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# Women's Asylum News

## Women's Project at Asylum Aid

### IN THIS ISSUE

Pp. 2-5 Lead article:

[Set Her Free: Ending the detention of women who seek asylum](#)

Pp. 5 Sector Update:

[Domestic Violence Survivors Restricted access to Legal Aid](#)

Pp. 5-7 Significant Legal Issues:

[A, B, C v. Staatssecretaris van Veiligheid en Justitie](#)

Pp. 7-8 National News:

[Home Secretary announces independent review of welfare in detention](#)

Pp. 8-11 International News:

[Displacement in Nigeria aggravated by Boko Haram](#)

[Women continue to fight for gender equality in Zimbabwe and the DRC](#)

Pp. 11 UK Training and Events:

[Promoting Recovery to Support Women with Complex Needs](#)

[Evelyn Oldfield Unit - Domestic violence in refugee communities](#)

Pp. 11-13 Publications:

[Home Office Releases Report on Women and Girls in Somalia](#)

[Women and children in danger in Eastern Ukraine – UNHCR Update](#)

[City of Sanctuary Maternity Videos](#)

Pp. 14 Charter Update:

[The Asylum Support Appeals Project](#)

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*"I was leading a student movement for women's rights, against FGM. The situation became very serious, it was my life in danger. I had to leave everything behind.*

*When I went for my asylum interview it was not a good experience at all. The interviewer was a man and it was difficult to deal with. Especially talking about the issues I had to. About FGM. I feel much better able to communicate about these things with a woman."*

- Shukri\*, Anti-FGM Activist, Somali Refugee  
Close the #ProtectionGap  
[www.asylumaid.org.uk/protectiongap](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/protectiongap)

\*Name & identifying details have been changed. Photo of model by Warren Goldswain

**We can close the Protection Gap for women fleeing persecution. Take Action before the end of February**  
[www.asylumaid.org.uk/protectiongap](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/protectiongap)

## Set Her Free: Ending the detention of women who seek asylum

**We are grateful to Gemma Lousley from Women for Refugee Women for this article**

On 14<sup>th</sup> January around 250 people, including refugee women, grassroots activists and campaigners gathered at Amnesty's Human Rights Action Centre in London for the first ever National Refugee Women's Conference. The conference marked the end of a successful first year for the Set Her Free campaign to end the detention of women seeking asylum, but it was shaped, also, by the recognition that the pressure must be kept up to achieve real change, and that much remains to be done.

The energy, anger and determination behind the campaign were palpable as the opening speakers addressed the conference, including Rahela Sidiqi, Chair of the London Refugee Women's Forum, Meltem Avcil, founder of the [Set Her Free petition](#), and Maimuna Jawo, also of the London Refugee Women's Forum. Following a panel discussion on the progress of the campaign, the conference hosted a performance by Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) Manchester which dramatised women's experiences of seeking asylum and being detained, including their song 'Shut Down Yarl's Wood'. In the afternoon, workshops on areas such as direct action and protest, campaigning using the arts and online campaigning developed ideas to move the campaign forward.

Broad political support – both Labour's Stella Creasy and the Conservative MP Richard Fuller spoke during the morning session of the conference – was matched by the wide range of attendees, from refugee and asylum seeker groups to women's groups and campaigns, including the Women's Institute, No More Page 3 and campaigners against FGM Daughters of Eve.

### **The campaign so far**

The Set Her Free campaign began in January 2014 with the parliamentary launch of Women for Refugee Women's (WRW) report [Detained](#), which highlighted the routine use of detention for survivors of rape and sexual violence and the trauma and distress caused by the experience of detention to women refugees. Hosted by Stella Creasy and supported by Richard Fuller and Labour MP Steve Reed, speakers at the launch included playwright Lydia Besong, who was detained in Yarl's Wood, and Meltem Avcil who, following her detention in Yarl's Wood as a 13-year-old and her involvement in the campaign to end the detention of children, started a petition to end the detention of refugee women which has now gathered more than 50,000 signatures. In December 2014, Meltem was recognised by Liberty as their [Young Campaigner of the Year](#), and presented with her award by Doreen Lawrence.

The campaign quickly gathered momentum as, in February, hundreds of campaigners and supporters gathered outside the Home Office for the Shine a Light protest; alongside significant media attention, the protest also attracted the support of writer Zadie Smith, who described Yarl's Wood as ["an offence to liberty, a shame to any civilised nation, and a personal tragedy for the women caught in its illogical grip"](#). In the same month, Rahela Sidiqi spoke alongside Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper at One Billion Rising in Trafalgar Square.

