

The Home Office Failures to Deal With Refugees and Asylum Seekers appropriately.

The Home Office is coming under increasing criticism from many quarters for its approach to humanitarian crises. In the list of the Responsibilities of the Home Office the emphasis is on “controlling immigration and protecting our borders”. However, it also states that one of their priorities is to “protect vulnerable people and communities”.

It is noteworthy that there is no mention of any obligation to take a share in the provision of humanitarian aid to some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

However, in the Home Office Single Departmental Plan (June 2019) it is stated that, through the Home Office Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, the aim is to “Fulfil the UK’s humanitarian and international objectives by delivering on committed resettlement schemes and improving provisions to support integration”

It is also the aim to “Create an efficient and effective in-country protection system by resolving asylum claims and appeals efficiently and strengthening asylum policy guidance”

According to figures from The Home Office’s response to the ICIBI’s (Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration) report, since 2015, over 20,000 people have been resettled in the UK from Syria. However, due to the backlog of unprocessed cases at the Home Office, both urgent and non-urgent, resettlement operations have been suspended.

In 2017 an All-Party Parliamentary Group on refugees found that while dedicated support was given to refugees arriving through the Government led Resettlement scheme, asylum seekers whose refugee status is granted following an asylum claim are left to rely on charities and local individuals for support. The chair of the APPG described the disparity as a “costly missed opportunity” for the nation because asylum seekers are ready to contribute to the economy.

It is difficult to understand the rationale behind this two-tier system. Why should one vulnerable person fleeing from their country be entitled to so much more than someone who has overcome all the privations encountered on their journey here, only to find they are languishing in limbo for weeks, months or years as they go through the system of Application and, in most cases, Appeal?

The Independent headline on 16<sup>th</sup> December read: “Home Office leaving stateless people facing detention and destitution, warns UN”. \*\*\*(see link at the end of this article)

People are being left homeless and destitute due to “procedural weakness and the approach to decision making “. Last year the Independent reported that over 1000 people have been forced into years of hardship because the Home Office refused to grant them any form of immigration status.

There are now so many people entangled in the system that the Home Office is frantically trying to set up centres to hold people who have arrived and initially been housed in hotels at great cost.

The centres in existence, eg. Napier Barracks and the site in Pembrokeshire have been heavily criticised for the poor standard of the accommodation, the failure to afford privacy, lack of information and lack of useful occupation. Law firms in Folkestone have complained that they have not been allowed access to their clients in Napier Barracks. They were set up little prior notice or consultation with local Authorities or other relevant bodies.

In Bedfordshire at Yarl's Wood, another building is being prepared, again without adequate notice of time for planning. This is to receive a further 200 men in what was an immigration removal centre.

These centres are unfit to offer a suitable setting for people whose lives have been devastated by trauma and the loss of their families and their homeland, and whose mental and physical health can be very fragile.

In a Freedom of Information question to the Home Office from the Guardian, it was reported on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December, that 29 asylum seekers have died in Home Office accommodation so far this year.

That is 5 times as many as those who have lost their lives trying to cross the Channel in small boats. One asylum seeker was described by one of his friends as a "nice sociable person", who was smiling when they reached the UK because he believed he was going to "have another life".

By the end of 2014, according to Amnesty International, the global refugee population stood at 14.4 million people, and "the UK is not disproportionately affected by this crisis, and neither is Europe". They say "Countries like Turkey and Pakistan host more refugees than all the EU countries combined. Except for Turkey, no European country appeared among the top ten hosts for refugees at the end of 2014. Developing countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda were all in the top ten.

According to the Refugee Council in Britain today 46,108 people have currently been waiting for an initial decision for more than six months. 31,752 asylum applications have been made in the last 12 months. However, people seeking asylum actually make up a tiny proportion of new arrivals in Britain. Their cases often take years to resolve.

It seems clear that the Home Office system is unfit for purpose and is costing untold misery and untold costs to the public purse.

It is time the Home Secretary grasped the nettle instead of tinkering around with drones in the channel trying to stop a few more boats making it across the Channel.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the performance of the Home Secretary and her department. either there is an astonishingly high level of incompetence or the approach to the subject of assisting vulnerable people fleeing their homelands is guided by "the hostile environment" and there is no humanity in this government.

There are international organisations which are trying to get governments to work together to seriously address the problem of large numbers of people who, for many reasons are unable to remain in their own countries. Climate change is likely to cause huge movements of people. But, it was ever thus and for centuries, ever since men started building boats, people have sailed off to a better life. As we know Britons have been no exception and Britain has lent a generous helping hand in the past.

Let us not continue to act in this disgraceful, not in my backyard way and, instead, take a lead in the world to attempt a humanitarian solution.

Jane Darling, FHCLP Policy Officer

The Independent article referred to can be reached with the link below:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-stateless-detention-unhcr-b1774355.html>