



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

LD4SOS SEPTEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER

MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW HOME AFFAIRS SPOKESPERSON ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL

"I am glad to be taking up the Home Affairs role once again. Now more than ever Liberal Democrats need to be making our voices heard for human rights both at home and abroad. Recent events have shown that we are facing a government that shows precious little respect for the rule of law and international norms – it is vital that we put the pressure on and stand up for liberal values. Whether on support for refugees or the rights of EU nationals, we will continue to hold the government to account."

SAFE & LEGAL ROUTES TO SANCTUARY NEEDED

Coverage of the perilous channel crossings has continued at pace over the last four weeks, following [the tragic death of a Sudanese teenager](#) who drowned when attempting the journey. In the face of increasingly hostile coverage, colleagues across the sector have responded in force calling for a humane response, and crucially, ensuring the existence of safe and legal routes.

LD4SoS have submitted [evidence](#) to the Home Affairs Select Committee pointing out how the present arrangements for border control are ineffective, waste money and create the market for people traffickers and people smugglers; under the 1951 Geneva Convention, asylum seekers are breaking no law in travelling to the country in which they wish to claim asylum. Oral evidence to HASC from Home Office Officials has confirmed that 98% of those crossing the Channel have claimed asylum, but that 71% of those have been refused under the EU's Dublin Regulation because they have come through a safe country.

There was no proper answer from the Minister when Roger Roberts asked "[what plans they have to create a route for asylum seekers to cross the English Channel to the UK safely.](#)"

JCWI have created a [briefing](#) outlining the case for safe and legal routes into the UK. As we outlined in the last update, you can take action with their [write to your MP action](#) and the City of Sanctuary [Stand up for Sanctuary campaign](#).

There is an article by LD4SOS Council member, Bradley Hillier-Smith on [our website](#).

You can see an article in September's Liberator on this issue too, by Suzanne Fletcher (written in a personal capacity), accessed [here](#).

BUT RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME STILL CLOSED

Since 12th March 2020 the UK hasn't welcomed a single refugee through its resettlement programme - the safest route to escaping war and rebuilding lives. That was understandable at the start of the coronavirus crisis, but with air travel for foreign holidays running throughout the summer there is no good reason for these life-saving flights not to resume. See [here](#) for Tim Farron calling for those routes to be re-opened.

Contrary to what we are told we take very few refugees. Johnson's government and MPs repeatedly claim the UK accepts more refugees than any other European country. This important [analysis](#) by the BBC's More or Less programme shows this is only by a very selective use of figures – in real terms the UK takes [FEWER](#) than any other country in western Europe.

In the House of Lords Sally Hamwee also highlighted the government's [misuse](#) of statistics. "The tables I have in front of me show that, combining both resettled refugees and asylum seekers, we take less than a quarter of the number taken by Greece and less than 10% of the number taken by Germany. This is not a competition, except a competition to do better. I wanted to put that on record."

Please email your MP and [pressure](#) the Government to reopen safe routes to safety, committing to a resettlement programme welcoming at least 5,000 refugees a year? It is Liberal Democrat [policy](#) to "Offer safe and legal routes to the UK for at least 10,000 refugees each year by expanding the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, both to help a greater number of people from that region and to cover other conflict zones such as Myanmar."

FAMILY REUNION STALEMATE

The UK's [proposal](#) for a system of reunification for [unaccompanied children seeking asylum](#) with their families in the UK or Europe has been rejected by the EU as not being within the EU's negotiating mandate. [Reportedly](#), EU officials suspect that "it's more about sending people back." In 2019, 312 children requested asylum in the UK through family reunification under the EU's Dublin regulation. Beth Gardiner-Smith, of Safe Passage, said that the absence of a deal could be "catastrophic" for unaccompanied children in Europe who have family in the UK and a legal right to be reunited with them. She urged the UK government to adopt primary legislation to protect the rights of unaccompanied minors.

Alistair Carmichael has [questioned](#) why Britain is one of 2 countries in Europe which doesn't allow refugee children to sponsor reunification with their parents. Our Liberal Democrat policy on this issue is here, <http://libdemfocus.co.uk/ld4sos/archives/1648>

NGOs are calling on the UK government to enshrine the right to family reunion for asylum seekers into UK law as it exists under EU law, through an amendment to the Immigration Bill proposed by Lord Dubs. We thank our Tony Greaves for [supporting](#) the amendment on family reunion for unaccompanied child refugees, rightly saying you support humanitarian, morally right moves "with heart and mind".

IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

The recently published quarterly and annual [immigration statistics](#) up to the end of June 2020 cover a wide range of themes, including:

- In the three months to the end of June 2020, 4,732 people claimed asylum in the UK. This marks a 40% decrease on the same period in the previous year.
- Between April-June 2020, the number of main applicants and dependants waiting over six months for a decision on their asylum claim rose for the ninth consecutive quarter. Of the 54,073 main applicants and dependants waiting for an initial decision, 38,756 waited over six months.
- In the same period, just 131 family reunion visas were granted, a 94% drop compared to the previous quarter.

