

Cuts to Refugee Action services in 2011-East Midlands

January 2011

Refugee Action is working in coalition with the Asylum Support Partnership to co-ordinate its response to the 2011 cuts to UKBA-funded services for asylum seekers and refugees. The Asylum Support Partnership consists of the agencies providing UKBA funded support services to refugees and asylum seekers, and consists of Refugee Council, North of England Refugee Service, Refugee Action, Scottish Refugee Council and Welsh Refugee Council.

The scope of cuts to Refugee Action services

In the current funding climate, Refugee Action inevitably expected cuts to our grants and had taken appropriate steps to plan for adaption. However, we were informed in November 2010 that the cuts were significantly higher than expected - 63% to our One Stop Service (OSS) and 50% to our Initial Accommodation Wraparound Service from April 2011. We were also informed that the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) will receive no further funding from September 2011, effectively ending the funding of refugee integration in the UK. In addition to the level of cuts, which far exceed those being made in other parts of the Home Office and specifically UKBA, we consider the time period over which they are to be made to be inadequate. Having to implement such devastating cuts in a short space of time means that meaningful strategic service reconfiguration will be impossible. A longer term extension of our grant agreements, and an agreement that we could make these cuts over a longer period of time, would enable us to plan beyond the short-term and re-configure our services strategically.

Our response

Refugee Action has had no little choice but to make the decision to close our offices operating in Nottingham, Bolton, Bristol and Portsmouth and to drastically reduce the service we provide in Liverpool, Manchester and Leicester.

We are concerned that these funding decisions will add extreme pressure to local advice agencies and local authorities, which are already under pressure in delivering services to British nationals. We are concerned that they will increase the asylum caseload of MPs and transfer unintended costs arising to other public services and government departments. Finally, we understand that these changes will have devastating effects on the UK's asylum seekers and refugees, undermining the duty of sanctuary which Britain has traditionally upheld, not to mention the concept of the Big Society.

We appreciate that the number of asylum seekers entering the UK has fallen in recent years. However, this does not provide a meaningful rationale for reflecting the bulk of the reduction of over a decade in a single cut to be implemented in a mere three



months. For most of the last decade, asylum support services have been woefully underfunded.

It is also vital that the voluntary sector retains the capacity to deal with a sudden influx of asylum seekers. A sudden worsening in the political situation in countries such as Sudan or Pakistan - from which asylum seekers to the UK have increased by almost a third in the last two years - could produce a rapid spike in new arrivals, and there would no doubt be a high level of public interest in their reception. We have asked our staff to convene a meeting of the contingency planning committee to look at these concerns, and establish the level of give we need in the system to be able to manage such a situation.

Current service provision in the East Midlands

Refugee Action currently operates offices in Leicester and Nottingham which provide advice via the One Stop Service, which has been awarded the Legal Services Commission Quality Mark. The Leicester office covers Leicestershire and Northamptonshire and the Nottingham office covers Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. Outreach sessions in Derby are conducted by Nottingham office staff on a twice-weekly basis.

At our Leicester office, appointments are available to clients on Tuesday and Thursdays, with emergency-only assistance on Wednesdays and telephone advice only on Fridays. A drop-in service, where clients can see a caseworker without prior appointment, runs on Mondays. In Nottingham, appointments are available to clients on all weekday afternoons other than Wednesdays and they can attend on a drop-in basis on Monday and Thursday mornings. Phone advice is available every weekday other than Wednesdays.

How many clients do we assist?

According to figures collated by Refugee Action, the total number of asylum seekers seen by Leicester office staff in 2009 was 932, the figure dropping to 885 in 2010. Although the total number of individuals decreased slightly, the total number of advice sessions (3001 and 2970) remained quite constant, reflecting the fact that many individuals present to services with complex problems which require more than one visit to resolve.

Who are our clients?

