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Women's Asylum News

Women's Project at Asylum Aid

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Lead Article

Women's cases in the early days of Asylum Aid *by Monireh Moftizadeh*

Asylum Aid was established in 1990 emerging from Rights and Justice which was a human rights organisation. Rights and Justice was set up in 1975 to help people of different nationalities with their campaigns, particularly from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. It would also help people from these parts of the world with their asylum claims. I was a caseworker at Rights and Justice when Asylum Aid was set up.

Cases that Asylum Aid inherited from Rights and Justice were mainly from Africa and the Middle East with few other nationalities. Asylum Aid expanded its service to asylum seekers from other parts of the world and the caseload was gradually increased. I was dealing with Kurds and others from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. People who asked Asylum Aid for help, had either applied for asylum on entry to the UK or would ask us to make a claim for them. We would then interview the applicants to prepare them for asylum interview or would complete the asylum questionnaire given to them. In most cases we would also provide the Home Office with further representations or additional information in support of our client's asylum claim.

The UK asylum determination process made it very difficult for most asylum applicants to get protection legally available to them under the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This was - and still is - because of the wrong interpretation of the Convention terms. For this reason, a large number of asylum seekers would be denied refugee status, especially women applicants and in particular if there were gender aspects in the claim which were not yet recognised by the UK asylum policy. It was therefore, almost impossible to obtain protection under the UN Convention for such women.

Traditionally, the man was considered the head of the family and would apply for asylum; the family was with him or would follow later. Women were therefore considered as dependants of the male applicant. However, there were women who would claim asylum in their own right.

I had a Kurdish client from Turkey who had brothers active in PKK who were in hiding. As her brothers were friends with her husband the Turkish authorities kept arresting, interrogating and torturing him to obtain information against the brothers. The husband kept harassing his wife as a result and the police started interrogating her as well, so she had to escape to the UK to gain protection. She was refused asylum but was granted ELR (Exceptional Leave to Remain).

An Iraqi woman was considered as a dependant of her husband when he claimed asylum in the UK as a result of years of imprisonment and torture in Iraq. She had experienced constant harassment following her husband's escape from Iraq and was finally expelled from the country. She had to walk across the border with her three children for 15 hours, but finally managed to join her husband. Despite their experiences of severe persecution they were refused asylum in 1992 and were given ELR. The decision made them very upset and the wife told me that she was disappointed because they deserved full protection. Her remarks were very distressing for me.

A woman from Turkey, who was left behind with four children when her husband escaped because of fear of persecution, was constantly harassed and detained by the police. Once she was severely beaten in front of her children and her arm was broken. She finally managed to escape from Turkey with her children and joined the husband in the UK. Despite her experiences of constant persecution she was not granted asylum and became a dependant of her husband who was given ELR.

The more I dealt with women's cases at Asylum Aid, the more I realised that the UK asylum policy was discriminating against women refugees. It was painful for me to see that women with the experiences of persecution similar to men were hardly ever granted asylum. The situation with the women who had experienced gender-related harm was worse. They usually would not talk about their problems until the last stage of the asylum procedure when there was a threat of deportation. I would then make a claim on behalf of them, but due to the insensitive attitude of the UK decision makers towards such claims, it was almost impossible to obtain protection for those women.

Despite the fact that the UN had issued a number of publications - including 'Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women' in 1991 - to assist women asylum seekers to get international protection, there was no improvement in the asylum determination process or in the treatment of women asylum seekers in the UK. When campaigns for a 'gender-sensitive' asylum policy started in Canada, the United States and Australia, legal experts and people and organisations assisting refugee women in the UK decided to take necessary actions in this regard. Consequently, the Refugee Women's Legal Group (RWLG) was set up in 1996.

The RWLG worked on the preparation of a legal handbook with the aim to develop 'a gendered perspective on refugee law and policy' in the UK and published "Women As Asylum Seekers: A Legal Handbook" in June 1997 and "Gender Guidelines for the Determination of Asylum Claims in the UK" in July 1998 as well. In the process of preparation and publication of the 'Handbook' and the 'Guidelines', several consultation

meetings and seminars were set up to campaign for the publications and to convince the UK authorities to improve the asylum determination process so that women asylum seekers could benefit from the protection available under the 1951 UN Convention.

