. The Children's Society is asking people to [email their MP](#) about the need to suspend the NRPF condition, so that all children and families can access vital benefits and crisis support during the Covid-19 crisis. There is a petition to [sign here](#).

DESTITUTION. Whilst there has been Home Office guidance that Local Authorities have to include those with no recourse to public funds in helping homeless people, not all councils are doing this because ‘guidance’ does not mean ‘have to’, and they are waiting for the Government to fund what they spend. If you find that this is a problem in your area please contact us.

GENERAL FOR ALL MIGRANTS. JCWI are calling on people to [add their name to their open letter](#) to the Home Secretary. It calls for: suspension of NHS charging and data sharing; suspending NRPF conditions; giving assurances that those who cannot make vital appointments such as interviews are not penalised; extending or modifying visas to prevent ‘overstaying’; releasing everyone who is detained and providing specialist support to those in asylum accommodation. We have also signed [this petition](#), saying "virus knows no borders, UK must care for all in its borders".

VISA PROBLEMS. This letter highlights concerns about families unable to meet the income requirement for family visa extensions due to COVID-19, and calls on the Home Secretary to protect these families. The letter, signed by 23 organisations is available online [here](#) with information on how you can write to your MP.

THINGS TO MAINTAIN AFTER THE CRISIS

Thankfully the Home Office has made some changes to how asylum seekers are being treated, thanks to a lot of pressure from the campaigning sector. It is now important that when the present crisis ends, we all try to do what we can to keep these concessions in place. They include:

- Suspension of reporting conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Quicker transfer from one type of support to another if a final appeal is rejected;
- An end to evictions for those who get a final decision, whether positive or not, for the next 3 months;
- Applicants wanting to make further submissions should not travel to Liverpool to hand them in, they can send them in via e-mail or post (at last – should have happened from beginning!);
- Extension of Free school meal provision to families with NRPF and those on Section 4 support.

To keep up to date with regular changes to the asylum system due to COVID-19, keep an eye on [Refugee Council](#) and [Right to Remain](#) webpages.

RESOURCES

- Right to Remain have launched their [asylum navigation board](#). This online tool helps people understand the UK asylum process, raises awareness of common problems people face as they navigate the process, and shares survival strategies. It is extremely well laid out and useful.
- Duolingo is a [free language-learning app](#) for phone. Earn points for correct answers, race against the clock, and level up. Bite-sized lessons are fun and effective.

ONGOING ISSUES

LIFT THE BAN. People's attitudes to the right to work for asylum seekers are changing in the present crisis, realising how crucial it is that all with skills should be able to use them. Asylum Matters have developed a 'Skills Audit' which they hope organisations working with people seeking asylum can help them undertake virtually. They are asking anyone with experience of the asylum system to fill out [the survey](#) – which will only take a few minutes – and will help us gather information on the skills, experiences and aspirations of people seeking asylum that could be applied to the current context. The results will be used to help us draw attention to the campaign, but all answers will be anonymous. If not already signed, here is the [petition](#) to give asylum seekers the right to work.

PROCESS. Roger Roberts asked a [formal question](#) as to how much the Home Office has spent on defending immigration appeals in the last 5 years. The answer is that they don't know, as records are not kept centrally. Well they should know! This system of refusing most and then letting people appeal is not only disastrous for people - not all can, or understand that they can, appeal - but it is a terrible waste of taxpayers' money. That is why it is Lib Dem policy to transfer the cost of appeals from the Ministry of Justice to the Home Office. It would make the Home Office more likely to make the right decision in the first place. Our policy [is here](#) - section 9.

REFUGEES. A [helpful Intervention](#) in the European Parliament on the situation at the Union's external borders in Greece, *"We are in the middle of a crisis, and most likely it will get worse before it gets better. So what is needed in this time of crisis? We need immediate operational action. Second, we need solidarity, between people, between Member States and globally. Now it's time to protect the most vulnerable, and to protect our capacity to help. And third, in times of crisis it is very important that we stick to our values and respect fundamental rights."*

You've probably [seen this](#), and are not sure about the practicalities, but at least processes need to start now and children be got out of situation they are in.

