



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

23 Lincoln Road, Hindley, Wigan. WN2 3QY

johnskipworth038@btinternet.com (correspondence)

info@ld4sos.org.uk

www.ld4sos.org.uk

facebook.com/ld4sos

twitter.com/ld4sos

President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

LD4SOS JULY 2020 NEWSLETTER

DOMESTIC ABUSE AND IMMIGRATION BILLS

We were hugely disappointed to see that proposals to extend legal protections from domestic abuse to migrant women were not supported in Parliament. A large [coalition](#) of women's, refugee and migrant and other groups had pressed MPs to support amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill, to provide protection from abuse for all women, regardless of their immigration status.

Christine Jardine worked hard on this Bill and said *"Myself & Lib Dems are working with "Step Up Migrant Women" to make sure the Domestic Abuse Bill supports all survivors, no matter where they were born. Conservatives didn't accept our amendments in the Commons, but we'll keep pushing in the Lords."*

It comes a week after the double disappointment of defeats in the House of Commons on amendments to the Government's Immigration Bill to end indefinite detention and protect refugee family reunification following the UK's departure from the EU. This came despite strong campaigning and cross-party support for amendments on both subjects.

But a huge thank you to everyone who contacted their MPs on these issues. The Bill will be coming back to committee after Recess and then back to both Houses of Parliament before finally being agreed. We will continue to campaign with other agencies on these issues. Please check how your MP voted (you can find this using [They Work for You](#)) and see if you can continue to put pressure on them over these key issues.

DETENTION

Jesuit Refugee Service UK have published '[Detained and Dehumanised: the impact of immigration detention](#)', drawing on the accounts of 27 forcibly displaced people supported by the organisation, who have direct experience of immigration detention.

A County Court has [ruled](#) that the Home Office should pay over £100k in damages to the claimant, unlawfully detained for 410 days. The Judge found that detention caused the claimant's PTSD and awarded significant personal injury damages.

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) have tweeted that bail has been granted to a client detained for three months in prison under immigration powers. The Home Office opposed bail despite admitting that his country's borders are closed and will be for the foreseeable future so removal is not imminent. "Our 110th grant of bail since lockdown began". Well done BID! We say we are angry about yet another case where the Home Office has detained someone whose removal is not imminent. Why? Taking 3 months of life away from someone is beyond recompense. Who pays for needless detention and legal costs? We the taxpayers do. Thank you, BID, for what you do.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

A [new report](#), Beyond Belief, from Freedom from Torture sheds light on the experiences of people seeking asylum at their interviews with the Home Office, revealing a culture of disbelief, insensitivity and a failure to see the human being behind the application. The report calls for a

fundamental culture change at the Home Office to ensure that those fleeing persecution are protected.

During Refugee Week Christine Jardine asked a Parliamentary Question about implementing the recommendations of this report, asking that *“caseworkers receive appropriate and relevant training when conducting interviews with victims of torture to encourage full disclosure and identify important aspects of claims, avoiding costly appeals; and what plans she has to report to the recommendations in that report.”* The Minister replied that they would be *“looking at”* the themes in the report.

We need to be alert to follow this up, it is all part of our determination to have a radically different way of decision making as in <http://libdemfocus.co.uk/ld4sos/archives/1667>

RETURNS TO ZIMBABWE

Christine Jardine has continued to raise the issue of Returns to Zimbabwe [through written questions](#), on respectively how up to date the Home Office information on ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘opposition to the government’ was, what recent assessment the Home Secretary has made of how refused asylum seekers are treated after their return to Zimbabwe, and how many asylum seekers had been returned to Zimbabwe in each of the last four calendar years.

The answers show that the data the Home Office is working on in making its assessments is not particularly up to date, that the Home Office does not normally consult with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for this information, and that its policy of 72 hours warning before deportation means that the courts frequently do not have the opportunity to assess the safety or otherwise of returns to Zimbabwe, even though to be legal any deportation must be to a country that is safe for the individual concerned.

RIGHT TO WORK and FAMILY REUNION

Tim Farron took the opportunity of the [debate](#) on the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU withdrawal) Bill to support the case for allowing unaccompanied children to come to the UK and giving a right to family reunion. He also pointed out that reducing the scope of the No Recourse to Public Funds rule would be helped by giving asylum seekers the right to work while they wait for their application to be heard. This would save the public money and would give the individuals involved the dignity of work, the ability to provide for their own families and to begin to integrate much earlier.

There has been a [new report](#) issued by the LIFT THE BAN Coalition, which Christine Jardine has welcomed, saying that it *“would save taxpayers’ money and give them some dignity. This new report shows how it is common sense”*.

HOUSING

The National Audit Office published a [report](#) on Asylum Accommodation and Support on 3rd July 2020, which had input from many campaigning organisations, and reflects many of the problems they found. A new report [Wake Up Call](#) was launched the same day by Asylum Matters and 41 other organisations based on evidence submitted to the National Audit Office and exposing the Home Office for failure to effectively manage the asylum system in 2019, leading to some of the most vulnerable people in society being left in appalling conditions for months at a time. One of our LD4SOS Council members made contributions to this report via one of the organisations involved.

Wake Up Call

The report sets out how the problems that arose during the transition to the new contracts almost fatally disrupted the asylum support system which was already operating on a knife edge.

Problems revealed included:

- Impossible hold times on the advice line – one charity waited 13 hours and 40 minutes on hold between just three clients
- Appalling delays receiving asylum support – Refugee Action reports an average wait of 40 days for destitute people to receive financial support or accommodation
- Terrible accommodation standards
- Long stays in contingency accommodation that was often unsuitable and resulting in risks to physical and mental health

We maintain that there are systemic problems with these contracts and the support system generally which require a root and branch solution.

