

IAP NEWS

No 10

The newsletter for the Inter-Agency Partnership June 2001

Welcome to the June edition of IAP News. This edition features information on the Refugee Arrivals Project, EA North, Asylum Statistics, an update on the Barbara Roche meeting and NASS related issues, and the Bulletin Board

Shahram Aghili tells IAP News about the Refugee Arrivals Project (RAP), one of the six voluntary sector agencies that forms the Inter-Agency Partnership

Why was RAP established?
Refugee Arrivals Project (RAP) came into being through joint efforts and concerns of many people and organisations. In 1987 refugee organisations expressed concern that new asylum seekers were particularly vulnerable at ports of entry, and could suffer through lack of information, orientation and specialist provision. Research was carried out and in 1988 a steering committee was formed, made up of representatives of community organisations and refugee agencies. As a result of this RAP was established and started receiving newly arrived asylum seekers. Since its inception RAP has been covering the major ports of entry in and around London namely Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton, Stansted and London City airports.

Before 3/4/00 and the formation of NASS, RAP would provide newly arrived asylum seekers with full board accommodation, advise them of their rights and responsibilities, and meet their other immediate needs such as accessing health care and referring them to other specialist agencies. In effect RAP was acting as a temporary sanctuary before accessing asylum seekers to mainstream benefits.

What has been the role and responsibility of RAP since the NASS system was introduced?
Since 03/4/00 and the establishment of NASS, RAP has been advising and assisting asylum seekers in completion of the NASS application form and providing them with full board emergency accommodation. Additionally we cater for other immediate needs such as access to health care, legal advice and other specialist agencies until such time that asylum seekers are dispersed to the regions by NASS or are leaving us to join their sponsors.

The majority of RAP project workers are from refugee or ethnic backgrounds and each one of them speaks at least two languages. We also employ a pool of interpreters covering more than 35 different languages.

RAP's Amigos (befriending project) looks after the most vulnerable of asylum seekers by assigning them a volunteer to take them through the initial stages of their new life in the UK. Our BASIC (Betterment of Asylum Seekers Immediate Conditions) project provides toiletry packs, education packs, phone cards, clothing and other basic necessities of life. Our clients come from all corners of the world including Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Middleast.

RAP has also been playing a proactive role within the asylum support partnership and has been influential in terms of highlighting the gaps in the current system and making constructive proposals for alleviating some of the problems asylum seekers encounter.

Why has RAP recently started assisting London disbenefited singles and childless couples?
The reason we are assisting this group of asylum seekers lies in the fact that whilst disbenefited families could approach Social Services to assist them in gaining access to NASS, no agency was responsible for the provision of the same type of support for singles and childless couples. Such clients were left in the dark not knowing how and from where to receive support.

What two improvements would you make with NASS? There have been many positive steps in the development of NASS policies but much more work needs to be done. In particular there are still uncertainties regarding the role of social services and provision of adequate support for disabled asylum seekers. Another area, which is in dire need of clarification, is the non-dependent deduction from the housing benefit and council tax benefit of sponsors of asylum seekers. NASS needs to come up with clear and unequivocal policies in such areas. These topics need to be covered in a separate article.

For further information about RAP contact:
Shahram Aghili – 020 8607 6943
Shahram.aghili@refugee-arrivals.org.uk
41b Cross Lances Road, Hounslow Middlesex TW3 2AD

asylum support programme



MIGRANT HELPLINE



refugee action



refugee arrivals project



REFUGEE COUNCIL

scottish refugee council



WELSH REFUGEE COUNCIL

Representatives from the IAP met with Barbara Roche, Immigration Minister, on 01/05/00. The main points discussed were as follows:

Vouchers

The results of the voucher review will be made available in the summer. It was supposed to be completed in early 2001 but the review has taken longer than expected. It was acknowledged that the review should be thorough rather than quick but **the urgent need for a more effective system to be introduced was emphasised**. Difficulties with the voucher enquiry line were also discussed as was the importance of establishing a local delivery mechanism that could resolve problems on the spot.

Reception Assistant Role

The vision of a more integrated reception phase whereby good quality accommodation and access to legal advice are available was discussed. One element of this proposal being that the support and asylum application would be dealt with simultaneously. The Minister stated that they are thinking about integrating the support and the asylum claim processes into one streamlined system.

One Stop Service

The role of the OSS as one of independent advice and advocacy, focussing on work with vulnerable clients, integration, community development and linking up with local voluntary sector for better referral and signposting was emphasised. The Minister shared this vision but pointed out the difficulty in implementing the integration strategy when so many asylum seekers will not be able to stay in the UK and that many will be removed at the end of the process. The Partnership re-iterated the need for a credible asylum system where good quality decisions are made and people are given access to legal advice, otherwise the removals policy will be extremely contentious. The Minister stated that the Home Office does not necessarily agree with the Partnership on the need for legal advice at all stages of the asylum process, and that emphasis will be on removals next year which will not be easy for anyone.

Regionalisation of NASS

The Partnership explained the need for NASS to have regional presence in order for the dispersal system to work properly. The need for local immigration offices is greater than ever, to avoid asylum seekers travelling across the country to attend interviews.

