

THE ISSUE

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WHAT CAN I DO?

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THE SOLUTION

Help end the destitution of people seeking sanctuary.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Lobby your local MP to campaign against destitution.

"THE USE OF DESTITUTION AS A LEVER TO COMPEL REFUSED ASYLUM SEEKERS TO ACCEPT RETURN IS INDEFENSIBLE, IS OPPOSED BY 61% OF THE PUBLIC, AND SHOULD END."
INDEPENDENT ASYLUM COMMISSION'S SAFE RETURN JUNE 2008

For more information and advice on how to perform these actions visit:
www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk

CITIZEN ACTION TOOLKIT 8: TACKLE DESTITUTION

Destitution? In the UK? In the 21st century?

Shocking, isn't it? But there are tens of thousands of people who are not allowed to work and have no access to benefits.

Others are forced to live a cashless existence on vouchers.

Read on to find you what you can do.

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10 WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO SAVE SANCTUARY



CITIZENS
for sanctuary

Independent Asylum Commission
citizen

This toolkit is a supplement to the '10 Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary' booklet. You can download an electronic version or order copies of the full booklet at www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk.

THE ISSUE

People believe strongly that those seeking sanctuary should not be made destitute by the government in an attempt to force them out of the country.

The Facts

Financial support and accommodation are cut off 21 days after their claim has been refused. Those who have been refused sanctuary are reduced to living in poverty and on charity hand outs.

In 2007, 50% of those who had been refused sanctuary were from countries where there was conflict, generalized violence or violations against human rights such as Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and DRC.

Links

Independent Asylum Commission opinion poll
www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/files/Saving%20Sanctuary%20Opinion%20Poll.pdf

Policy-makers often assume that because the public demands a tough line on immigration that the public would support any means to the end.

Sometimes, however, such policies go well beyond what the public actually wants or is prepared to support. One such policy is the enforced destitution of people who have been refused sanctuary. The Independent Asylum Commission in its recommendations was clear that when a person seeking sanctuary has had a fair hearing and been found not to merit sanctuary, then it is right for them to return home – preferably voluntarily and at minimum expense to the taxpayer.

However, the Commission also found a range of flaws in the way that decisions are made, which means that many people did not receive a fair hearing. The fact that many cases initially refused are won on appeal – up to 50% in the case of some nationalities – suggests that despite improvements, there are still problems with how we decide who needs sanctuary. In other cases people seeking sanctuary were not able to access legal advice at their appeal, further reducing the chances of there being a just outcome.

When a person's claim is refused they have 21 days in which to prepare to leave the country before their housing and financial support are cut off. They are prevented from working. This system works if it is actually possible and safe for a person to return home, and so long as they really have had a fair hearing. For everybody else though it amounts to a policy of enforced destitution – a policy that boils down to starving people until their hunger and desperation outweighs their fear of returning home. In most cases people prefer to live on the streets in the UK than endanger their life by returning home. Understandable really.

To be fair to the government, they do provide very basic support in the form of supermarket vouchers to the minority who do not have a viable route home or who cannot travel because they are pregnant. But this includes less than 5% of people refused sanctuary in the UK.

The upshot is that people who find themselves destitute are driven further to the margins, and often find themselves exploited in the informal economy or resort to prostitution in order to survive. Many are supported by churches, charities, and Red Cross food parcels.

Does the public support this tough policy of destitution? An opinion poll for the Independent Asylum Commission showed that 70% of people said that no-one should be destitute in the UK, regardless of their race or immigration status.

THE SOLUTION

Help end
the destitution of
people seeking
sanctuary.

The Facts

“In Manchester last week people seeking sanctuary told the Independent Asylum Commission disturbing stories of how they came here seeking sanctuary, and found destitution. I was shocked by a situation that has all the appearances of a shameful blemish on our nation's proud record of providing sanctuary.”

Sir John Waite
Co-chair of the Independent Asylum
Commission, 2007

Links

Nick Broomfield film on destitution
www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10398

We should be supporting those who have been refused sanctuary until they are able to return home.

