

## Updates – March 2018

Here are some updates on the **3 issues** as identified last month with the spotlight on them. They are:

- 1. The ‘destitution’ gap between receiving refugee status and accessing benefits***
- 2. Children refugees in Calais getting reunited with family members here in the UK***
- 3. Accommodation and the unacceptable conditions reported in which asylum families and individuals are placed as they wait for their claim to be decided.***

The following information is taken from the resources of the groups Asylum Matters and Safe Passage: thanks to them for making this information available.

### 1. Destitution gap: between getting refugee status and receiving benefits

This assessment from Asylum Matters Partners shows that progress is being made in overcoming this bureaucratic lapse.

The Home Office has been working with the Department of Work and Pensions to align the issuing of National Insurance Numbers (NINo) with Biometric Permits (BRP). Since 15 January 2018, all refugees and their dependents aged 17 or over should now receive a BRP featuring their NINo. Delays in receiving relevant documentation, in particular NINos, were a significant barrier to making a timely transition so we hope this streamlined process will reduce delays. (Asylum Matters Partners).

There is also a pilot proposal in the Yorks and Humberside area in which the Home Office making contact with people during the 28 day period before they have to leave their asylum support accommodation to ask them what benefits they will need.

This must be a huge relief for people who have just been granted refugee status, especially those with children.

**Consultation:** the Church of England’s Parliamentary Officer, Martin Kettle, has reported that the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration is conducting a consultation on this issue. If you wish to contribute, please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/asylum-accommodation-call-for-evidence>

### 2. Unaccompanied children refugees: work to reunite them with families in UK

Safe Passage reported in February that 128 unaccompanied children have been contacted in Paris, as SP attempts to gain their recognition and transfer to the UK before these children drift to Calais or succumb to low and sub-zero temperatures on the streets, or get picked up by traffickers.

Natasha from Safe Passage wrote on 28 February -

There are currently up to 150 unaccompanied minors sleeping rough in the freezing cold and snow in the woods in Calais, and more on the streets of Paris. **We are working hard to push the government to fulfil the promise it made** last month to [reduce the waiting time for the family reunion process for refugee children stuck in France to 25 days](#), so that we can finally put an end to this situation and to children dying trying to reach the UK.

There is more news about unaccompanied children and the [Private Members Bill](#) regarding Family Reunion, due to be presented on Friday 16 March, on the Safe Passage website.

### 3. Accommodation conditions

The following exchange in the House of Commons doesn't get us much further but does show that the issue is being pressed in the Commons.

David Lammy (Lab, Tottenham) asks SSHD [Secretary of State for the Home Department] what recent assessment she has made of the living conditions in asylum accommodation centres; and if she will make a statement.

Caroline Nokes 23.2.18: Accommodation providers are required to provide safe, habitable, fit for purpose and correctly equipped accommodation that complies with the Decent Homes Standard in addition to standards outlined in relevant national or local housing legislation.

The contract requires Providers to inspect each property every month and UKVI inspects a significant proportion of properties each year to ensure standards are being met. Where asylum accommodation is found to be falling short of the required standards UKVI has procedures in place to hold suppliers to account to quickly resolve the issue.

The same question was asked in the House of Lords but included the specific issues of

'concerns about (1) safety, (2) welfare, and (3) sanitary conditions'. The response was in exactly the same terms as that given in the Commons by Caroline Nokes.

**Campaign:** [Refugee Action's campaign, Stand Up for Asylum](#), which has been launched this month, will also pick up these issues. Mariam Kemp Hardy, Refugee Action's Head of Campaigns, will speak about this at the next meeting of the London Churches Refugee Network on June 27.

John Murphy