Unfortunately the meeting had to come to an abrupt end as the Minister was required to go and vote. It was agreed that the Partnership would write to her outlining the main points raised and anything else there was not time to cover. A further meeting was requested in two months time. Obviously with the general election around the corner we do not know who will be Immigration Minister after June 7th; however, the Partnership will continue to press for meetings with senior ministers to keep the needs of asylum seekers on the agenda.

ASYLUM STATISTICS: APRIL 2001

The Home Office received 5,000 new asylum applications in April 2001, a decrease of 14% on the previous month. The total number of new asylum applications received in 2001 so far is 22,715.

Main Nationalities of Asylum Applicants: March 01

Nationality	Number
Afghanistan	700
Sri Lanka	445
Somalia	420
Fed Rep of Yugoslavia	375
Iraq	295
Iran	295
Turkey	270
Pakistan	220
China	135
India	130
Sierra Leone	110
Zimbabwe	110
Romania	100
Albania	100
Other nationalities	1,290

NB: All figures are provisional and rounded – source Home Office

The current positive decision rate (i.e. grants of refugee status or ELR) on applications given substantial examination remains at 30% at the end of April 2001. However, **many more asylum applications are successful at the appeals levels**. Nationalities given a higher positive decision rate than the average of 30% for April 2001 were Sierra Leone (89%), Afghanistan (88%), Somalia (78%) and Iraq (33%).

The Home Office received 11,890 asylum appeals in April – an 8% increase from the previous month. The total number of appeals received in 2001 so far was 41,810, bringing the monthly average to 10,453.

Source:

HomeOffice Statistics
www.homeoffice.gov.uk
 Refugee Council
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

UPDATE

Emergency Accommodation (North) Project update

Following on from last month's update, EA North is rolling full steam ahead with NASS aiming for a **start date of 4 July**. The intention remains to ring-fence Central London and not allow access to EA (in London) at all except for those deemed to be medically unfit to travel. NASS aims to second a qualified medical officer from the NHS to undertake such examinations 'without delay' and does not intend to impose set criteria but to leave the decision to qualified medical opinion.

- Contrary to last month's update, **NASS forms will not be filled out until the applicant is outside London**, at one of the EA sites procured specifically for this project. Instead only skeleton information will be recorded prior to boarding a bus. An asylum application must have been made in order to access NASS support
- People waiting to board a bus will be directed to a **holding area or 'coffee lounge'** (destination yet to be confirmed but likely to be near Croydon for easy access from the Asylum Screening Unit) where basic facilities will be available
- Some EA will be available in London to accommodate people who arrive after the last bus has gone or over the weekend. The Refugee Council will not be involved in the running of this unit
- **Bedspaces outside London for EA North** – as far as we know NASS is contracting for 200 bedspaces through the Scottish Consortium and another 400 through an as yet unnamed private provider. NASS initially approached Local Authorities for EA North but did not get sufficient expressions of interest, therefore a private provider is now involved. The privately provided accommodation is within reach of Liverpool and Leeds for ICD interview access
- A thorough special needs assessment is intended to take place once in EA North, it is not clear who will be responsible for this. There will however, be arrangements in place for those accepted as ongoing patients of the Medical Foundation who will be returned and housed in London
- The filling out of the NASS forms is part of the specification for EA North, therefore the providers of the accommodation may fulfil this function. There is no Reception Assistant function built into EA North
- Dispersal from EA North will happen in the same way as it does from EA elsewhere, it will not necessarily be within the same region to start with but this is the longer term intention.

What does this all mean for us?

- It is hard to tell exactly how EA North will affect the work of the Partnership. Refugee Council's London operation will be affected in the sense that they will no longer be providers of EA however they will still be dealing with voucher only cases and possibly special needs cases as well.
- In the regions the impact on our work will very much depend on where the EA North is situated. We do not yet know what level of involvement is likely while applicants are in EA North but NASS has indicated that some providers may wish to sub-contract NASS form filling and dispersal briefings to the local voluntary sector. This will be a matter for each agency to consider.
- **One Stop Services will continue to be independent advocates for asylum seekers** living in the region and those situated in the same regions as EA North will undoubtedly see an increase in client numbers.

Millie Barrett, Programme Secretary of the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team, is on the EA North Project Board and will be providing regular updates in IP News. Millie is also ensuring that the concerns of the Partnership, particularly regarding special needs cases and access to legal advice, are continually being raised within discussions.

Millie Barrett – 020 7840 4348, m.barrett@refugeecouncil.org.uk

COVERING THE COST OF FUNERAL PAYMENTS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

NASS has yet to publish a Policy Bulletin regarding assistance towards funeral costs of asylum seekers. Additionally, there has been recent change in legislation. Consequently, what is to follow is subject to change but here are some guidelines as to who is eligible for such payments and the process for burial/cremation of deceased asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers who are supported either by NASS or under the Interim Arrangements cannot access the Social Fund as they are not ordinarily resident here. Should a destitute person die in hospital, the NHS Trust is responsible for the funeral arrangements. Outside of hospital, responsibility falls to Environmental Health. In both situations, the deceased's faith, cultural or religious beliefs will be taken into account. Normally the deceased will be cremated but where this is against such beliefs or wishes, the deceased will be buried. Costs will cover a simple, but respectful funeral, including the burial plot and any medical certificates required. **Please note that costs will not be reimbursed after a funeral has taken place should relatives or individuals make such arrangements.** Therefore, it is essential that the relevant authority be informed prior to making any arrangements.

