

“That is why, I come to UK to be free from danger, anxiety, worries and suffering. But in reality, there are worries and suffering to get decision on application”

Overview

In 2007 Asylum Aid launched its Asylum Rights Watch survey, so that people who have come into contact with the UK's asylum system can tell us their experiences and contribute to our policy and campaigning work. This is the first in a series of dossiers summarising responses to the Asylum Rights Watch survey (see separate dossiers on destitution and the right to work). This information sheet is based on submissions received between October 2007 and April 2008. It presents a general overview of the responses that reflected on how the asylum process treats asylum seekers and how this affects confidence in the system.

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Process

Many asylum seekers reported that decision-making on their claims had been subject to considerable delays and referred to the devastating psychological impact that this uncertain waiting period can have. Respondents stated feeling powerless and that their lives are being put on hold for reasons out of their own control.

"...ever since I applied for asylum my life has never been the same, some times I feel like this world would be better off without me to the point that I feel like taking my own life would help me rest in peace rather than being scared all the time and worried."

There were also submissions illustrating asylum seekers' lack of awareness of how the asylum process works and asylum rights.

"They are taking time to give decision. It is kind of torture for anyone who is waiting for result... I come to UK to be free from danger, anxiety, worries and suffering. But in reality, they are in worries and suffering to get decision on application. Please tell Home Office, please do not take time to decide on asylum seeker too long."

The survey also revealed anger about the dehumanising nature of the asylum process. For example, many respondents said that reporting requirements and limitations on education and employment and detention procedures further exacerbated the trauma, anxiety and fear being experienced by asylum seekers.

"The restrictions and preventions imposed by the Home Office Immigration Service are suicidal and inhumane, a system of injustice on my part for I have not abused British hospitality in seeking refugee status."

"I was 17 when I arrived from Tibet. At that time I had no idea how the legal procedures regarding seeking asylum because I was alone and I know no one. I went through all the steps without knowing that I can ask legal help before seeking asylum. So, they refused me and issued discretionary leave until I reached 18. That was at the end of 2004. After that I was able to ask for solicitor through social worker."

"My own experience is about the reporting system. To be honest it is very very worrying to know that every week you have to report. Every week I become very sick of going to that place. I am like why does this happen to poor people like me."

Many of the responses in this category were concerned with how the system fails to respond appropriately to asylum seekers with additional vulnerabilities and particular needs. Threatening and intimidating behaviour by immigration officials was also reported.

“I am psychological therapist working for the NHS. I see asylum seekers who have been referred for treatment of PTSD. I have invariably found that any therapeutic work I might do with these individuals is disrupted by the ongoing realities of their lives in the UK. The asylum claim procedures are lengthy, impersonal and in many cases inhumane and people suffering from acute anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares and accompanying health problems have the added trauma of going through repeated hearings when they have to repeat the original story, be interrogated, and are often told that they are not believed. These experiences are profoundly re-traumatising and any progress made during therapy can be wiped out.”

“I received a letter from the court that I have exhausted all my channels of appeal. Two immigration officers came to my house they took photos of me and my baby, lied to me that they want to update their data. Then immigration came in the morning, about 15 of them to arrest me and my baby, I was not at home, they break the door and got in, my neighbours called me to tell me, I was so scared, I am not a criminal that they will come to get me that manner, they know I am helpless, have no defence”

Perceived Injustice

Respondents had little faith in the quality of decision-making by the Home Office and were sceptical about the Home Office’s approach to assessing asylum applications. There were concerns amongst the submissions that the culture of disbelief had permeated throughout all stages of the process, and suspicions that there was an inherent bias towards viewing claims in a negative light.

“Women who are raped will have the onus on them to “prove” this has happened when shame is a big factor that prevents women from being able to give details of rape and sexual assault and my experience has been that they tend not to be believed by the immigration authorities”

“It is highly disappointing to witness the treatment a civilised country like the UK is giving to asylum seekers. The assumption of the Home Office when you claim asylum is absolutely wrong, they believe you are not genuine. This assumption ultimately affect the Home Office initial decision which is chaotic.”

The survey highlighted a widespread perception of injustice amongst asylum seekers; the system does not appear to have the confidence of those whom it is supposed to be serving and they do not feel that their cases are receiving a fair hearing.

Some respondents reported examples of unexplained procedural blunders by the Home Office, which further contributed to the sense of injustice.

"I came here fled from Iraq to be safe and not to be part of the trouble, but the home office decision was negative turned down my case like a lottery system"

Take action

Asylum Aid supports the work of the Independent Asylum Commission, which has conducted a nationwide citizen's review of the UK's asylum system. It has collected evidence through public hearings, written and video evidence, and research. The Commission published its interim findings in March 2008 and its final conclusions and recommendations in May, June and July 2008. To find out more about the work of the work the Commission, and how to get involved see:

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

"I feel the home office decision-making system is biased. It's more on how quick can we go through the pile than realistically looking at issues. I am a victim of human trafficking (trafficking for sexual purposes) having left my country due to political reasons. Yet they (Home Office) didn't even tackle my trafficking issue all they were interested in is how quickly could I be deported?"

"...Duplicate copies were used to determine my case since the home office respondent admitted that my case documents were lost. I believe there was no proper statutory review to the information which was at hand."

Written by Carmel O'Sullivan and Melanie Gower.

The Asylum Rights Watch survey can be accessed through our website www.asylumaid.org.uk. Asylum Rights Watch is an ongoing project, and we produce regular dossiers summarising the responses received. For further information about the Asylum Rights Watch survey including previous dossiers of evidence and how you can help us to promote it, please go to the 'Asylum Rights Watch' section on our website.

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