

Women's Asylum News

Women's Project at Asylum Aid

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We have to stop locking up rape victims

written by Debora Singer

In January, Women for Refugee Women published their groundbreaking new research report, [*Detained: women asylum seekers locked up in the UK.*](#)

The report sheds a worrying light on the experiences of women asylum seekers who are detained. Some are detained at the beginning of the asylum process, routed into the detained fast track to have their claims considered. Others are detained at the end when they are appeals rights exhausted and the Home Office is preparing to remove them to their country of origin. In 2012, 2,000 women were detained in one of these ways, with no information as to when they would be released. In fact the UK is one of the few countries in Europe that sets no time limit on asylum detention. In the foreword to the report, Professor Philippe Sands QC states that we need to do away with such centres of detention and replace them with fair, humane alternatives. The right to liberty is at the heart of any conception of justice and the rule of law.

For this report Women for Refugee Women talked to 46 women who had sought asylum and had been detained at some stage in the process, mainly in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. Some were still in detention at the time of this research and some had been released. Nearly three quarters of the women said they had been raped and 41% said they had been tortured. Over 85% had been either raped or tortured. Nearly a fifth of the women were fleeing persecution because they were lesbians. All but one of the women who had been allocated to the detained fast track were victims of rape or torture.

The women's experiences in detention reignited their past traumas from imprisonment in their countries of origin. They talk about the memories coming flooding back. They talked about feeling uncomfortable being guarded by male staff, and some of the women talk of the fear that their male guards were going to do the same to them as the soldiers had done to them back home. One woman said "they kept saying, we're not going to rape you, it's not like that here."

Shockingly half the women said they had experienced verbal abuse in detention, three had experienced physical assault and one had experienced sexual assault. They said they had come to the UK expecting a humane system, a country that respected human rights. Evidently, this was not the case.

Apart from concerns as to where the detention of asylum seeking women fits into national and international human rights legislation, the report notes that the detention of women who have experienced rape and sexual violence would also seem to contravene the Home Office's own policy. One of the action points in the [Government's action plan to end violence against women and girls](#) states that "the Home Office will work with key stakeholders to improve the processes for referring asylum seekers who are victims of sexual violence to the appropriate services and provide appropriate information and advice". Such services are clearly not available in Yarl's Wood.

The report also highlights the impact of being detained indefinitely on women's mental health. As well as being forced to relive the trauma of previous harm in their country of origin, the women also talked about how frightening it was to see other women being removed to their countries of origin knowing that it might be their turn next.

One of the clearest findings was that the experience of detention was immensely distressing, as emphasised by the high levels of depression and suicidal thoughts. Indeed 1 in 5 of the women had tried to kill themselves in detention. Previous reports by MIND, Medical Justice and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons have raised concerns about the fact that the process of asylum itself is damaging to mental health and that mental health care resources are very restricted. Recently the High Court ruled that the care of four people with mental health problems who were held in immigration detention breached Article 3 European Convention on Human Rights, amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment.

Additionally, women reported poor health care for their physical health needs. One woman was three months pregnant when she went into Yarl's Wood and suffered severe weight loss due to vomiting. She said that the only thing she could keep down was cornflakes and milk that other women bought for her from the vending machines using their meagre 71p daily allowances. This woman went on to develop hyperemesis gravidarum, a complication of pregnancy characterised by intractable nausea and vomiting. (Readers may recognise this illness – it is the one from which Kate Middleton suffered in the early stages of her pregnancy).

An additional impact of detention is that women are now separated from their children. Women for Refugee Women campaigned for the end of the detention of children, so it is bitterly ironic that one quarter of the women in the sample had children in the UK who they were unable to care for because of being detained.

Although detention is presented by politicians as an efficient way to control the asylum system and to remove failed asylum seekers, in 2012 barely 1 in 3 (36%) of the women who left detention were removed from the UK. The remainder were released within the UK. Leaving detention creates its own problems. Women talked about the difficulties on release as there is no advice or help. Half of them had been destitute at some stage after detention with no financial support and nowhere to live. Women continue to be haunted by their experiences of detention in the UK. As Lydia Basong, a teacher and playwright from Cameroon who now has refugee status, says, "when I left detention, Yarl's Wood followed me to Manchester."