When we were conducting focus groups for the Independent Asylum Commission's public attitudes research, participants simply could not believe that a person in modern Britain might end up totally destitute.

As far as many of them were concerned, people seeking sanctuary seemed to be entitled to all sorts of additional benefits – so the idea that they might have no cash, no shelter, no nothing – well, it seemed all a bit difficult to take in.

Even when people become aware of destitution, they sometimes blame the people themselves, describing them as 'bogus' and therefore capable of returning to their country of origin and making a living there. They do have a choice, they say, and they are choosing to stay here when we have told them to leave – so their destitution is their own fault.

However, as the Independent Asylum Commission pointed out, there are many problems with the way that decisions are made, and therefore the system does not always get decisions right. Hence there being so many people who have been refused sanctuary but are genuinely terrified of what will happen on their return. They do choose to be alive and destitute here rather than dead and able to earn a living abroad – but they should be punished still further with destitution.

So what can you do to help?

Well, there are already dozens of projects across the country that support people who have been refused sanctuary. So if you decide to do something too, you will not be on your own! The projects provide housing, financial support, befriending, youth clubs, ESOL classes and a whole lot more besides. See if you can get involved.

However we need to do more than just apply a sticking plaster – we need to get to the root of the problem and deal with it at a policy level too!

WHAT CAN I DO?

Try to live on a £10 charity food parcel for a week, like a person refused sanctuary in the UK. Film your day or write down your thoughts and send it to your local TV station or newspaper.

The Facts

“One day some people came to my house and said the Home Office have said you have to leave. I told them I was very sick, and it is cold and raining outside. The man took my legs from the bed and the women held me under my armpits and put me outside in the street with my bag of medication, locked the door and left. Today I live on the Food Parcel the Red Cross gives me every week, and £3.70 travel.”

Testimony of Hamed, from Darfur, when he was made destitute.

Links

Boaz Trust

<http://boaztrust.org.uk/support-us/lent-endurance-challenge/>

Could you survive on a Food Parcel?

Many destitute individuals are supported by charitable projects across the UK, who distribute very basic food parcels – a lifeline for those who have been refused sanctuary.

In order to gain an insight into the lives of one of the most marginalized and ignored groups in society, and to stand in solidarity with their hardship, try living one week on a basic food parcel.

The Boaz Trust – a charity working with destitute people seeking sanctuary – run a “Food Parcel Endurance Challenge”. This runs on a nationwide scale throughout the year, as well as around certain periods such as lent and a “post-Christmas detox” challenge. The challenge they set, is to live the life of a person refused sanctuary for one week. In exchange for your weekly food budget, the Boaz Trust will provide you with a food parcel and £3.50 cash to live on for one week.

The Boaz trust also suggests a shopping list for you to “buy your own” food parcel. The items below should be bought from the economy/ value ranges.

Shopping List

Vegetable oil, carton of juice, carton of milk, bar of chocolate, salted peanuts, packet of biscuits, 14 teabags, loaf of bread, packet of pasta, 250g rice, 250g sugar, 250g salt, 250g semolina, 1 stock cube, 1 tin of spaghetti in tomato sauce, 1 tin of soup, 1 tin of baked beans, 1 tin of plum tomatoes, 1 tin of garden peas, 1 tin of chick peas, 1 tin of hotdogs, 1 small tin of sweet corn, 1 tin of tuna, 1 tin of sardines, 1 orange, 1 banana, 1 pear, 1 apple, 2 carrots, 2 onions, 2 potatoes, 1 green/red pepper.

Once you have your food parcel, why don't you film your week and then send it to local media? Make sure you also note down exactly what you ate for each meal and your mood and hunger level!

Compare notes with others who have experienced the same situation – and imagine if this was how you were living month after month.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Find a local scheme that exchanges cash for the supermarket vouchers given to some people seeking sanctuary, or get your church, community group or trade union branch to set one up.