In June, the London Refugee Women's Forum and Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) London attended the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, taking with them the [solidarity quilt completed with the Women's Institute Shoreditch Sisters](#), which is stitched with messages of support for women in detention. Angelina Jolie – who co-chaired the summit with then Foreign Secretary, William Hague – spoke with the Forum's secretary Jade Amoli-Jackson and wrote a message for the quilt, which is now stitched into its centre: "We love and support you. We admire your strength."

In July, Maimuna Jawo gave evidence to the first ever [parliamentary inquiry into the use of immigration detention](#), set up and led by Sarah Teather MP, which is due to publish its final report shortly. In September, the London Refugee Women's Forum opened the Labour Party conference fringe with a performance of their poem 'Set Her Free'; in the same month, members of Women in Hope addressed the Green Party conference. In November WRW gave evidence to Bedford Council's inquiry into healthcare in Yarl's Wood, and to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' inquiry into violence against women and girls. It's important, too, to highlight the ongoing campaigning activities across the country, including [WAST Manchester's 'Shut Down Yarl's Wood'](#) demonstrations in Manchester city centre.

In December Yvette Cooper announced that, if elected in 2015, Labour will [end the detention of survivors of sexual violence, those who have been tortured and women who are pregnant](#). She also pledged an independent investigation into Yarl's Wood, focusing on the repeated allegations of sexual abuse of women by guards under Serco's management (in spite of these allegations, it was announced in November 2014 that Serco's contract to run Yarl's Wood [has been renewed for another eight years](#)). Welcoming these commitments, WRW [called on other political parties](#) to set out how they would end the suffering of women who are locked up when they come to the UK to seek safety.

### **Keeping the pressure up: The need for real change**

While the successes of the campaign's first year are clear, WRW's new report, launched at the National Refugee Women's Conference, points to the importance of maintaining

momentum and effecting substantive change in the treatment of women who seek asylum. Following on from *Detained*, [I Am Human](#) explores further refugee women's experiences of detention: it finds that, although the majority of the 38 women we spoke to (a third of whom were in detention at the time of interview) were survivors of rape or other sexual violence, they were routinely watched and searched by male guards in Yarl's Wood.

More than 85% of the women we spoke to told us that male guards saw them in intimate situations, including while they were naked, partly dressed, in the shower or on the toilet. This happens when male guards enter women's rooms without knocking, [a practice that has also been documented by the Chief Inspector of Prisons](#); it also happens when women who are deemed to be so mentally distressed that they are placed on suicide watch, or 'constant supervision', are watched by male guards. When we published *Detained*, the Home Office denied that male guards would see women detainees in intimate situations, insisting that 'male staff would not supervise women showering, dressing or undressing, even if on constant supervision through risk of self-harm'. *I Am Human* highlights, however, that such a practice is both routine and ongoing.

The majority of women also told us that they had experienced being searched while a male guard watched, or that they had been subjected to a rub-down search by a male guard, both of which are breaches of Home Office policy. Disturbingly, two women told us that they had been strip-searched by male guards (one of these instances happened at Colnbrook, a detention centre near Heathrow). The report points, too, to an ongoing culture of inappropriate sexual conduct and exploitation at Yarl's Wood. Six of the women who spoke to us said that a member of staff had made a sexual suggestion to them, and three said that they were touched sexually. Unsurprisingly, but nevertheless shockingly, half of the women we interviewed had been on suicide watch while in detention and 40 said they had self-harmed.

Attendees at January's conference agreed collective actions, including writing to the Home Secretary, Theresa May, to draw her attention to the findings of *I Am Human* and to ask her to meet with Women for Refugee Women to discuss these and the report's recommendations for change. There was also a real appetite for protest – for a physical demonstration of opposition to the continuing existence of Yarl's Wood, and a show of solidarity with the women who are held there – and this is something we will be developing over the coming months. As the general election looms closer, there is a keen awareness that much remains to be achieved, but it is matched by the determination and voice of the campaign to end the detention of refugee women.

To find out more about the Set Her Free campaign to end the detention of women seeking asylum and to get involved, go to [Women for Refugee Women's website](#).

The Set Her Free petition, started by Meltem Avcil, gained more than 50,000 signatures in its first year. [You can sign the petition here](#).