The report finishes with a number of recommendations. The starting point is that detention has no place in the asylum process and that individuals who seek sanctuary in the UK should not be detained whilst their cases are being considered. Their cases can be heard while they are living in the community at lower cost and with less trauma to the asylum seekers themselves. Until then the key recommendation is that women who have experienced rape, sexual violence and other forms of torture should not be detained, and that if an individual raises these experiences at any point in her asylum claim she should be released to continue her case in the community.

The launch of the report in Portcullis House on 29 January was attended by over 100 people including many women refugees and asylum seekers. The speakers included a cross party panel of MPs, the actress Romola Garai, and [Meltem Avcil](#) who was herself detained as a child with her mother some years ago. Women for Refugee Women have now launched their "[Set Her Free](#)" campaign which includes a [petition](#) by Meltem.

Debora Singer is Policy and Research Manager at Asylum Aid and a Trustee of Women for Refugee Women

Sector update

Questions in the House of Commons: How are asylum officials trained to help trafficking and trauma victims?

On 6th January 2014, Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central, Labour) [asked the government](#):

"What specialist training is offered to asylum case owners with respect to (a) identification of cases of trafficking and (b) working with victims of trauma?"

Mark Harper (The Minister for Immigration) replied:

"All asylum decision makers undertake a 25 day initial training course. This includes training on interviewing vulnerable persons, gender issues and an introduction to the issue of victims of human trafficking, including the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), indicators of human trafficking, and the First Responder referral process.

“Further, all asylum decision makers are required to complete two mandatory e-learning courses, entitled “Human trafficking” and “the National Referral Mechanism”. Content includes indicators of human trafficking and how to identify potential victims and refer them into the National Referral Mechanism.

“In addition, all asylum case owners and caseworkers who operate as Competent Authority decision makers within the NRM are required to undertake additional training on NRM processes, indicators, sensitive interview skills, children as victims of trafficking, NRM decision making, group discussion and NRM partner presentations.

“There is no stand alone training on trauma issues but the issue of trauma is included in a number of training courses, including the Foundation Training Programme and Competent Authority training as above”.

How are the needs of torture victims assessed during asylum screening interviews?

On 6th January, Gareth Thomas MP (Harrow West, Labour) [asked the government](#):

“To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the effects of a delay in making an initial decision on the mental health of an asylum seeker who stated that they were a victim of torture in their screening interview; and if she will make a statement”.

Mr Harper (The Minister for Immigration) replied:

“We aim to take decisions as quickly as possible. In 2012-13, 78% of initial decisions were taken within six months. In fact we aim to take initial decisions more quickly than six months. In 2012-13, we took 54% within 30 days, up from 47% in 2011-12.

“Sometimes cases will take longer than six months for an initial decision for reasons beyond our control, for example where we are asked to delay a decision for the benefit of the applicant to allow sufficient time to provide expert medical evidence relating to torture or where there are issues relating to national security.

“Those who claim to have been victims of torture are signposted to Freedom from Torture or the Helen Bamber Foundation. However, it is for the applicant or their representative to decide whether to seek an appointment with one of these organisations”.

Significant Legal Issues

AS (Afghanistan) v SSHD [2013] EWCA Civ 1469

This is an extremely welcome decision from the Court of Appeal on the question of whether an Immigration Judge of the Immigration Asylum Chamber must accept as conclusive the decision of the Competent Authority (CA), on whether an appellant has been a victim of trafficking. In finding that it did fall within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal to consider the matter, the Court of Appeal overturned the earlier decision of the Tribunal in SHL v SSHD [2013]

UKUT 00312, that challenging a decision under the Trafficking Convention in the Tribunal was a 'backdoor challenge' in that the correct recourse was by way of Judicial Review.

AS was a young Afghan male. In 2008, he came to the attention of the police who, believing him to be a minor, placed him in the care of Social Services. He absconded but re-emerged in 2010 and claimed asylum. In short, he claimed that his family had suffered harm in Afghanistan and that an agent had been paid to smuggle him and his father out of the county. He had become separated from his father in Greece but had managed, via an agent, to come to the UK. On absconding from the care of the Local Authority, he had contacted the original agent who directed him to a Mr Saleem, who said that the family still owed money for the exit from Afghanistan. As a consequence, AS would be held captive in the basement of a London hotel to work off the debt. AS was released from his bondage in October 2010.

