



**REFUGEE SUPPORT
GROUP DEVON**

Wat Tyler House
King William St
Exeter EX4 6PD

Telephone.:
01392-682 185

Email:
info@rsgdevon.freewire.
co.uk

Reg. charity no 1092410

Bristol Relocations

The local media has shown an interest in the traumatic stories of some of those who had to leave Exeter against their will. Unfortunately NASS has not seemed to do anything with their gesture of 'considering' those with special circumstances to stay in Exeter. This means those with family ties, those with vital health appointments, those with local solicitors and those with very strong support networks are now faced with additional expenses, although no additional support to compensate this. Devon County Council have promised to help finance vital transport costs back to Exeter and will provide RSG with a small fund to administer for this reason. We have so far assisted several journeys helping individuals to access their legal representatives in Plymouth and Exeter. We are very disappointed that the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has yet to respond to the urgent correspondence sent when the move to Bristol was announced – nor has any reply been forthcoming yet as to when we might get a reply! Our local MP Ben Bradshaw has however shown support following correspondence from the individuals concerned as well as many others disappointed in the situation. Here's hoping these comments have been taken higher.

Life in Bristol

So how is everyone in Bristol? Unfortunately we have not received many positive comments yet. But we have not heard from everyone. We're hoping those that haven't been in touch have not because they are getting themselves settled and enjoying the experience of being in a larger city.

The main difficulty that people have been faced with is that their NASS weekly allowance was not transferred smoothly to Bristol. The first two weeks were spent with no income, and they could not find organisations to help. Three experiences of Refugee Action (a national charity that provides a 'one-stop' service for asylum seekers) in Bristol were that the place is so busy they were unable to see anyone there, or that the office was closed by the time they got there. A Bristol version of RSG has not been found yet. Another issue some people have found difficult is the distance from their house to services, including doctors. One household tell us they are a 30-minute bus ride away from the city centre and it costs £3.00 – clearly a journey they cannot afford more than once or twice a week. This household reported they were turned away from the local GP because they were asylum seekers and have had to register with a city centre surgery.

On a positive light we have heard that the houses are very nice!

So what can we do to help?

Keep in touch with those you know – a letter or a text message to show you're thinking of them could brighten up their day. Does anyone make journeys to Bristol? Could you offer someone a lift? Are any volunteers familiar with Bristol city? Could you show people around? Introduce to useful groups or organisations? We can still help advocate for individuals who really wish to be in Exeter and request our help, but if there really is no way to return then we need to help them to make Bristol their home. [AH]

Editors

Annette Hughes,
David Mezzetti and
Jeremy Cushing

RSG management committee

Meetings are held on the first Wednesday in every month at 7pm in Wat Tyler House (see above). Everyone welcome.

Every meeting starts by considering any proposals or requests put forward by asylum seekers, who are particularly welcome. Agenda items to the office if possible two weeks before the meeting, please.

JOB OFFER!

Activities co-ordinator – see next page

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RSG – WHAT NEXT?

Following the relocation of NASS supported asylum seekers last month I have been asked many times ‘what will happen to RSG?’ I can assure you we are still here! And we are still busy! As reported in January’s newsletter, we have now secured funding for the next two years, and we endeavour to continue to be flexible and meet the needs that are presented to us throughout this time.

Although we have clearly ‘lost’ a few customers, as well as some vital volunteers (both within RSG and other community organisations), we are also continuing to gain new visitors to the office and are being kept on our toes with a variety of enquiries from asylum seekers and refugees in Exeter that are known to us. We are also getting more and more requests for help from other local organisations.

On average we address 8 face-to-face enquiries in

the office each day – some days as many as 14 people have passed through our doors. There is no typical enquiry we deal with these days – some people need help to find a solicitor, others want help dealing with other services in the city (e.g. housing, job centre, arranging appointments), some come for a chat and a cup of tea, others to use the resources (computers, fax), and we are continuing to support several destitute asylum seekers with our emergency fund. We are also providing a listening ear and support to some of those in Bristol.

English language help

The office enquiry service is not the only service RSG offers. We are still running our English Language Help on Mondays and Thursday evenings, as well as a Saturday morning on request. Numbers attending, however, are very low – so if you need help with your English or know of individuals who could use additional language classes please come along. Contact us for more information.[AH]

Activity co-ordinator

Owing to unforeseen circumstances Cassie is no longer able to continue her role as Activity Coordinator. All is not lost, however, Cassie is now working in a voluntary capacity and particularly looking at developing Refugee Week activities. Its great to have Cassie on board and it also means we shall be recruiting again. We want to fill the post quickly, so if you're interested please do respond to the following advert immediately!

