



OCTOBER 2014

PEOPLE FLEEING CONFLICT & PERSECUTION LEFT IMPOVERISHED IN UK

Call for asylum support rates to be increased

There has been no increase in asylum support rates since April 2011. In December 2012 we asked you to urge your MPs to support our call to review the Government's policy on levels of support paid to asylum seekers, and to increase these levels. Following a legal challenge testing the lawfulness of the amount paid to destitute asylum seekers, in April 2014 the High Court found that the Government's assessment of the amount needed by asylum seekers to avoid destitution was flawed, and ordered the Home Office to carry out a review. However, in August the Government announced that, following this review, support levels would remain unchanged.

This decision means that many people fleeing conflict and persecution are left without sufficient support to meet their essential living needs while waiting for a Home Office decision on their asylum application.

Asylum seekers are effectively not allowed to work to support themselves, and are often dependent on government support for extended periods of time. The vast majority of people seeking asylum in the UK currently receive just over £5 per day to pay for food, toiletries, clothes, travel and other expenses (housing and fuel bills are paid for separately for those with nowhere to live). While it is possible to survive on this amount for a few days or weeks, it is not possible to do so for the long term without suffering serious impact on health. Income Support is set at what is considered to be the minimum amount people need to meet their basic living needs; the rate of support paid to many asylum seekers is now as low as 50% of Income Support. A cross-party Early Day Motion (EDM 99) calls on the Government to raise asylum support rates to at least 70% of Income Support. This is how you can help.

1. Write to your local MP

First, check on the parliament website to find out if your MP has signed EDM 99:

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/99>

- If your MP **has not yet signed the EDM**, please write to ask them to do so [see [sample letter 1](#)].
- If your MP **has already signed the EDM**, please write to thank them for doing this and ask them to write to the Home Secretary and raise the issue with their party leader [see [sample letter 2](#)].

Please ask each group member to write a personal letter even if it's to the same MP.

2. Organise a meeting with your local MP to discuss this issue

Many members of the public, including MPs, have negative attitudes towards asylum seekers which are based on misconceptions. It is vital that discussion of this issue is based on factual information. To help, we have included two documents in this mailing: a briefing for parliamentarians, which you can give to your MP, and: a Q&A which you may find helpful in preparing yourself for discussing this issue.

CONTENTS

- The guidance sheet
- Background information
- Sample Letterx2
- Briefing for parliamentarians
- Q&A

GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

If you have any queries about this action and for updates please contact

Ruth.Dawson@amnesty.org.uk / Jan.Shaw@amnesty.org.uk

Local group's monthly mailing can be downloaded from:

www.amnesty.org.uk/groups

MONTHLY ACTION

Background Information

CALL FOR ASYLUM SUPPORT RATES TO BE INCREASED

History of asylum support

People coming to the UK to escape conflict and persecution and who would otherwise be destitute used to receive 90% of Income Support whilst awaiting a decision on their application for asylum. In 1999, under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act, this support was reduced to 70% of Income Support, on the basis that their accommodation and utility bills would be paid for separately. However, in recent years this support has been reduced still further and some asylum seekers, including single adults over 25 and lone parents, now receive around just 50% of Income Support.

Impact of living on just £5 a day

Still Human Still Here – a coalition of nearly 70 organisations, including Amnesty International UK - does not believe that this level of support is sufficient to allow asylum seekers to meet their essential living needs and pursue their asylum applications. Previous research by Still Human Still Here found that 70% of Income Support is the absolute minimum required to meet needs. This conclusion was reached by taking the basket of basic goods compiled by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for its minimum income standards report and then stripping this down so that only items needed to avoid absolute poverty were included. In addition, the Royal College of Psychiatrists has stated that “the psychological health of refugees and asylum seekers currently worsens on impact with the UK asylum system.”

Asylum seekers are not permitted to work to support themselves, and those without enough to live on may resort to other survival strategies such as illegal work, prostitution and begging.

The numbers

Asylum seekers spend an average of around 18 months on Section 95 support. Currently, more than 10,000 have been waiting more than six months for an initial decision on their asylum application.

Asylum applications to the UK have been under 26,000 a year for the last five years – easily within the UK's capacity to deal with efficiently and humanely.

Combatting the myths

Sustained inaccurate and often inflammatory reporting on asylum issues over the last 20 years has imbedded negative attitudes towards asylum seekers in the public consciousness. A media search carried out between January 2001 and January 2006 found that seven UK tabloids published 713 articles which referred to ‘bogus asylum seekers’ and the words ‘crime’ and ‘asylum’ appeared together 945 times. Despite frequently held views to the contrary, it should be stressed that:

- Asylum seekers are not entitled council housing and are dispersed to areas of the UK where there is more availability of unused housing stock, on a no choice basis.
- Asylum seekers do not get generous benefits. The great majority have to meet their food, clothing and other essential living needs on just over £5 a day.
- Asylum seekers are not permitted to work to support themselves.
- Refugees have successfully settled and made a significant contribution to the UK for many centuries. This was true for the Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, Asians escaping Idi Amin's Uganda or more recently the Bosnians and Kosovans who fled the Balkans.
- Higher support rates do not lead to more applications for asylum. Many EU countries (eg. Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg) have far more generous support systems than the UK, but receive far fewer applications.
- The UK does not take ‘more than our fair share’ of asylum seekers. In 2013 the UK ranked fourth amongst EU countries, with Germany, France and Sweden all receiving higher number of applications.
- Approximately half of those applying for protection in the UK are granted it. Of those who are refused, the vast majority do have a genuine fear for their safety, but the Home Office may have concluded that their fear is exaggerated or that the situation in their country has improved, or that they could relocate to another area of their country and be safe.