## Sector update

### Domestic Violence Survivors Restricted access to Legal Aid

A Court has dismissed a challenge brought by the Public Law Project on behalf of Rights of Women to new restrictions on access to legal aid. The changes, introduced in April 2013, include regulations regarding the standard of proof required in order to be eligible for legal aid for family cases. According to Rights of Women, [up to 40%](#) of women affected by domestic violence will not have access to the evidence required under these new prescriptive proof requirements.

Rights of Women argued that the effect of these changes is to deny representation to large numbers of women who need its support in order to escape from abusive relationships, protect their children and control their finances.

Access to family law legal aid is not restricted by nationality, so it is a way in which asylum seekers who are experiencing domestic violence, including those whose asylum claim has been rejected, can access support. However, given the high standard of proof required, if the violence took place in the country of origin, or is for any other reason difficult to evidence, these women will not qualify. This, within the context of further restrictions being enacted on access to legal aid, will affect asylum seeking women's access to justice.

The Divisional Court dismissed Rights of Women's claim that the effect of the regulations were not what Parliament had intended, ruling that the Justice Secretary had acted within his powers, in a [judgment](#) published on 22 January.

## Significant Legal Issues

**A, B, C v. Staatssecretaris van Veiligheid en Justitie, C-148/13 to C-150/13, European Union: Court of Justice of the European Union, 2 December 2014**

[Back to top](#)

This case concerned three asylum applicants in the Netherlands who had claimed asylum on the basis of their sexual orientation. All three claims had been rejected on the grounds of credibility.

As part of a second application, A has volunteered to undergo a test or perform a same-sex sexual act in order to prove their sexual orientation. B's application had been rejected on the grounds that their statements with regards to their sexual orientation were vague, too brief, and implausible. In particular, the Dutch authorities felt that B should have shown greater insight into, and emotional awareness of, their sexual orientation given that they were from a country where homosexuality was not generally accepted. C's application was rejected on the basis he had not disclosed his sexual orientation in an earlier application for asylum and he had not clearly explained how he had become aware that he was gay. Nor was he able to answer questions about gay rights organisations.

The three cases were referred to the Court of Justice to rule on what limits were imposed on the methods of assessing the credibility of a declared sexual orientation under Article 4 of the Qualification Directive 2004/83 and the rights to human dignity and respect for private and family life under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The court ruled that an applicant's own declaration of his or her sexual orientation was only the starting point for an assessment of their claim to international protection, which was contrary to the submissions made by applicants A, B, and C that stated that a declaration of sexual orientation by an asylum applicant should be held as an established fact. However, the court also ruled that in seeking further confirmation of an applicant's sexual orientation, the competent authority must ensure that any methods used are consistent with Article 4 of the Qualification Directive and the rights to human dignity and respect for private and family life.

In particular, questioning based on stereotyped assumptions regarding the behaviour of gays and lesbians is not compliant with the duty set out under Article 4 of the Qualification Directive to assess a claim on the basis of an applicant's individual circumstances. The specific example considered by the court was questioning in relation to knowledge of organisations for the protection of the rights of gays and lesbians. The inability of an applicant to answer such questions cannot by itself lead to the conclusion that the applicant and their claim lack credibility.

Further, whilst competent authorities are entitled to conduct interviews to assess asylum claims, questions regarding sexual practices are contrary to the right to respect for private and family life. Also, the submission of applicants to "tests" regarding their sexuality or production of films of intimate acts infringe the right to human dignity. The court also

considered that such films would lack probative value as they constitute evidence merely of the performance of a sexual act and not of sexual orientation. Concern was also raised that acceptance of such evidence would lead to a “slippery slope” whereby all applicants would end up being expected to submit such evidence.

Finally, the court held that to find a claim incredible solely due to the late disclosure of sexual orientation was contrary to Article 4(3) of the Qualification Directive under which there is a general duty to take into account the personal circumstances and vulnerability of the applicant. The court recognised that someone may display reticence in revealing intimate aspects of their life.

*Victoria Mascord, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2014*

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## National News

### Home Secretary announces independent review of welfare in detention

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 the Home Secretary announced an independent review of policies and procedures affecting the welfare of those held in immigration removal centres.

It will seek to identify whether improvements can be made to safeguard the health and wellbeing of detainees, and those being escorted in the UK. Stephen Shaw, a former Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, has agreed to lead the review. He will inspect detention facilities, review healthcare provision and scrutinise all Home Office policies and operational practices.