Refugee Support Group Devon

(Home Office Purposeful Activities for Asylum Seekers Fund)

Activity Coordinator (£18,000 pro-rata)

Part-time (18 hours) for 4 months to:	organise regular events/activities	develop community garden
	organise training events	manage a pool of volunteers to help with the co-ordinator’s work
Post-holder must:	support and promote volunteering among asylum seekers.	
	have good local (Devon) knowledge of leisure/recreational opportunities have a working understanding of issues facing asylum seekers and a knowledge of the local situation.	have a proven ability to develop and manage a project be able to start work within one month of interview.

Closing date –Thursday 24 March. Interview Friday 8 April

Please apply in writing with CV, supporting statement and details of two references to A Hughes, RSG, Wat Tyler House, King William Street, Exeter, EX4 6PD or email [info @ rsgdevon. org. uk](mailto:info@rsgdevon.org.uk). For further information phone the office on 01392 682185.

IMMIGRATION: WHAT TO DO

'I believe we must limit immigration' (Michael Howard)

Well, of course he does. And those who claim that Michael Howard was 'playing the race card' are of course quite correct. Possibly you might stretch a point and say the 'xenophobic card'. But in the words of an *Independent* columnist, it's dog-whistle politics: passers-by can't hear it, but your dog can, and that is the whole purpose of the exercise. Predictably, Labour have now imitated the Tory initiative by proposing to end unskilled immigration. Both main parties are now therefore playing the race card on immigration, though Labour is probably a hair ahead morally in that they have not (yet) proposed a quota for refugees.

Unfortunately, because we live in a democracy they are responding to what they perceive is public anxiety on the issue. Polls support them, though the immigration issue seems to have peaked and declined slightly in comparison with others. Some people argue that politicians, in their desire to seem 'tough' actually make this worse: recently Tony Blair refused to comment on this when challenged by RSG. Current claims by Charles Clarke that Labour intends to make sure that immigration is in our national interest suggest that at the moment it isn't (tell that to the NHS) and thus give comfort to racists. Labour has a dog whistle too. The electoral argument shows both parties at their worst. In the runup to the election we can expect to see more of the same, though there is no guarantee that the next government (whoever heads it) will actually implement the policies politicians are now threatening.

Currently about 4.9 people living in the UK were born outside it (1 in 12). Ethnically 53% of these are white, 12% Indian, 7% Pakistani, 6.5% black African, 5% black Caribbean, 3.6% Chinese and 3% Bangladeshi. This figure has been rising since the war, slowing

1970s and then rising again in the 1990s. In 2003 513,000 people came intending to stay at least a year (same as for 2002). However 362,000 left (an all-time record), so the net inflow was 151,000.

People planning to stay long term

The key figures for most people are those of people given permission to stay long-term. These are people who have finally been allowed to stay, mostly as a result of (a) working in Britain, or (b) claiming asylum, or (c) being related to British residents (spouses or other family members from abroad). The totals have increased over the last few years, though not spectacularly (thousands):

	99	00	01	02	03
Work	11	16	15	20	30
Asylum	39	46	29	30	21
Family	42	53	57	53	66
Totals	97	126	108	116	140

**including a few other minor categories*

Far the biggest increase over this period is in work-related (172%, as compared with 46% for family reunion and a decline of 46% in asylum), suggesting that the increasing trend is probably related to the UK's low unemployment, i.e. shortage of labour. It has been rather puzzling that in recent years employment has gone up but this has not caused wage inflation: part of the reason undoubtedly is immigration. This (and pressure from employers) is why the government has been reluctant either to reduce immigration or provide effective control of exploitive employment practices. (As seen recently in Exeter, immigrant workers are very easy to exploit.)

This increase in immigration also occurs at a time when the increase of the population would otherwise be slowing down because of falls in the birth rate. Immigrants tend to be young, when our population is becoming more elderly. Increases in the immigrant population are opposed by many people, and for a variety of reasons. Immigrants often claim that they 'take jobs British people won't do', and this may be true (Lloyd Maunder were unable to meet all their

take lower wages (*not* true of Lloyd Maunder), and to that extent can reasonably be said to be taking jobs away from British workers. A homeless man met recently on the road to Tiverton remarked that he could no longer get work picking daffodils in Cornwall because it was all being done by Lithuanians. More alarmingly for us, foreign workers may also be more efficient. Since EU enlargement last May 133,000 workers from eastern Europe have been registered (about half of whom may have been here already, illegally). They come from countries where, under communism, training for manual occupations was much better than it is here, and they are often much better qualified than indigenous workers anyway, and possibly more motivated. As an article in the *Guardian* commented recently, if you ring them up, they call back.