The profile of asylum seekers using Refugee Action services in Leicester in 2010 followed a national pattern, which in turn correlates to areas of conflict and levels of high mobility among those in danger. The most common ten nationalities were Zimbabwean (206 clients in 664 sessions), Iraq (151 clients in 510 sessions), Iran (111 clients in 401 sessions), Somalia (61 clients in 200 sessions), Sri Lanka (54 clients in 149 sessions), China (35 clients in 142 sessions), Sudan (22 clients in 76 sessions), India (20 clients in 47 sessions) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (13 clients in 31 sessions). Languages spoken included Kurdish Sorani, Arabic, Farsi, Tamil, Sinhalese, Somali, Pashto, Dari, Urdu, Mandarin, Punjabi, Hindi and French.

In 2010, three quarters of clients were aged between 18 and 40 and 70% were male. Five clients were under 18 and 48 were over 50. Almost 20% had dependent children.

Why do clients need assistance?

Of all the advice sessions delivered by Refugee Action, most (nearly 1800) dealt with issues around UKBA-provided financial support (which included payment problems or



the termination of support). Resolving such problems often required a good knowledge of the complexities of the UKBA support system. 1699 sessions related to Section 4 support (for asylum seekers whose initial applications have been refused), most of whom are destitute; 585 destitute individuals sought advice in 1351 advice sessions in 2010.

307 people sought help to understand correspondence received from UKBA. Correspondence is always in English and often refers to some of the complex regulations which relate to support for asylum seekers.

Collaborative working

Refugee Action's established work in Leicester means it has long been a source of advice for other organisations who encounter asylum seekers and there were 650 occasions in 2010 where advice was sought by organisations rather than individuals. Additionally, Refugee Action referred or signposted individuals to other organisations on 339 occasions during the year.

The impact of the cuts in Leicester and the East Midlands

The Leicester and Nottingham staff teams currently provide advice provision across the East Midlands, with the Leicester office covering Leicestershire and Northamptonshire and the Nottingham office covering Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. The Nottingham office will close, leaving the Leicester office to become the hub for the whole of the East Midlands. The staff team in Leicester will be much reduced, to one Area Manager, 2.5 caseworkers and 0.5 administrators who will, in addition to being a much smaller team than previously, need to cover a much greater geographical area.

Caseworkers will continue to provide advice, however it will no longer be possible to run the office as a drop-in centre for one day a week, though some pre-booked appointment sessions will be able to continue. The majority of advice sessions will be conducted over the telephone advice line, which will use a combination of the remaining caseworkers, volunteers and social work placement students. Targeted outreach to Nottingham and Derby will take place, this will have to mean a further reduction in direct advice provision in Leicester.

The Leicester Fresh Start Project for destitute women asylum seekers is not government funded and therefore will continue as planned, with six destitute women housed at any one time for up to six months (see separate briefing). Funding is being sought from non-statutory sources to support this project into the future.

The need for advice remains high and, because Refugee Action's capacity will be so much reduced after UKBA cuts in March 2011, it is obvious that other agencies - often statutory agencies - will have to absorb this demand in some way.

About Refugee Action

Refugee Action is an independent, national charity working to enable refugees to build new lives in the UK. We provide practical support for newly arrived asylum seekers as well as a long-term commitment to their settlement. Through our 'One Stop Service' (OSS), Gateway Protection Programme, Choices Project and Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES), the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) funds us to give independent, confidential frontline advice and information to asylum seekers and



refugees on a breadth of topics. These range from UKBA asylum support, in-depth work on integration and employment following a successful decision, education, access to health and complex issues such as domestic violence, racial harassment and trafficking. We also offer support to Refugee Community Organisations through our Basis project.

Last year, refugees and asylum seekers contacted our One Stop Service over 50,000 times across seven offices in the South West, South Central, North West and East Midlands regions. Because of the numbers of people we see, we feel we are in an appropriate position to note the trends that emerge in terms of inequalities for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. These inequalities may emerge in relation to gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or mental health problems, particularly because so many refugees have experienced post-traumatic stress and do not have access to the healthcare they need.

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