The review is expected to last around six months. It is likely that Mr Shaw will consult with a wide range of stakeholders including current and former detainees, charities, non-governmental organisations, other government departments, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and the President of the Independent Monitoring Board.

The Home Office has faced criticism for years over the welfare of detainees, following incidents of death, self-harm and sexual abuse, as well as repeated court rulings finding Home Office practice unlawful. The coalition government has also been challenged over the practice of indefinite detention and the sporadic failure to meet its 2010 pledge to end the detention of children.

The announcement comes as the Home Office publishes the

**Back o top**

findings of a narrower, more focused external review of mental health issues in detention. In 2012, the Home Office commissioned the Tavistock Institute to consider the way mental health issues are dealt with in immigration detention. The Tavistock Institute's [Review of Mental Health Issues in Immigration Return Centres](#), along with the [Home Office's response](#) to it, has been recently published.

The review will include Yarl's Wood, the immigration removal centre where most women are detained, will be looked at as part of the review. In January the national charity Women for Refugee Women criticised conditions at Yarl's Wood (see previous article).

The review has been welcomed by the Yarl's Wood Befrienders, who support those being held at Yarl's Wood.

Co-ordinator Heather Jones told *Bedford Today*: "There is a high level of mental health issues. We feel very strongly that there are far too many people being detained. At least a third to half of people are released rather than returned. A lot of people are being put through what is a very difficult circumstance and then released and it is at great cost to public finances.

"Some people are kept for very long lengths of time, which inevitably affects their mental health. If you go into prison you know why you are there and you know when you are going to get out. When you go into detention you don't know when you are going to leave."

She said after being released back into the community, some say they still wake up at night thinking they can hear keys and someone opening their door.

"However nice the staff are and many of them are very nice, it doesn't make being locked up and having your freedom taken away from you and the uncertainty any easier," said Heather.

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## International News

### **Displacement in Nigeria aggravated by Boko Haram**

Boko Haram, the radical Islamist group that has conducted several violent attacks since mid-2014, have been found to be causing an unprecedented protection crisis in North-eastern Nigeria. The majority of internally displaced people (IDP's) are women and children, many of whom have been traumatised by the sexual violence Boko Haram routinely unleash on civilian populations.

Along with government counter-insurgency measures and ongoing inter-communal



conflict which have contributed to the insecurity, the Boko Haram insurgency has reportedly displaced 1.5 million people within the country as of September 2014, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). A further 150,000 have fled to neighbouring Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Worst affected is the Baga region in Borno State, where Boko Haram are attempting to establish an Islamic State. Since the 2012 imposition of a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, the violence has escalated. In the last six months, Boko Haram have focused their escalating violence almost exclusively on civilians.

Boko Haram have abducted over 500 women and girls in Nigeria since 2009, and large scale abductions have escalated since earlier this year. Out of the 276 schoolgirls from Chibok abducted in April 2014, 219 remain unaccounted for. Between 2013 and mid 2014 Boko Haram has destroyed 211 schools in Borno state. The group has also embarked on a terror campaign against Christians, killing worshippers and burning churches. The group has specifically targeted Christian girls and imposed forced conversions to Islam and marriage to its own members.

Sexual violence has been a consistent feature of Boko Haram attacks on civilian populations along with the systematic abuse against the abducted women and girls, including forced marriage.

The fear of abduction has contributed to the large numbers of IDP's who decided to flee their homes pre-emptively, and this increase is reflected by the growing number of official IDP camps, which now number twelve in Borno State alone. IDMC have reported that 3.3 million Nigerians have been forced to flee their home since 2010. IDMC states that there are also reports of internal "discipline committees" within refugee camps implementing corporal punishment to displaced women. The lack of organised management combines with the sheer number of IDP's attempting to gain access to a camp means that gender based violence is easier to perpetuate and more difficult to monitor.

Vulnerable household members, particularly women and children, face a greater risk of gender based violence once they are displaced, whether in camps or in host communities. An IDMC assessment in September 2014 found that vulnerable IDP's in Yola town, Adamawa state have been forced to revert to survival sex to meet their basic needs.

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### **Women continue to fight for gender equality in Zimbabwe and the DRC**

Women in Zimbabwe have been calling for tougher punishments for men who have committed acts of sexual or gender based violence against women.

**[Back to top](#)**

The campaign was launched after a video of a gang attacking a woman wearing a miniskirt in Harare went viral. Despite being caught on CCTV, only two members of the gang have been arrested.