I was extremely pleased when I was invited to join the RWLG in 1996 and the experience I obtained from the work in this field helped me with my representations of women asylum seekers. The idea of setting up the Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid was basically the outcome of the comments and requirements raised by the refugee women who had attended the meetings and seminars about the 'Handbook' and the 'Guidelines'. RWRP was set up in the year 2000 and I started taking gender-related asylum claims from around the world.

Meetings, seminars and international conferences on 'gender-based persecution' were gradually held by the UNHCR and refugee organisations around the world. Campaigns in support of women's asylum claims in different countries contributed to the improvement of the asylum determination policy in support of refugees around the world and in the UK as well. The day that I received the refugee grant letter for one of my clients from Africa, fleeing the fear of FGM, in 2001 became one of the best days of my working time at Asylum Aid. I still remember her happy face when I gave her the letter.

The UK authorities became obliged to take serious actions and improve their asylum determination process and in 2004 they introduced their own gender guidelines. Once in the past, despite my repeated requests for female interviewer and interpreter for the interview of a women asylum seeker with a very sensitive case, two men appeared at the interview at the Home Office! This was so terrifying for my client that she only just managed to decline to take part in the interview. I understand that, luckily, this is not such a problem nowadays, but regrettably establishing asylum claims for women with gender-based persecution aspects is still problematic. In my view, constant and sincere campaigns are required to tackle the problem.

Monireh Moftizadeh was an asylum caseworker at Asylum Aid from 1990-2003

Sector Update

Asylum Aid celebrates 25th anniversary

On 25 November, Asylum Aid celebrated 25 years of representing refugees with a party for supporters, beneficiaries and staff. The evening was a great success, thanks to the overwhelming support that we received from supporters, who generously gave their pro-bono support to the event.

The event was first and foremost a celebration, and featured comedy sets from Sadia

Azmat and Shazia Mirza, who also compered the evening. Both comedians generously performed their hilarious sets for free, using humour to attack anti-asylum seeker prejudice and the awful situations and regimes that refugees are fleeing from.

More sober talks were given by one of Asylum Aid's founding members, Alasdair Mackenzie, who spoke about the early years of Asylum Aid and the establishment of the women's project, and by our current CEO, Wayne Myslik, who launched Asylum Aid's new [Would You Rather](#) campaign, and talked more about the things that the organisation has achieved in the last decade. Drawing the audience's attention to the date, which was the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Wayne spoke about the achievements of Asylum Aid's women's project over the past 15 years of its existence, the founding of the Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum, a framework for a large coalition of organisations to work together to promote the rights of women asylum seekers, the progress made on achieving a more gender-sensitive process, and how we are continuing to work on this, with our [Protection Gap](#) campaign.

The most powerful speech, however, was made by an ex-client of Asylum Aid's, a woman who explained her story of seeking sanctuary in the UK, and described how since Asylum Aid had helped her to build a new life in safety, she was regaining her confidence and working in a job that fulfils her.

We're grateful to all those who contributed to the event, and to all those who came along to show their support on the night. We are looking forward to carrying on our vital work for the human rights of asylum seekers coming to this country seeking protection from persecution.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence

The disparity in the treatment of women asylum seekers who have experienced sexual violence, as compared to the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict is a stark example of the government's inconsistent approach to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG), according to a report entitled ["Where are we now? 10 year review of Westminster Government action to end violence against women and girls"](#) published by the [Coalition to End Violence Against Women](#) (EVAW), during the 16 Days. The report reviews the situation regarding violence against women 10 years' ago and considers what progress has been made and what challenges remain since that time. It incorporates the different advances and gaps in relation to women and girls affected by violence across the sectors (health, education, etc). The report states *"We do not believe that the engagement of key departments should depend upon the personal commitment of individual ministers or officials"*, pointing out the disconnect between our attitudes to different groups of survivors of sexual violence.