AS received a positive 'reasonable grounds' decision under the Trafficking Convention, but a negative Conclusive decision. The decision-maker appeared to accept that the conditions in which AS had been required to work did amount to forced labour. However, she found that, on the evidence before her, AS had not been a minor on leaving Afghanistan and that, 'forced labour' only amounted to 'forced labour' if the victim was a minor. Hence, what had occurred was 'people smuggling' not 'trafficking'.

AS appealed the asylum refusal. Whilst the IJ considered that the CA decision that AS had not been a victim of trafficking was 'astonishing', he went on to dismiss the asylum appeal. AS appealed to the Upper Tier Tribunal and was granted permission on the grounds that the Immigration Judge had not reached a clear finding on whether AS had been trafficked to the UK and subjected to forced labour. However, the Upper Tribunal Judge concluded that, as the First Tier Tribunal (FTT) had no jurisdiction to review the trafficking decision of the CA, the absence of findings by the FTT Judge on that point was immaterial. AS appealed to the Court of Appeal to clarify whether a decision of the CA in relation to Trafficking could be challenged at the Tribunal.

The Court of Appeal took a reasoned and practical approach to the issue before it. It was clear that in an appeal before the Tribunal, the relevant immigration decision is not the decision to refuse asylum, but the decision to remove. As such, an appellant is entitled to raise arguments as to why she should not be removed, including that she is or has been a victim of trafficking. Indeed, the issue of the One Stop Notice requires an appellant to raise all grounds on which they wish to rely in their appeal and the position that the Tribunal had no jurisdiction to consider the trafficking decision was 'inconsistent with the giving of a One-Stop warning'.

Further, the Court rightly noted that, "If the First Tier Tribunal is entitled to take into account a decision that an appellant is (or has been) a victim of trafficking it seems odd that, if a perverse decision has been reached that an appellant has not been a victim of trafficking, the Tribunal cannot consider whether the facts of the case do, in fact, show that the appellant was a victim of trafficking'.

However, a word of warning was issued that the appeal before the Tribunal should not be treated as an opportunity for an appellant to simply rerun a case which had been fairly and properly considered on the facts by the CA. However, when, as in the instant case, the decision of the CA was perverse, the arguments of the appellant on that matter should be considered.

Unfortunately, the experience of many practitioners who work with victims of trafficking is that poor quality decisions by the CA under the Trafficking Convention are far from unusual. Sometimes they are perverse, more often simply cursory, poorly thought through, and display a lack of understanding of the Convention and of relevant case law.

As decisions of the CA will now be subject to more regular judicial scrutiny, it is hoped that this case will encourage the adoption of a more careful and considered approach to claims under the Trafficking Convention. If it does not, at least it affords appellants the opportunity for this important matter to be considered as part of their asylum appeal without the requirement to pursue a long and costly challenge by way of Judicial Review.

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 Adrienne Anderson for sharing the following 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

DZ (Anonymity Order Made) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2013]
UKAITUR AA022492011 (22 October 2013)

This decision of the Upper Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber (IAC) discusses the application of the particular social group (PSG) ground to an appellant who would be perceived to have transgressed Iranian social mores by virtue of conducting a relationship outside of marriage. While involving a male applicant and the particular Iranian society, it includes some discussion on the application of the PSG ground in the UK which will have relevance to women originating from societies which apply strict moral and behavioural codes to women.

In particular, Judge Grubb discusses the proper approach to PSG cases in the UK and the interpretation of Article 10.1(d) indent 2 of the European Union Qualification Directive (QD).

The appellant was a 20 year old Iranian national who had formed a non-intimate relationship with a young girl, F, outside of marriage. The relationship was discovered by F's father who beat the appellant on one occasion. In attempting to flee this attack, the appellant accidentally caused F's father to fall down a flight of stairs. Upon finding out the following day that F's father did not survive the fall, the appellant illegally exited Iran. He feared prosecution for the murder of F's father and for his illicit relationship.

The appellant claimed that he was part of the group "people who have breached or are perceived to have breached the moral code in Iran". At [56], Judge Grubb accepted that the appellant shared an "innate characteristic" with others in his position or together with others who have or are perceived to have transgressed Iranian social mores" and that he shared a common background which cannot be changed.