The Facts

Section 4 support, includes accommodation and £35 worth of supermarket vouchers a week. These vouchers can only be spent in certain supermarkets which presents a number of problems;

- May not be able to purchase cultural foods.
- Does not cover nappies, baby milk etc.
- Often far from accommodation with no money to travel.
- These limitations, drive illegal exchanges which often leave the individual with just £20.

Further information

Contact sanctuary@cof.org.uk for more information.

Exchanging cash for vouchers seems simple, but how can I get involved?

So here is where it gets practical. It is relatively straightforward to set up and run a voucher exchange programme in your local area. All you need is someone to coordinate the exchange, a space to host it and people who are willing to use vouchers in their local supermarket. Church halls, community centres or organisations already working with people on Section 4 support all make good places to set up your scheme.

The practicalities are simple: you'll need a safe place to store the money and vouchers, and a couple of volunteers. Organise a regular time for exchanging vouchers that is convenient for those on Section 4 support, such as 10am until 1pm every Thursday. It's a good idea to keep records as you go: record people's details, how much they exchange and how often they come. A weekly report of how much money was exchanged and receipts confirming clients received the right amount of cash are both sensible ideas. If you like, you can check the gift cards on the supermarket websites before accepting them to find out how much money is on the card. Paper vouchers don't need checking as they have to be spent in one go.

The final piece of the puzzle is the buyers. Try to find a group of people willing to buy vouchers on a regular basis. As the vouchers come in different forms and denominations it is helpful to have people who shop at different supermarkets. You can then organise a time for them to collect the vouchers or send them out by post.

If you shop at Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons or Asda you can directly help people trapped by the existing voucher system by exchanging your cash for vouchers via an organisation or scheme. As the vouchers are exchanged at face value this won't cost you anything. You'll be able to buy what you want and where you want simply using gift cards or paper vouchers instead of cash.

Both individual and organisations can set up regular orders with voucher exchange schemes, buying vouchers by standing order on a monthly basis via organisations that runs the scheme. It saves voucher exchange schemes a lot of hassle if you can pick up a large number and exchange them yourselves. Does your organisation have regular events? Do you attend to a regular event or religious service in your community? If you talk to others about exchanging vouchers you might find a number of people are willing to buy the vouchers on a regular basis.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Lobby
your local MP to
campaign against
destitution.

The Facts

“The use of destitution as a lever to compel refused asylum seekers to accept return is indefensible, is opposed by 61% of the public, and should end.”

Independent Asylum Commission, *Safe Return* report

Links

Boaz Trust:

<http://boaztrust.org.uk/support-us/lent-endurance-challenge/>

Join the campaign to end destitution now!

We need you to engage your local MP in the debate. Most MPs will be aware of sanctuary issues in their constituency however, destitution is slightly harder to monitor. It is up to us to let them know.

Use the following template to write a letter.

Dear....

I am writing to express my concern for those people who have been refused sanctuary and are now destitute in the UK. This issue has come to my attention after meeting with several individuals who have been refused sanctuary in this country but still feel that it is unsafe for them to return home.

My main concerns include:

- That destitution is being used as a political tool to force those who have been refused sanctuary out of the country. Many come from areas of ongoing conflict and so fear their life if they were to return.
- Those who are destitute, often include extremely vulnerable individuals, including pregnant women, victims of torture and those with physical/ mental illnesses.
- Many of those who have been refused sanctuary, cannot access health care.
- That those who have been refused sanctuary, are not allowed to work.

This information corresponds to the findings of the Independent Asylum Commission which also states that: Destitution has far-reaching social costs that are difficult to quantify, and though it is proper for UKBA to seek the support of the taxpayer for its policies, the public are also quite clear in their disapproval of destitution: in our opinion poll 61% asserted that “no-one in the UK should be destitute, regardless of race or immigration status”.

I strongly urge you to do everything in your power to put this issue firmly onto the political agenda and to push for a new policy that will end destitution.

Yours faithfully,

Resources

Title

Text

Please let us know how you get on with these actions. We will collate all of the results from across the country and add them to our website so we can see all the change we have accomplished.

If you need advice or support, please contact carina.crawford-rolt@cof.org.uk.

Good luck!