The UK Home Office's persistence in using male translators, untrained in sexual violence issues, to interview women asylum seekers who have experienced violence and to detain them, even whilst pregnant is criticised in the report, which covers the rights of women seeking asylum skilfully, including them as illustrative of this lack of equivalence. The

The UK Home Office's persistence in using male translators, untrained in sexual violence issues, to interview women asylum seekers who have experienced violence and to detain them, even whilst pregnant is criticised in the report, which covers the rights of women seeking asylum skilfully, including them as illustrative of this lack of equivalence. The report notes that a woman seeking refuge from VAWG may well face disbelief about her experiences and her need for protection. It points out that women may be placed in initial accommodation that is not segregated and receive financial support that is far below that required to bring up children. She may not be able to access specialist support because it is a minority of women that are facing such a severe funding shortage. She may even be detained where she can be further dehumanised and traumatised.

In line with these concerns, the EAW Coalition recommends that the Westminster government should ensure a consistent, survivor-oriented approach to women survivors of violence, especially in regards to the UK's foreign policy on survivors of sexual violence, and the Home Office's approach to women seeking asylum.

EAW Coalition recommends the introduction of a new law requiring national and local governments to work with and fund the women's sector and the survivors they work with to develop VAWG's strategies and plans and to ensure resources for frontline services and consistent human rights compliance approaches from all agencies wherever abuse happens. This law should cover all forms of violence against women and girls according to the UN definition, including those experienced by women with uncertain immigration status and asylum seeking women. This would ensure that all women have protection from violence, access to specialist support in the aftermath of violence and that there is a targeted and effective response to male violence from all agencies. Finally, the Westminster government should develop and implement, in consultation with women's organisations, an over-arching gender equality strategy within which work on VAWG should sit.

The [ICchange](#) campaign for the UK to ratify the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention enjoyed the continued support of Asylum Aid, as well as Southall Black Sisters, Rights of Women, IKWRO, Rape Crisis and Forward throughout the 16 Days. As the first international treaty to link refugee rights with violence against women, this has the potential to strengthen the rights of women seeking asylum across Europe.

During the 16 Days, Asylum Aid circulated an update of the [Women's Asylum Charter campaign](#) to close the protection gap one year on since its launch. Enhanced with a logo painted by one of the [Protection Gap](#) advocates, it showcases the work that has been undertaken in the second six months of the campaign both in the UK and in Europe. The Protection Gap advocates are a group of women who, drawing on their own experience of the asylum process, are campaigning to close the protection gap for other asylum seeking women. Two of them can be seen in a short video promoting the campaign. Policy and Research Manager, Debora Singer, was one of four experts invited to speak at the hearing of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee of the European Parliament in December. As a result of her contribution, the Protection Gap demands have been included in the draft report discussed at the hearing.

Significant Legal Issues

Unlawful detention of trafficking victims in Detained Fast Track

The Queen on the Application of IK, Y, PU—This case was brought against the Home Office on behalf of a number of claimants who had been detained under the fast-track asylum procedures and who all were vulnerable or at least potentially vulnerable as asylum seekers who may be victims of human trafficking. It was contended that Home Office had acted unlawfully by detaining these claimants and attempting to process their asylum claims under fast-track procedures and that she had acted in breach of her own published policies on the detained fast-track (DFT) and trafficking, and also in breach of Article 4 ECHR, which prohibits slavery and forced labour.

The court declared that the Home Office had acted unlawfully, in breach of their own policy and Article 4 ECHR, when detaining and subjecting the claimants to the DFT because they had failed to identify that their claims were unsuitable for quick decision under the DFT. The court declared that the Home Office had failed to identify that the claimants were potential victims of trafficking, failed to recognise their cases required further investigation and failed to ensure that they had been properly informed of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and by failing to document any attempts to do so. Further, the court declared the DFT process did not comply with the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 in that vulnerable groups were at risk of discrimination

The background to the case was that the Helen Bamber Foundation, a charitable organisation which assists victims of torture by providing therapy and medico-legal reports, had struggled with handling the large volume of referrals it was receiving from the DFT process and no longer gave initial assessment appointments. Instead, a letter would be provided stating that the case warranted further clinical investigation and that the person should be removed from the DFT process. Two of the claimants in this case (IK and PU) had been referred to the Helen Bamber Foundation, but the Home Office refused to release them upon receipt of letter confirming clinical investigation was required. Two of the claimants had also obtained Rule 35 reports (PU and Y), which were supposed to be one of the safeguards in the fast-track system to prevent potentially vulnerable individuals being subjected to detention. In both cases, detention was maintained despite the production of Rule 35 reports which indicated the presence of scarring that may have indicated that the claimant was the victim of torture.