Zimbabwe consistently [ranks](#) as one of the top 20 countries of origin for asylum seekers to the UK, and in particular is the country of origin of a high proportion of women making asylum applications in their own right.

The attack on the woman came only two months after the so called 'mini skirt marches' where women in Southern African nations marched to protest against the leniency of the court in dealing with issues of sexual harassment, as well as the general prevalence of sexual harassment and gender based violence.

The campaign in Zimbabwe is associated with a wider discussion on the lack of female parliamentary representation and workplace discrimination. Gender rights activists, fronted by Jessie Majome, the former Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, are calling for a mandatory minimum sentence of nine years for sex offenders.

Figures from the Zimbabwe police released in June 2014 show that 11,000 women reported rape between 2012 and March 2014 - 3,571 of them adults and 7,411 aged under 16. Gender activism has steadily gained traction elsewhere on the continent, where the conversation of women as peacekeepers continues to play a role in the Democratic republic of Congo.

In 2000 the UN Security Council passed its landmark resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The resolution calls for women to be granted a more active role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and encourages gender mainstreaming and women taking more leadership positions.

The Democratic Republic of Congo currently has the UN's largest peacekeeping force on the ground. However, the ability for women to participate in sustainable peace solutions has been limited by entrenched cultural norms of gender roles. While women are often targeted as victims of violence in wartime, including sexual and gender based violence, they remain marginalised in subsequent peace talks and negotiations.

Women still face acute discrimination in the work sphere, with a lack of community acceptance of women in work, leading to stigmatisation for being surrounded by men in a working environment. The belief that women should 'stay home' is prevalent, and members of local reconciliation groups acknowledge the challenges of encouraging women to take up leadership roles and overcome the label of women as 'second class

citizens'.

## UK Training and Events

### Promoting Recovery to Support Women with Complex Needs

The Women and Girls Network (WGN) is running a free two day accredited course in London on the 18-19<sup>th</sup> March on promoting recovery to support women with complex needs. The course will define complex needs, introducing developmental trauma and complex traumatic stress alongside more common clinical perspectives. Strength and evidence based interventions working holistically to support recovery will be explored.

For more information and to apply, please visit [www.wgn.org.uk/training](http://www.wgn.org.uk/training)

### Evelyn Oldfield Unit - Domestic violence in refugee communities

On 6<sup>th</sup> March the Evelyn Oldfield Unit is hosting the first of a two-part series of events on engaging with the issue of domestic violence in refugee communities. The event aims to create links and understanding between 'mainstream' women's domestic violence services and refugee community groups also active on this issue or interested in providing services for women affected by it.

The morning session will allow these two groups to share information about their activities and talk about how to work together and share effective methods of working with women affected by violence. This will be followed in the afternoon by a performance and presentation from Praxis Family Care, a support group for survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence and their children.

For further information or to book attendance contact [sarah@evelynoldfield.co.uk](mailto:sarah@evelynoldfield.co.uk)

## Publications

### Home Office Releases Country Guidance on Women and Girls in Somalia

The Home Office has released a new [Country Information and Guidance](#) (CIG) report on Somalia, focusing specifically on women fearing gender based violence.

The February 2015 report states that gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape, FGM, exploitation and trafficking is widespread in Somalia. Additionally, internally displaced people (IDPs) or women travelling alone without male

**Back to top**

family or clan support are at heightened risk of experiencing gender based violence. The guidance states that Somali women form a Particular Social Group, within the meaning of the 1951 Refugee Convention, due to the widespread discrimination they experience due to their gender.

For IDPs, effective state protection is unlikely to be available in South and Central Somalia or Mogadishu, particularly for those women without familial support, [or without remittances](#) from abroad. Security services throughout the country were found to have several structural weaknesses including impunity for human rights abuses. Impunity for gender based violence is widespread, where traditional laws which often take precedence over weak state rule, discriminate against women and girls. Convictions for rape and sexual violence are very rare, with women often forced to marry the perpetrator. Additionally, women survivors report experiencing fear and shame when reporting such crimes, and often face further discrimination and stigmatisation. The unwillingness or inability of the state security forces to effectively handle reports of sexual or gender based violence means that, in general, women are not able to access effective protection.