Any prosecution or conviction for such behaviour would not change the fact that the appellant had offended the moral code. Judge Grubb made it clear that prosecution through the criminal justice system did not define the group but reflects the potential response of the state to some of the group. He found that "[i]t is the individual's behaviour and its disapprobation by reference to the moral codes of Iranian society which defines the group."

This was an important finding to prevent the invalidation of the PSG in this claim, given that a PSG cannot be defined exclusively by the persecution that the members of the group suffer or by a shared fear of persecution.

As mentioned above, Judge Grubb also dealt with Article 10.1(d) indent 2 insofar as it might appear to also require an appellant to show that he or she would have a distinct identity, that is, be perceived to be different by others in society, in the country of origin. Despite the guidance of the UK House of Lords in *Fornah*,¹ that the QD should *not* be taken to impose the double requirement on an appellant to show that they have both an innate characteristic and a distinct identity, some decisions of the Upper Tribunal Immigration and Asylum chamber have imposed the double requirement on applicants.²

Judge Grubb (though he did not need to make this point because he found the appellant in this case to be part of a group that would be set apart from others by Iranian society), said at [59] that he would interpret the QD consistently with UNHCR guidance and the dicta of the House of Lords. That is, he would interpret the QD to require *either* that an appellant show that they were part of a group defined by a shared or innate characteristic *or* that they were part of a group that would be cognisable in the particular society despite its members not sharing an innate characteristic.

Further sources:

For more information about the PSG ground, particularly its judicial application, please see UNHCR's publication as part of its Research Series: *The 'Ground with the Least Clarity': A Comparative Study of Jurisprudential Developments relating to 'Membership of a Particular Social Group'*, August 2012. In Part 4, the paper discusses both the innate characteristic and social perception approach, and whether one or both approaches are required in a range of European and common law countries. Part 5 focuses on jurisprudence on particular types of groups including groups defined along sex/gender and sexual orientation/gender identity lines.

For the full case, please see:

<http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKAITUR/2013/AA022492011.html>

National News

Women asylum seekers caught up in providers' housing crisis

Last year, the companies responsible for providing housing for asylum seekers were accused of [leaving women homeless and harassed](#). Now their handling of housing contracts has been criticised again, this time by the National Audit Office NAO (NAO).

¹ *K v SSHD; Fornah v SSHD* [2006] UKHL 46).

² For discussion of this phenomenon, see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *The 'Ground with the Least Clarity': A Comparative Study of Jurisprudential Developments relating to 'Membership of a Particular Social Group'*, August 2012, PPLA/2012/02, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f7d94722.html>, p. 39.

The *Guardian* [reported](#) that the government is seeking to recover millions of pounds from private companies G4S and Serco, after finding that the accommodation it found for many asylum seekers falls below normal standards, and was either inadequate or uninhabitable. Asylum seekers are required to live in a property and location of the government's choosing, with no say over where they might live. MPs familiar with the standard of housing in which asylum seekers are placed have called it "not fit for living" and displaying "abject disregard for basic human dignity".

This is not the first time the companies have been reprimanded for the poor conditions into which asylum seekers are forced. Research by the Maternity Alliance and Refugee Council in February 2013 [raised concerns](#) that the housing provided by these companies puts pregnant asylum seekers at risk, including two examples of women being evicted at the time they were due to give birth. One of the women, Catherine, whose support was ended just days before she gave birth, was subsequently moved to G4S's mother and baby unit in Stockton, and described the experience as "total displacement". Another woman in Rotherham was evicted on the day she was to be induced.

One of the agencies, Cascade, was found at the end of February 2013 to have no frontline female housing officers for its 700 properties across West Yorkshire.

The plight of women asylum seekers highlighted by peers in Parliament

MPs, peers and campaigners gathered together in January to discuss the impact of immigration detention in the UK, in a meeting organised by the charity [Detention Action](#). Several attendees told stories of what could befall women asylum seekers if they were forced into immigration detention.

One speaker told of a young woman from Guinea Conakry, who had arrived in the UK on a spousal visa but had been adjudged to be a minor. Even though people under 18 years old should not be detained, she was taken to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. Overwhelmed by the conditions in Yarl's Wood, the young woman – who had no prior history of mental illness – became deeply depressed and ultimately tried to take her own life.