The UK's National Referral Mechanism had been established to identify victims of trafficking. As a designated Competent Authority, the Home Office had published a number of policies on how they would treat victims of trafficking within immigration processes. One clear aspect of the policy was that victims of trafficking should only be detained in exceptional circumstances. The National Referral Mechanism also provided for various professionals, including frontline Home Office officials, to be "First Responders", who must refer those identified as potential victims for trafficking assessments. Home Office policy recognised that victims of trafficking may not readily identify themselves as such through fear,

lack of knowledge of what trafficking is, or simply seeming themselves as a migrant in unfortunate circumstances. The forms for referring into the NRM thus contained a number of indicators of trafficking, the presence of any one being sufficient to trigger a referral to the NRM.

In the case of IK, she had disclosed at her screening and substantive interviews that she had been forced into marriage, sexually abused and feared being trafficked for sexual exploitation by her fiancé. IK was asked if she wanted to participate in the 'trafficking process', but her evidence was that this was not fully explained to her and there is also no indication in the Home Office records that this was fully explained to her either. No referral was made by the Home Office to the NRM despite her account containing more than one of the standard indicators for trafficking. Another First Responder, the Salvation Army, agreed to make a referral to the NRM for a trafficking assessment but even after being notified of this, the Home Office did not remove IK from the DFT. She later received a positive reasonable grounds decision that she may be a victim of trafficking.

In the case of PU, she was seen within 48 hours of being detained for a medical assessment for the purpose of preparing a rule 35 report. During the compiling of that report, PU disclosed violence and sexual exploitation at the hands of her husband, and that he had stated that she "owed him" for bringing her to the UK. The rule 35 report concluded that PU 'may have been a victim of torture'. The Home Office's response to the rule 35 report did not deal with the clear indicators of trafficking. After her release from detention, PU was referred by the Salvation Army to the NRM and received a positive reasonable grounds decision that she may be a victim of trafficking.

In the case of Y, at his screening interview he disclosed a number of factors of which any could have been indicators of trafficking, including not being in possession of his own travel documents and his claim to be an orphan child living with an older male who sexually abused him. No follow-up questions were asked at screening and his case was entered into the DFT process. At his substantive interview, Y gave further details which indicated that he was a potential victim of trafficking such as grooming, but this was not explored further. His asylum claim was refused and no mention of trafficking was made in the refusal letter. Y secured legal representation and his representatives wrote to the Home Office requesting his release from the DFT on account of indicators of trafficking and on the basis of a rule 35 report concluding that he may be a victim of torture. First Responder Barnado's had confirmed they would undertake a trafficking assessment. Y's case went before the First-tier Tribunal, who refused to take the case out of the fast-track process and instead gave directions for the Home Office to investigate the trafficking claim. Y was not released until a court order ordered his release after 113 days of detention. Y was referred by Barnado's into the NRM and received a positive reasonable grounds decision that he may be a victim of trafficking.

All three claims for judicial review were allowed. It was found that IK and Y were unlawfully detained from the dates of their screening interviews and that PU was unlawfully detained from the date of her Rule 35 report because it was clear at these relevant times that their cases were unsuitable for the DFT on account of their

vulnerability as potential victims of trafficking.

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Asylum Aid and Rights of Women are working together on joint strategic work to disseminate legal information on gender, asylum and refugee issues. Asylum Aid would like to thank Rights of Women's *Victoria Mascord*, for sharing the above case summary.

For more information and case summaries, you can join the Women's Migration and Asylum Network. Email wman@row.org.uk or visit www.rightofwomen.org.uk/current.php

National News

Yarl's Wood update: Home Office accused of breaching handcuffing guidelines

Women detained in Yarl's Wood report skipping hospital appointments and healthcare check-ups in order to avoid the indignity and humiliation of being handcuffed during hospital visits.