Finally, you may be aware of recent changes in legislation about those who access the Social Fund for funeral payments. There are three important separate points to note:

(1) The change in legislation corrects an anomaly whereby a claimant (not the deceased) who is not an asylum seeker and is eligible for benefits and has relatives on NASS support will, from 7 October 2001, be able to access the Fund. (Hitherto, if a claimant's relatives were NASS supported, the claimant was not eligible to access the fund); **(2) If the deceased is supported by NASS or under the Interim Arrangements**, irrespective of the claimant's status or eligibility, access to the Fund will not be granted as the deceased is not ordinarily resident; and **(3) an asylum seeker who is eligible for benefits can apply to the Social Fund.**

SUPPORT FOR PREGNANT ASYLUM SEEKERS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS WITH YOUNG BABIES

The **Maternity Alliance** is embarking on a project to investigate the healthcare and social support available to pregnant asylum seekers and new parents, particularly in dispersal areas, and the impact on maternal and infant health as a consequence of inadequate voucher support. The overall aim of the project is to highlight the fact that this group of asylum seekers has special needs and the support system should reflect these needs.

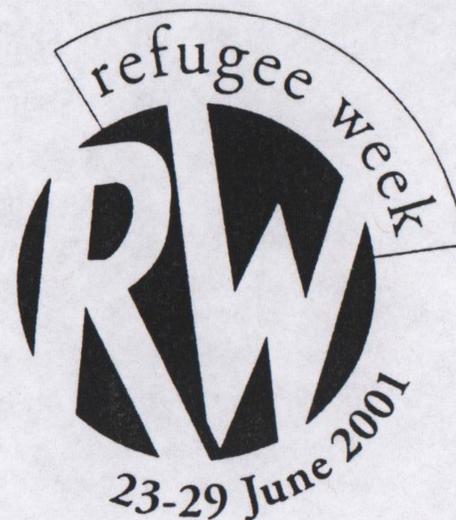
Project Objectives

- To investigate the healthcare and social support offered to pregnant women and new families and the availability of specialist initiatives in dispersal areas, including linkworkers and interpreters within the maternity services, access to HIV services and rape counselling
- To gather case histories on individual experiences and outcomes, including pregnancy outcome, birthweight, health and baby, health of mother and cases of postnatal depression
- To investigate the quality and location of accommodation offered to pregnant women and new families and investigate how many opt for crowded living with friends or relatives to avoid dispersal away from community networks
- To highlight the true cost of a healthy diet needed for pregnant women and new families and investigate how many opt for crowded living with friends or relatives to avoid dispersal away from community networks
- To build on our existing work training maternity health professionals on the care and support of pregnant asylum seekers and new families
- To extend our outreach programme delivering welfare advice to meet the needs of the group
- To develop a lobbying programme to highlight the needs of pregnant asylum seekers and new families, including the importance of adequate maternity care and social support, access to a good diet, and restoration of access to the Welfare Food Scheme for pregnant women and their babies (particularly where an HIV+ mother is advised not to breastfeed)

The Maternity Alliance hope to interview approximately 40 asylum seekers who are either currently pregnant, have given birth in the UK or have arrived in the UK with a child under one. The purpose of the interview will be to talk about the woman's maternity experiences and how she has coped in the voucher/dispersal system. The overall aim of the project is to demonstrate the inadequacy of the current support system in meeting the special needs of pregnant women and new families, and to lobby for improvements.

If you know of anyone who can help with this project please contact:

Jenny McCleish (jmcleish@maternityalliance.org.uk)
The Maternity Alliance, 45 Beech Street,
London EC2P 2LX



Refugee Week will be held during the last week of June (23rd to 29th)

What does it involve?

- hundreds of events, exhibitions, and activities taking place throughout the UK
- Opportunity for refugees and refugee organisations to influence UK public opinion and policy towards refugees and asylum seekers, and improve public understanding of the issues

Refugee Week was initiated in 1998 by RefAid and the Refugee Council, who are working in partnership this year with the LondonArts, UNHCR, Refugee Action, the Arts Council of England, Save the Children, and a professional artist from the refugee community. Refugee Week 2001 will develop a wider spread of national partnerships, reflecting the recent dispersal of refugees across the UK.

For details of events contact:

Email: Refugee.Week@refugeecouncil.org.uk
Refugee Week information line tel:
020 7820 3055

Please send articles or letters that you would like to appear in the next edition of this newsletter to:

Nic Alderson

Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team

Refugee Council

240-250 Ferndale Road

London SW9 8BB

nic.alderon@refugeecouncil.org.uk