She was ultimately released from detention, but only after profound damage to her mental and physical health.

Heather Jones from the charity [Yarl's Wood Befrienders](#) also spoke. The practice of moving detainees between detention facilities is well-established, and she explained that women, for whom the only detention facility is Yarl's Wood, face a particular challenge. Men can be moved between several detention centres, but if the authorities choose to move a woman then the only option is often into the prison estate. This might include women who have never been held in prisons before.

The event was attended by a number of MPs and peers including Baroness Shirley Williams, Lord Avebury, Lord Roberts, John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn. They pledged to maintain pressure on the government to improve government policy around detention of immigrants and asylum seekers.

Charities publish response on women and asylum to the Home Affairs Committee

Last year the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) held a wide-ranging inquiry into asylum. The HASC's conclusions and recommendations were published in October 2013 (see *WAN* #120), and the Home Secretary responded in December 2013.

Asylum Aid has now published [a briefing on the Home Secretary's response](#), which focuses specifically on the quality of asylum decision-making for women and the areas where the government's reply is inadequate. The Home Secretary's response is not thought to go far enough. Despite statements of good intentions, there are insufficient details about the mechanisms needed to improve the current situation.

For example, the Home Secretary has accepted some of the recommendations and referred to existing asylum policies; but the stated policies will not in fact result in the recommendations being implemented.

The Home Secretary accepted the HASC's emphasis on using performance management to improve standards; but only a consistent package, including line management, performance management, supervision and appraisals systems, can achieve this. And she accepted that training for asylum officials can and will improve; but better systems and decisions for women seeking asylum need a change in culture across the Home Office, with far greater leadership and vision. We are pleased that Sarah Rapson, Interim Director of UKVI has taken on the role of Gender Champion and would urge her to use this to promote a gender-sensitive asylum system.

Among its key recommendations, Asylum Aid is calling on UK Visas and Immigration to overhaul its treatment of rape victims, learning from the successes and failures of the police and CPS in this area, and to introduce local screening services for women who cannot travel safely to Croydon.

International News

Afghanistan: "the world's worst for women's rights"

In January, the *Guardian* reported on the substantial barriers faced by [women seeking safety from persecution in Afghanistan](#), both inside the country and outside its borders.

The article tells the story of Norzia Atmar, a high-profile Aghan politician forced to flee from virulent attacks by her ex-husband following a "bitter divorce". Hunted by both her husband's family and her own, both of whom feel that Norzia's actions has brought shame upon them, she has managed to get across the Afghan border and apply to be resettled from there by the United Nations. As the article makes clear, it isn't possible to apply for resettlement from within Afghanistan itself, leaving many more people trapped inside the country with no hope of finding lasting protection.

The *Guardian* points out that, over the last five years, barely one in ten of the people claiming asylum in the UK from Afghanistan are women. UK courts are also more likely to send a woman home than a man. The article quotes Asylum Aid's Debora Singer, who seeks to explain why:

“Victims of domestic abuse are unlikely to have documentary evidence of what has happened to them: you don’t get a certificate for being beaten. Also the shame and trauma affects their memory and it can be difficult for them to provide a coherent story ... disclosing what has happened to them”.

Thousands of women displaced as fighting worsens in South Sudan

Fresh violence has erupted in South Sudan, the newest state in the world, as part of a political struggle which has seen thousands of women and families caught up in the brutal fighting. The UN Refugee Agency [estimates](#) that more than 401,000 people have been displaced inside South Sudan since it gained independence in 2011.

Women are in grave and growing danger of exploitation and abuse. Reports indicate that women are being forced to accompany rebel groups, cooking for them and carrying looted goods as they move between regions.

Meanwhile, [women are also at the frontline of the violence](#). The charity Medicine Sans Frontières (MSF) has been working in the region for decades, and has recorded a worrying new trend in women seeking help after they have been raped. “Since 2005,” said MSF in the Pibor region, “MSF never treated – had never seen – any cases of rape. And if you look, for example, at 2012, we have received 26 cases of sexual violence”. MSF added that 74% of violence survivors were women and children.

MSF reported a first-person account from one woman who had seen her home destroyed and family killed. “On the day of the attack”, she said, “they set [huts] on fire and threw children in the fire. I collected the children to run away but, because I am old, I cannot run fast and they killed the children ... if the children can run, they will shoot them with the gun. If they are small and cannot run, they will kill them with a knife”.