The Home Office has been [accused](#) of breaching its own guidelines on handcuffing asylum seekers by [Women for Refugee Women](#), expressing concern about the use of restraints on female detainees at Yarl's Wood, and calling into question whether the requirements of necessity, reasonableness and proportionality are being adhered to before handcuffing detainees.

Some detained women believe that there has been a change in policy over the past two months, and have even reported being handcuffed during visits to hospital. One detainee who refused to attend a hospital appointment in restraints believes she is being targeted by security officers because she supported the '[Shut Down Yarl's Wood](#)' protests in the summer.

Women for Refugee Women has stressed the danger that unjustified handcuffing poses for the health of detainees missing important appointments. Expressing its disapproval of the reported change in handcuffing policy, the charity's letter of complaint to the Home Office emphasised that the use of handcuffs across the board is not acceptable

The Home Office's guidelines on the use of restraint were updated following the death of an elderly man with dementia, which occurred while he was shackled in a detention centre near Heathrow. The guidelines state that handcuffs should not be used unless a risk assessment shows restraints are warranted, and that the use of this during escorted visits must be considered only when it is 'necessary, reasonable and proportionate'.

The Home Office has commissioned an independent review of the practice.

International News

Women and children at risk of sexual violence in Europe's refugee crisis

Women and children refugees entering Europe in the ongoing displacement crisis face sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, even once on European soil, according to a

growing number of voices.

[Amnesty International](#) recently reported alarm over numerous testimonies from women who have suffered abuse at the hands of fellow refugees, smugglers, and even European authorities, while the UNHCR has also [expressed concern](#) over 'credible testimonies' of sexual violence against refugee and migrant women on the move in Europe. A senior Europol officer has also come forward with a [warning](#) that unaccompanied refugee and migrant children in Europe are easy prey for unscrupulous gangs and are at risk of being trafficked and forced into prostitution.

With more than 644,000 refugees and migrants having arrived in Europe by sea last year, the UNHCR reports that just over a third are vulnerable women and children. The risks of sexual violence and abuse are particularly high in locations where refugees and migrants gather, such as bus or train stations. Overcrowded reception sites also present a high risk to vulnerable women and children, as they often lack adequate lighting and separated spaces for single women and families with children to sleep. Additionally, short-term reception centres in destination countries including Germany are [said](#) to lack basic protections for women such as locks on bedroom doors in mixed sleeping areas.

Reports and testimonies indicate that there have been instances of women and children engaging in 'survival sex' to pay smugglers to continue their journey. As well as highlighting these vulnerabilities, the UNHCR has called on authorities to find alternatives to the detention of children, who often lack the protection of an adult. UNHCR are also working to prevent family separations, recognising the enhanced risks that this poses for women and girls. A separate [article](#) however, points to the dangers of assuming that women only face risk when making journeys on their own. Aside from the possibility of abuse or exploitation by a member of their own family, female travellers continue to face risk even when accompanied by men.

The UNHCR and Amnesty International have called on authorities to ensure the better protection of these vulnerable groups, and expressed the need to ensure access to information, enhanced identification of persons with specific needs, including unaccompanied children. There is also need for provision of psychosocial support and enhanced safeguarding in reception areas.

UNHCR, in collaboration with UNFPA and the Women's Refugee Commission has now published an [initial assessment report](#) on the protection risks for women and girls in the European crisis, with a focus on Greece and F.Y.R.O.Macedonia.

Rape as a weapon of war in Darfur

Rape is used as a weapon in the long-running conflict in Darfur, affecting women and girls from non-Arab black African ethnic groups in particular, according to a snapshot [report](#) produced by [Waging Peace](#), that highlights the use sexual and gender-based violence by armed groups in Darfur. Indeed, sexual attacks are said to have a clear ethnic component, with attackers using derogative, ethnically-laced language to humiliate victims.

In placing the prevalence of rape in the context of ethnic tension, the report states that sexual violence 'cannot be understood except through the prism of conflict'. The testimonies in the attack are even said to suggest that sexual and gender-based violence may be part of a deliberate counter-insurgency strategy, aimed at discouraging support for rebel activity among the local population. The report emphasizes the planned nature of the attacks, which suggest that they may be permitted or encouraged by military commanders.