Internal relocation can be perilous, with unaccompanied women's vulnerability heightened by Al Shabaab as well as the present famine conditions. Al Shabab's territory, although diminishing, is under strict Sharia law, where women may face violations of their basic human rights including stoning and public whipping as 'punishment'. Additionally, women who are travelling face the risk of being abducted, raped, or becoming victims of forced marriage to Al Shabaab fighters. In some cases, girls have been forced to become suicide bombers.

Those without prospects for securing a livelihood after displacement are at real risk of having to live in makeshift accommodation which falls below acceptable humanitarian standards and facing a heightened risk of gender based violence. Women from minority clans are particularly at risk.

FGM is almost universally practiced throughout Somalia, and is reinforced by strong cultural beliefs, although the practice is declining in Somaliland and Puntland. The Upper Tribunal found in 2011 that FGM is being performed at a rate of over 90%. However, in 2010 it was reported that incidences of FGM among children are on the decline. The CIG report summarised that women fleeing Somalia who can demonstrate they are at risk of FGM or other gender based violence, and cannot escape the threat from internal relocation, should be eligible to be granted asylum on this basis.

## **Update**

Among the estimated six and a half thousand Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ukraine, most of whom have fled violence in the east of the country, 66% are women, 24% are children, according to a [UNHCR update](#) on international protection considerations.

In many cases, families have been separated, with men remaining to guard property, or show allegiance in non-government controlled areas, and women fleeing to the borders of these conflict zones. Alongside the risk from generalised violence in these non-government controlled areas, there are increasing reports of violence against women, including harassment, forced labour and sexual violence.

There is also a risk of domestic and other kinds of violence if women attempt to leave these areas, as this is viewed as a political statement, and anyone assumed to be sympathetic to the Ukrainian government is at increased risk.

There have been some reports of conflict-related sexual violence in areas where levels of violence are high, but there is a lack of support and assistance provided in those areas, as well as a lack of information available, which could be leading to the issue being under-reported.

The lack of adequate provisions, services and accommodation for IDPs in the country is forcing some to attempt to return to their homes in conflict areas out of desperation.

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## **City of Sanctuary Maternity Videos**

The Maternity Stream of City of Sanctuary has released [two videos](#) dealing with pregnancy and childbirth for refugee and asylum seeking women in the UK. The first of the two videos, 'Childbirth in the UK, stories from refugees' brings together the first-hand accounts of refugee and asylum seeking women discussing their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood. The stories highlight the various physical, emotional and cultural challenges and difficulties faced by refugee mothers.

The second video, 'Childbirth in the UK, a guide for refugees' is aimed at refugee and asylum seeking women, giving information and advice about accessing maternity care services, drawn from the experiences of women within the system. It is also hoped that the films will be used as an educational resource for midwives and other health professionals working with refugees and asylum seeking women in need of pregnancy and childbirth support. The video is being translated into 8 additional languages.

**Back to top**

## *Charter of rights of women seeking asylum*



**Endorsements: 352**

**Google group membership: 179**

The Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) is proud to support the campaign to close the Protection Gap for women seeking asylum in the UK.

ASAP works with many inspirational women asylum seekers who are doing everything they can to survive the tough asylum system in the UK. We represent and advise many of these women at the asylum support tribunal in east London. We know therefore, from our direct experience how much of a difference the simple demands of the campaign could make.

The women we work with often find it difficult to disclose traumatic experiences, especially in formal and intimidating environments. It is even harder if a woman has no option but to bring a child with her to interviews and hearings.

Our dedicated women's project at ASAP was started as a result of the extra barriers that women face when trying to negotiate their way through the complex asylum support system in this country. There has been a failure to recognize and address these additional obstacles for women and girls. For this reason we are delighted to be supporting the Protection Gap campaign as a member of the Women's Asylum Charter because it is vital that women seeking safety in the UK are able to access support services that help them to tell their stories as fully as possible and, as a result, increase their chances of being able to access long term protection in the UK.

So far, ASAP has supported the campaign by publicising it on our website and tweeting about it. We found that we have had a really positive response from our supporters on social media; people have re-tweeted our messages and we've been able to reach a bigger audience as a result.

All ASAP staff have signed a one of the postcards for protection and sent them to our MPs asking them to raise the issues with the Home Secretary. We have already had one response back to say that an MP has taken this forward.

We'll continue to do all that we can to support the campaign and hope that it results in some positive change for women in the asylum system. Join us and sign your postcard for protection in support of the rights of women. [www.asylumaid.org.uk/protectiongap](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/protectiongap)

**Back to top**

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.

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