South Sudan – a timeline

- 9 July 2011 – Independence Day
 - August 2011 – at least 600 people killed in ethnic clashes
 - November 2011 – a disaster declared in Jonglei state after some 100,000 people are forced to flee clashes between rival ethnic groups
 - August 2012 – 200,000 refugees flee into South Sudan to escape fighting between the Sudanese army and rebels along Sudan’s southern border
 - March 2013 – a demilitarised zone is agreed after twelve months’ negotiation
 - July 2013 – South Sudan’s President Kiir dismisses his entire political cabinet
 - December 2013 – hundreds of people die in clashes between rival army factions as the struggle for political power continues
 - January 2014 – a tentative ceasefire is agreed
-

**“Women appear to be the main target”:
rape and sexual violence widespread in the Central African Republic**

The UN has described in harrowing detail the persecution and violence to which women are subjected in the Central African Republic (CAR), where serious conflict has been raging for more than a year.

Brigitte Balipou, a magistrate from CAR, [addressed](#) the UN Security Council at the end of 2013 and told delegates “women are victims of violence on a daily basis. They are being raped; they are being assaulted; their husbands are being killed; or they are being raped in front of their children”. She added: “They don’t have enough food; they are not getting medical attention; they don’t have access to drinking water – they have nothing”. It is reported that young girls are also in danger of being recruited as ‘wives’ to older soldiers on all sides of the war, and being subjected to sexual slavery and violence.

These reports are supported by accounts from others in the camps housing the growing number of people displaced by violence. One man told aid workers that women “appeared to be the main targets”, targeted for sexual advances or to carry out labour, and then attacked if they refused. “If the woman says no, she can be killed”.

The violence in CAR has escalated rapidly towards the end of 2013. The [number of child soldiers](#) is estimated to have doubled in the last few months of fighting, and there are even reports of children being beheaded. The European Commission has warned that arms are flooding into the country, with conflict continuing as the region’s political instability grows. Some humanitarian agencies are talking about the need to involve women in accessing justice and rebuilding the country, but all agree that violence urgently needs to cease before this can take place.

There are no official numbers on the number of people killed in CAR, but the [UN estimates](#) that 935,000 people have been internally displaced and 600 killed in the capital Bangui alone. 3,500 children are thought to have been recruited into the armed forces, and the UN has declared a Level 3 emergency.

Publications

**The Burmese army targets women for sexual abuse “with impunity” –
new report from the Women’s League of Burma**

A new report from the Women’s League of Burma – [Same Impunity, Same Patterns](#) – documents ongoing sexual violence against ethnic women and girls in the country. The ruling military regime is widely considered one of the world’s most repressive and abusive.

The report records the cases of more than 100 women who have been raped since the controversial General Elections in 2010. However, restricted access for researchers makes it likely that this is a conservative estimate.

In one incident, the report details the case of a woman called Sumlut Roi Ja, who was abducted by the army in 2013 and forced to cook and clean for them during the day. During

the night, she was gang-raped. The military denied any knowledge of Sumlut's fate, despite a number of witnesses to the original abduction, and a court case to uncover the truth was dismissed for lack of evidence when no witnesses were allowed to speak. It is feared that Sumlut has been killed. Other cases include the targeting and rape of an eight year-old girl.

The Women's League of Burma describes the way that rape and sexual violence fits into the regime's brutal 'Four Cuts' policy, by which parts of the population are deliberately cut off from access to food, funds, information and recruitment. This process treats civilians as legitimate targets in whom to instill fear, and over whom to exercise power. In this context, the Women's League describes rape and sexual violence as war crimes as well as crimes against humanity.

Same Impunity, Same Patterns also quotes Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's high-profile pro-democracy campaigner, who said in 2011: "Rape is used in my country as a weapon of war against those who only want to live in peace, who only want to assert their basic human rights. It is used as a weapon by armed forces to intimidate the ethnic nationalities and to divide are country".

What role can the personal stories of women refugees play in advocacy and law? A new report by the Human Rights Law Centre

When I tell my story I'm in charge: Ethical and effective storytelling in advocacy is a [new report](#) written by Rachel Ball, which looks in detail at the potential benefits and pitfalls of inviting people to tell their own stories as part of campaigning and advocacy. This includes the role of women asylum seekers and refugees.