Victims are often said to first encounter attackers early in the day on their way to their destination, 'only to be ambushed at a later time' by a larger group of men. Several of the rapes documented formed part of mass attacks on entire villages, such as the case of the mass rape of 221 women and girls in the North Darfur village of Tabit in late October and early November 2014.

The report also indicates that justice is seldom met in cases of sexual violence, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. Victims rarely report their attacks, owing to a belief that doing so will not result in repercussions for the attackers. Evidence suggests that these fears are not unfounded; less than a quarter of the total cases documented by Waging Peace were reported officially, and of these, the majority were not acted upon by the police or the UN African Union Mission In Darfur (UNAMID).

The testimonies of the victims also reveal a fear towards the stigma attached to rape, with public attitudes being so negative that many women do not reveal that they have been raped unless they fall pregnant, and are thus forced to do so. Furthermore, most of the victims are said not to have received the physical, psychological or medical support they required.

The report suggests that it is unlikely that real security can be achieved for women in Darfur without an end to the conflict in the region. However, it does make recommendations. These include calling for cases of sexual violence reported to UNAMID to be followed up on effectively, and to increase patrolling and the scope of physical protection offered by UNAMID to the civilian population of Darfur. The report also calls on the Sudanese government to improve their medical provision for rape victims and their reporting and conviction mechanisms.

Publications

The Shaw Review into Welfare in Detention: Implications for women in detention

The presumption against detention should be extended to victims of rape and sexual violence, and the presumption of exclusion from detention of pregnant women should be replaced with an absolute exclusion according to the recommendations made by Stephen Shaw in a [review](#) of welfare in immigration detention of vulnerable persons. The review focuses mainly on healthcare and the impact of detention upon detainees' mental health, but includes some recommendations pertaining specifically to the issue of women in detention.

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A presumption against detention for victims of rape and other sexual or gender based violence, and includes victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) as coming within this definition

The review finds that there is a strong case that those who have been the victims of sexual violence, or (in the case of women) gender-based violence, should not be in immigration detention. Under current policy, being the victim of rape or sexual violence is not, in itself, one of the published criteria for exclusion from immigration detention. The review states that the presumption should be that victims of sexual violence should not be detained, and calls on the Home Office to put in place arrangements for excluding them from detention at the earliest opportunity.

- ***The presumptive exclusion from detention for pregnant women should be replaced with an absolute exclusion***

Shaw recommends that the Home Office amend its guidance so that the presumptive exclusion from detention for pregnant women is replaced with an absolute exclusion. It urges the Home Office to acknowledge the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, the detention of pregnant women does not result in their removal. The review also recommends a short-term measure, where the Home Office should 'closely monitor any cases in which pregnant women are detained, and arrange for their immediate release if there is any sign of removal not being achievable imminently or if the woman concerned shows any indication of physical or mental distress'

- ***The service provider at Yarl's Wood should only conduct searches of women and women's rooms in the presence of men in the most extreme and pressing circumstances, and there should be monitoring and reporting of these cases***

The review recommends that the service provider at Yarl's Wood (Serco) should only conduct searches of women and of women's room in the presence of men in the most extreme and pressing circumstances. It does not, however, recommend a change to the wording of Home Office policies on searching. Rather, it states that the staff at Yarl's Wood have at times been operating outside the 'spirit' and 'thrust' of Home Office policy, under which men should only be present when there is an operational need. The review stresses that the proportion of female staff at Yarl's Wood must be increased.

- ***The Home Office should draw up a research strategy for immigration detention and should consider commissioning clinical studies on the impact of detention upon women, and research aimed at improving models of care.***

The review finds that immigration detention has been subject to too little research, and that this situation should be remedied by clinical studies on the impact of detention on women, in particular. Shaw expresses concern about both the detection and treatment of mental illness, and the impact that detention itself may have on mental wellbeing. The

review acknowledges that sexual violence is associated with an increased risk of mental illness in detention, a fact that influenced the above recommendation regarding victims of rape and other sexual attacks.

