



31st August 2021

Dear **Priti Patel MP** (Secretary of State for the Home Department),

Cc:

Sajid Javid MP (Secretary of State for Health and Social Care),

Gavin Williamson MP (Secretary of State for Education),

Vicky Ford MP (Minister for Children and Families),

Robert Jenrick MP (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government),

Dominic Raab MP (Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and First Secretary of State),

Social work response to the Government's treatment of Afghan asylum-seekers

We feel compelled to raise a social work response to what we see as a crisis of leadership from our Government in response to the situation in Afghanistan. The Government is offering to resettle 5000 people this year and a further 15,000 over the next 5 years and is calling this scheme “generous” and “compassionate”. We refute the Government’s claim to be acting with generosity and compassion, and ask the Government to do more, much more. After 20 years of military action in Afghanistan it is not a case of being “generous” it is about taking responsibility for the role the British Government has played in the war and Afghan society,¹ and it is our duty not to abandon Afghans.

The current crisis has exposed the inhumanity and unworkability of the Nationality and Borders Bill that is currently being rushed through parliament. The Bill would mean that anyone who arrives in the UK via an unofficial route would be considered to have entered the UK illegally and would subsequently be denied the same rights as a person who arrives in the UK via a state-sanctioned resettlement programme. These criminalised, ‘second-class’ refugees would not have the same

¹ https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_protection_of_civilians_annual_report_2019_-_22_february.pdf

family reunification rights, they would have limited access to public services and would never be granted permanent settled status. Given the fact that the best the Government is claiming they can do for the Afghan people, is offer to resettle 5000 people in 1 year, then what hope is left for those who are unable to access these resettlement schemes but to try and make their own way to safety? And for this, those who arrive in the UK, would be criminalised. That is nothing short of cruel and inhumane.

Last year the Government was advised by civil servants that there is an inadequate supply of suitable accommodation for asylum-seekers and that the way to solve this problem is to mandate Local Authorities to make provision for this type of accommodation.² The Government did not act on this recommendation and instead continued to place people in unsuitable hotel and army barrack accommodation. This type of accommodation places asylum-seekers in unsuitable, dirty, overcrowded, isolated living conditions, and costs the tax-payer more!

In August 2020 and again in June 2021 Kent Children's Services stopped accepting unaccompanied children into their care.³ With other Local Authorities taking similar action or currently on the verge of it.⁴ This has resulted in unaccompanied children being denied their legal entitlement to care as set out in the Children Act 1989. Instead they have been detained or accommodated in inadequate and unsafe conditions, as evidenced in the Kent Intake Unit inspectorate report from October 2020⁵, and by the fact that the Home Office is currently acting as the corporate parent for a cohort of unaccompanied children, and sees fit to place these children in hotels without meeting their most basic welfare and safeguarding needs.⁶

Currently there appears to be a breakdown in the ability of central government and local government to work together and ensure that the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees are being met. This is resulting in a crisis of care. The consequences of this crisis are all too apparent in the tragic death of a five year old boy, Mohammed Munib Majeedi, who died after falling from a window of a hotel that was not fit for purpose.⁷ The Government must act now to ensure that there are no further tragedies and that lives are not knowingly placed at risk. The negligence must stop.

We call on the Government to comply with the demands set out by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants⁸, which seek to improve the Government's response to Afghans and address some of our concerns about the Nationality and Borders Bill:

- **Abandon the 'resettlement-only' plans** set out in the Nationality and Borders Bill, that would criminalise or deny full refugee status to those who make their own journeys to seek asylum in the UK
- Grant **immediate asylum** to Afghans already waiting for status in the UK
- Release all Afghan nationals from **detention**

² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/aug/23/afghan-refugees-likely-to-have-problems-finding-suitable-uk-housing>

³ <https://kccmediahub.net/kent-leader-is-saddened-to-announce-for-the-second-time-in-a-year-we-have-reached-the-limit-of-safe-capacity-for-the-care-of-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-and-will-take-any-action745>

⁴ <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/11/20/second-council-longer-taking-asylum-seeking-children-iro-caseloads-soar/>
<https://www.lgplus.com/services/children/croydon-set-to-refuse-to-take-new-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-16-08-2021/>

⁵ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspections/dover-short-term-holding-facilities/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/21/no-shoes-spare-clothes-or-money-traumatised-afghan-children-stranded-for-weeks-in-hotels>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/20/mps-demand-review-into-what-home-office-knew-about-safety-of-hotel-where-afghan-boy-died>

⁸ <https://www.icwi.org.uk/stand-with-afghan-refugees>

- **Expand the family reunion route** so that Afghans can be joined by other members of their family, such as parents and siblings
- Join the international effort to **evacuate and resettle** Afghan nationals

We make further demands on behalf of the social work profession:

- **We ask that central Government and local governments show leadership and integrity in our response to asylum-seekers and refugees. As social workers, we demand that we are supported to carry-out our legal duties, as enshrined in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.**
- **Local Authorities must be obliged and enabled to provide good quality support and services to unaccompanied children, children in families and adult asylum-seekers. This includes the provision of adequate accommodation and access to social care.**

Yours Sincerely,

Naomi Jackson, Development Lead, Social Workers Without Borders

Ruth Allen, CEO, British Association of Social Workers

John McGowan, General Secretary, Social Workers Union

Rory Anderson, National Convenor, Social Work Action Network