[Refugee Council](#) and [Refugee Action](#) have provided detailed analysis of the data, while the human costs of the delays in processing asylum applications are shown in a BBC [report](#), which leaves little doubt that an end to the hostile environment is required.

The facts are condensed, using the Refugee Council website, in our [information sheet on "10 top facts"](#).

There is also an important [report](#) from the UN on the role of private military and security services in immigration and border management. A clear [overview](#) has been provided by Privacy International.

EVICCTIONS

The moratorium on evictions is coming to an end. Tim Farron put an Urgent Question in parliament to the Minister about the plight of those that are about to be evicted at the end of the moratorium. This includes both those in private rented accommodation who cannot pay the rent because of the Covid situation, and those asylum seekers who have had negative decisions and would be destitute with neither anywhere to live, or income. You can hear Tim's speech [here](#), and the asylum mention is at 12.45.08.

CAMPAIGN TO LIFT THE BAN – CALL BY PEERS

The increased delay in processing claims makes it all the more essential that asylum seekers are allowed to work. In scrutinising the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination ([EU Withdrawal](#)) Bill, Peers have argued the easing of the rules would help integration, give people dignity, save the taxpayer cash and avoid the threat of exploitation. We are proud of all our Liberal Democrat Peers who spoke up so well in a [debate](#) led by Baroness Sally Hamwee with support from all sides on the Right to Work for asylum seekers. Sarah Ludford is [here](#) and this is a video of her [speaking](#). Sally Hamwee, Brian Paddick and Lord Loomba all spoke out strongly that we need to "Lift The Ban".

- The Right to Work has been a long held Liberal Democrat [Policy](#).
- The House of Commons library has published a briefing paper on the right to work for people seeking asylum which can be read at [the House of Commons library website](#).
- Asylum Matters has continued to [campaign](#) actively on the issue and provides a wide range of resources for campaigners through info@asylummatters.org.
- Asylum Matters and Groundswell have produced [this briefing](#) which focuses on the impact of Covid-19 for people who are in the asylum system, refugees or those who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS PEERS LEADING THE FIGHT FOR CHANGES IN DETENTION

Liberal Democrat Peers Sally Hamwee and Sarah Ludford have tabled a number of amendments to the same Bill on the use of [detention](#). They include setting a time limit to detention stating that individuals cannot be detained longer than 28 days unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that there is a change in circumstances and that the initial criteria for detention are met (set out in another amendment as: the person can be removed shortly, detention is strictly necessary, and detention is in all circumstances proportionate).

Our Peers have done a fantastic job of getting cross party support for these amendments and spoke passionately in their [support](#). There was very little support for the government's position, who argued that there was no policy of indefinite detention and that there must always be a realistic prospect of removal and various safeguards in place; a time limit would encourage abuse of the system; public safety would be compromised if serious criminals were automatically released after 28 days. The amendments will be re-tabled at the Report Stage when the Bill will be voted on by the House of the Lords – probably 30 September.

Meantime there has been some change in the use of the detention estate. Yarl's Wood is no longer to be used as a women's immigration removal centre. Instead, it has been temporarily [repurposed](#) to house people who have arrived on small boats from across the Channel. Brook House is being [used](#) to hold people for charter flight mass-deportations to various European countries. People from countries including Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan and Kuwait are being [dumped on arrival](#), left on the streets of Germany, France and Spain.

The Home Office has admitted the majority of those being detained for removal are refugees with valid asylum claims but seems stubbornly determined to use the Dublin Regulations to force people to apply for protection in other European countries.

On the issue of age [assessments](#), a particular problem for some young people seeking asylum, the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit launched on 9th September a Guide by young people who have been age assessed.

STOP PRESS on PRIVATISING DECISION MAKING.

There is extremely worrying news [here](#) about outsourcing of interviews and decision making with Home Office training. The backlog needs clearing but not like this, decisions must be made justly and fairly. [Our policy](#) offers better ways.

A POEM on REFUGEES By Brian Bilston

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or I
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not ok to say
These people are just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at a different way

(Now Read from Bottom to Top)

LD4SOS at Federal Conference

Don't forget if you have registered for the Federal Virtual Conference starting tomorrow 25th September you can access: Once you have registered **you will be sent a link** to use to access debates and events at the Conference.

- Our Conference Fringe: 6.45pm Saturday 26 September 'The plight of LGBT+ asylum seekers'
- Our Annual General Meeting and Open Forum 4.00p.m. Sunday 27th September
- Our 'Virtual' Exhibition Stall – the Information Booth

Check out our video with information about LD4SOS – look at it now [Here is the direct YouTube link](#). This is the website address: <https://youtu.be/o3vCFkN4hVE>