The Government has [stated](#) that it accepts the 'broad thrust' of Shaw's recommendations and that the Home Office will carry out [three key areas](#) of reform, including a wider definition of those 'at risk' to include pregnant women and survivors of sexual violence.

Pictures from November, December and January at Asylum Aid



Clockwise from below: Comedian Shazia Mirza entertaining the crowd at Asylum Aid's 25th Anniversary party; The Protection Gap logo, designed by Protection Gap Advocate Marjan; Protection Gap Advocates, Princess A and Khedijah admire the Hope Project's garden project.



Charter of rights of women seeking asylum



Endorsements: 364

Google group membership: 180

The Protection Gap campaign, one year on

By Debora Singer and Camilla Omollo, Asylum Aid

It has been one year since the [Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum](#) launched its campaign to close the [Protection Gap](#). Following an extensive postcard campaign, the Home Office included all five of the campaign's demands in its Gender Asylum Action Plan, produced in March 2015. The campaign has since gone international and women who have experienced the asylum system continue to promote the campaign.

In the course of the campaign a group of women refugees associated with the Evelyn Oldfield Unit have come together with Asylum Aid to work on promoting the campaign. Naming themselves the **Protection Gap Advocates**, they have developed ideas to ensure that these demands move from the Action Plan to being fully implemented. They have chosen to undertake a variety of activities as a group and individually. They have shared social media skills with each other to promote the campaign; the logos we are using for the campaign have been designed by Marjan; Princess C has been promoting a [film](#) she made with us focusing on the difficulties women face in getting an accurate credibility assessment. The Advocates' next plan is to ensure that lawyers and asylum seeking women themselves know which measures are available to them already. A video of Protection Gap Advocates Khedijah and Princess explaining their work on the campaign can be found on the Asylum Aid [website](#).

The Protection Gap campaign is excitingly reaching beyond the UK and into Europe. Debora Singer, Asylum Aid's Policy and Research Manager, was invited to speak at a hearing on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in Europe. The hearing was run by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on the European Parliament in Brussels on 3rd December 2015, and was led by Mary Honeyball MEP. Debora included the demands of the Protection Gap campaign in the draft report she presented at the hearing, expressing concern that these demands are found in international protocols but are missing from the asylum system in Europe. The difficulty of women getting accurate and positive credibility assessments when faced by a 'culture of disbelief' surrounding their asylum claims was also outlined by Debora. You can watch Debora's contribution [here](#).

We are encouraged that the Home Office is continuing to liaise with us on the progress on the issues the campaign has raised. However, we believe that there needs to be continued effort in advocating these demands until they are fully implemented. Only then will women have measures in place that enhance their chances of obtaining an accurate credibility assessment and the right initial asylum decision from the very beginning.

Click here to [donate online](#) and help Asylum Aid save lives

She was detained without charge

Nobody believed her story and no-one spoke up for her

Her family and friends didn't know where she was

Afraid...isolated...

She had no idea what would happen to her next

And that was after she sought asylum in the UK

Our asylum system is now so tough that, all too often, this is how people seeking help are treated. And that can't be right.

We believe the system should be fair and just and that every asylum seeker should have legal help to make their case - only then can we say in good conscience "let the law take its course".

Asylum Aid is an independent, national charity that secures protection for people seeking refuge in the UK from persecution in their home countries.

We provide expert legal representation to asylum seekers and campaign for a fair and just asylum system. Founded in 1990, we have since helped 30,000 people to get a fair hearing. In 2009 85% of our clients were granted leave to stay in the UK when decisions were made on their claims for protection.

Please support us

Your donation will safeguard our independence and enable us to stand up for fair asylum rights without fear or favour.

You can make a donation via our website:
www.asylumaid.org.uk/pages/give_now.html
OR send it to us by post with this form:

Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Telephone:
Email:

I want to make a one-off gift of £

(please make cheques payable to Asylum Aid)

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If you are a UK taxpayer, the value of your donation can increase by at least 25% under the Gift Aid scheme - at no additional cost to you. Please tick the box below to join the Gift Aid scheme.

I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer and that I pay as much income or capital gains tax as Asylum Aid will reclaim in the tax year. Please list all donations I make or have made to Asylum Aid for the past four years as Gift Aid donations until further notice.

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