Crisis convenes joint letter to No 10 on homelessness

The charity Crisis has convened a [joint letter](#) (to which Asylum Matters is among more than 40 signatories) calling on the Prime Minister urgently to introduce emergency homelessness legislation to protect people facing homelessness during the coronavirus pandemic. The letter has been shared on [social media](#) and was covered by media outlets including [Sky News](#).

Refugee Council launches new action on evictions threat

With just hours to go on 30 June 2020 the Home Office confirmed (The [Independent](#) and [Inside Housing](#) are among media outlets which have reported this) that it would not extend the suspension on evictions from asylum accommodation, although the ban on evicting social and private tenants has been extended to 23 August 2020. Charities, including [NACCOM](#) (The No Accommodation Network) and the Refugee Council, have warned that this will result in refugees being forced into homelessness during the COVID pandemic. Amid the ongoing threat that newly recognised refugees will soon be evicted from asylum accommodation, currently paused as from 1st July pending a decision by the Immigration Minister, the Refugee Council has launched an [urgent action](#), urging people to sign a call to the UK Government to ensure everyone's safety.

The Home Office states that it has decided to resume the move-on process by giving notice to those whose asylum claims have been concluded; and that this will resume in a "[measured, phased and careful way](#)", with further details yet to be confirmed. The Department has stated in [media comments](#) and on [Twitter](#) that this process has not yet started.

Asylum Matters and NACCOM are calling on the Home Office and the government to take urgent action to protect people seeking asylum from homelessness during the pandemic and beyond. This includes a further suspension of evictions into homelessness; emergency temporary legislation that allows this and funding for local authorities to provide emergency housing to anyone at risk of homelessness (regardless of immigration status); and a permanent end to No Recourse to Public Funds conditions. Enforced destitution is never acceptable, not least during a public health crisis. The current lack of certainty on the Government's timescales means that many people in asylum accommodation remain in a state of limbo, not knowing what will happen next. You can read their joint position paper [here](#).

EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN DURING THE PANDEMIC

More than 100 refugee and asylum-seeking women in the UK have shared their experiences during the pandemic for a new report [Hear Us](#) written by the Sisters No Strangers Coalition.

Many of these women had already fled abuse and violence in the UK. They became more vulnerable during the pandemic. The Report notes that: three quarters of them went hungry, a fifth of them were homeless, and most of them said that their mental health got worse. The Report makes a number of recommendations. Their primary ask is for “a grant of leave to remain to be given to all those with insecure immigration status to ensure the safety of those seeking asylum, to protect public health and enable British society to build more equally”.

ASYLUM PROCESS

Right to Remain have published a document explaining Home Office guidelines for initial / substantive [interviews](#) with the Home Office. Asylum seekers are entitled to an audio recording. It has not always happened but this Parliamentary [Question](#) by Lord Roger Roberts confirms that, and makes clear that they are entitled to a verbatim written transcript too.

HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

The National Audit Office has published a [report on immigration enforcement](#) and the Home Office’s management of people with irregular migration status. **It is a damning indictment of how the Home Office manages Immigration enforcement. The Home Office needs radical reorganisation as Lib Dem policy says [here](#).**

Looking at the effect of Hostile Environment policies to limit irregular migration, the report concludes that, by its own admission, the Home Office had ‘*no specific evidence base*’ to support introducing these measures and ‘*is currently unable to measure whether these activities have the desired effect of encouraging people to leave voluntarily.*’

LGBT

This report in the [Guardian](#) highlights research demonstrating that people seeking asylum in the UK and Europe on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity are routinely having their claims rejected because of a widespread culture of disbelief and being expected to provide impossible levels of proof. Lib Dems call for fairer rules and better training for those making such decisions, as we say here <http://libdemfocus.co.uk/ld4sos/archives/1667>

DECISION MAKING

Roger Roberts asked in the [Lords](#) why the rate of successful appeals had gone up from 17% in 2005 to 52% in 2019. The Minister didn’t quite say “because we get so many decisions wrong in our haste to send people back to unsafe countries”. What is needed is radical overhaul of decision making by Home Office as recommended in our policy [here](#).

MODERN SLAVERY

[A report](#) in The Independent following the local lockdown in Leicester identifies conditions of modern slavery in a minority of Leicester textile factories. As Christine Jardine, Liberal Democrat Home Affairs spokesperson quite rightly said: “We have to be on our guard to ensure that the inexcusable scourge of modern slavery does not grow under cover of COVID-19.” Our policy on modern slavery is [here](#).

VIRTUAL FEDERAL CONFERENCE IN SEPTEMBER

We shall be running our usual fringe and AGM events at Conference, details of which will be in the Conference Agenda.

For our usual Exhibition stall, you will now find us in an **Expo Booth**. There is a tutorial for accessing booths [here](#).

Saturday 26 September 2020 at 18.45

'The Plight of LGBT+ asylum-seekers'

Leila Zadeh (Director of UKLGIG & former refugee) and Christine Jardine MP in conversation with LD Seekers of Sanctuary Council member Dr Ruvi Ziegler (University of Reading) on the legal & political challenges facing LGBT+ asylum-seekers in the UK.'

Sunday 27 September 2020 at 16.00

AGM and Open Forum on current issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees

After the AGM business, an open forum to discuss pressing issues faced by seekers of sanctuary in the UK including housing, unaccompanied children and family reunion, detention and the right to work, with contributions from campaigners and Parliamentarians. Have your say!