Bell talked with dozens of campaigners and practitioners in Australia, the UK and United States, and looked at a range of case studies from charities seeking justice for young people to Asylum Aid's 2009 'Every Single Woman' campaign. She notes the central importance of informed consent to letting people tell their own stories, and the potential ethical dangers in obtaining this from people who may be vulnerable or at risk, but Bell is also clear that these are voices which can and should be part of campaigning.

This may improve the quality and authenticity of the campaign, but it may also aid the person involved. As the refugee women involved with 'Every Single Woman' explained, the opportunity to tell stories can expand the horizons of women who have often been silenced and left without a voice.

"There is much to gain," Bell concludes, "if we recognise that stories are central to our work and approach the challenge of storytelling with respect, humility and creativity".

UK Training and Events

Support for vulnerable migrant women

Thursday 20th February

Amnesty International, 25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA

Free. From 10:00am to 5.00pm. For further information, or to book a place, email Sarah Menzies on sarah@evelynoldfield.co.uk, or phone 020 7697 4102.

This training, organised by Evelyn Oldfield, is for women from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds working with refugee and asylum-seeking organisations.

Seminar 1: Learning how to respond when women disclose abuse, 10am - 1.00pm

Seminar 2: Supporting women with welfare and immigration issues, 2:00 - 5.00pm

Participants will receive relevant materials and copies of relevant Rights of Women legal guides.

Mine. Yours. Others: Migrant Women Taking Their Place in the Community

Wednesday 12th March

25 Hanbury Street, London E1 6QR (off Brick Lane)

Free. From 4.30pm to 6.30pm. RSVP by 21/02/14 please to jessica@thearbour.org.uk

This event is a celebration and culmination of The Arbour's Lead to Inspire project, a community leadership programme that supports newly-arrived migrant women to become leaders and trailblazers for local and national integration.

There will also be the launch of a research paper exploring the challenges of migration and female leadership, outlining several recommendations based on research carried out in collaboration with Lead to Inspire participants. The hope is that this event will bring together a range of key organisations and community leaders already working with and for the migrant community, to promote understanding of how migrant women can take an active role in local initiatives.

Charter of rights of women seeking asylum



Endorsements: 347

Google group membership: 169

Refugee Women's Strategy Group (RWSG) supports over 100 refugee and asylum seeking women in Glasgow to 'speak for themselves'

Women who participated in the *Speak for Yourself* initiative held in Scotland between June and November 2013 spoke out about the huge impact that the asylum process has on their mental health and the need for a gender sensitive asylum process. This, they said, should include childcare, regional screening and a better understanding of women's experiences. The right to work, more employment support for women, improved housing conditions and the need to tackle racism and discrimination were also high on the list of priorities.

Since 2004 RWSG has been committed to ensuring that the voices of refugee women in Scotland are heard and to representing their views to decision-makers to influence policy and practice. For six busy months, *Speak for Yourself* involved RWSG members, supported by Scottish Refugee Council, listening to as many refugee and asylum seeking women as possible to find out their key concerns. They met with refugee community organisations and carried out focus groups and individual interviews. All of this culminated in a vibrant and empowering women's conference in November.

As RWSG member, Meriem Timizar said, "Last year we identified the need to engage with the wider community of refugee women and we're delighted so many women told us what's important to them. We're looking forward to working together to tackle these issues". The conference, attended by 75 women, aimed to be as participative as possible, with inputs from RWSG, discussion groups and a fashion show where women shared their favourite music and traditional dress. One participant said: "There are many places where women do not have a voice – today we had the whole platform".

Forming the basis for RWSG's new action plan, the report from the engagement process will be launched in April at a meeting with key stakeholders.

For more information contact rwsg@mail.com
or Elaine Connelly (elaine.connelly@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)
or Fiona Ballantyne (fiona.ballantyne@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)
Women's Community Development Workers, 0141 248 9799.

For more information on the Charter and the Missed Out campaign, please go to www.asylumaid.org.uk/charter

If your organisation would like to endorse the Charter, please send an email simply stating the name of your organisation to charter@asylumaid.org.uk

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.

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

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