Arguments by the Government that immigrants increase the UK's GDP (as well as its tax income) have been questioned and are probably based on rather shaky calculations. It seems on the basis of world-wide research that immigration probably doesn't depress economic performance, but nor does it boost it significantly.

It is also claimed that immigrants put pressure on public services like health, schools, housing and benefits. There is very little actual evidence of this – of the 133,000 mentioned above only 21 have applied for unemployment benefit. It is true that if immigrants become homeless they will qualify for social housing, but of the 400-plus asylum seekers who were sent to Devon over the last few years, and the 100 Poles currently employed by Lloyd Maunder hardly any have qualified (or applied) for social housing (Devon's Asylum Seeker Protection Team say only 6 since 1999, as compared with 8 families from the Met Office move). There is no evidence that immigrants put pressure on health services (in fact, some have not even signed on with a GP). They are likely to be young and (initially) single, but eventually, inevitably, the children of immigrant families will require places in

Immigration: what to do

schools. Inevitably, also, immigrants have to be housed, even if not in council housing; they will have health needs and they will have children who have to be schooled.

Since they are only filling the spaces left by our falling birth rate, the pressure is no more than would have happened naturally (and in fact probably less). But this argument is not popular. It is easy to argue that if we educated – even more to the point, trained – our own people better (and perhaps made it easier to move from north to south) we would not need immigrants. And the birth rate is turning up again ...

Proposed solutions

It is generally recognised that exchange of people among at least developed nations is useful and should continue.

Migrationwatch, the anti-immigration organisation who take a rather negative view of immigration (see their website, www.migrationwatch.org) recognise the benefits of migration between developed nations but think that we should only welcome people from less developed nations with great caution and on a temporary basis. This will require much more thorough border controls (something Labour have already promised). We should not allow them to settle, since Britain is already too densely populated and our social infrastructure and environment cannot stand the strain.

Recently the Labour MP for Hornsey, Barbara Roche, and Claude Moraes MEP have proposed a British 'green card' system similar to that operating in the US, to replace the very messy and un-transparent work permit systems in place today. They argue that bringing all schemes together in one system would help rational policy-making and also give more protection against exploitation by employers (a consideration echoed by the unions). It should be accompanied by measures to help immigrants, such as better English teaching and firmer protection against racial and religious discrimination. There should be more explicit celebration of immigrant cultures – they suggest the formation of a National Museum of Migration. A British green card might eventually form the basis of a

Labour

Labour riposted to the Tory proposals by issuing a five-year plan for immigration and asylum. They are proposing a four-tier system, with tier 1 being highly-qualified professionals, tier 2 people like nurses and other technical professions, tier 3 unskilled workers and tier 4 an untidy rag-bag of students and temporary workers like footballers or film crew.

Tier 3 will have the fewest rights: they won't be able to bring dependants, they will have to leave after a specified period and won't be able to claim benefits. Tier 2 will only be able to come if they have a job offer (not true of tier 1) and if no EU citizen can fill the vacancy. Tiers 1 and 2 will be able to apply for permanent settlement but only after 5 years (4 at present).

There are ambitious proposals for frontier defences for Fortress Britain – fingerprinting, health checks, doubled entry payments, and eventually an 'e-borders' scheme and ID cards.

The government can no longer restrict immigration from eastern Europe. But this is turned into an advantage by announcing strict controls on unskilled migrants from *outside* the EU. The government is accused of planning a two-tier 'guest worker' system, and almost certainly this is in fact exactly what they have in mind (there are currently around 10,000 gangmasters in the UK and they need cheap labour).

The Conservatives

The Tories propose to put an annual limit on immigration, operated by a points system aimed at making sure we only get the skills we need. They say (without any evidence) that this will reduce the numbers of immigrants. (Actually it might just as well increase them: the Tories claim that under Labour immigration has been unlimited, which is simply nonsense.) '24-hour' controls will be introduced on our frontiers to enforce the system. The Tories also

NUMBERS

90 million: number who go in and out of the UK every year (and that's before the Chinese start to visit)

60 million: total population of UK

4.9 million: number of British residents who were born abroad

362,000: number of UK citizens who emigrated in 2003

151,000: net immigration 2003

140,000: number of people given leave to stay in 2003

133,000: number of people from eastern Europe who've registered for work since EU enlargement

60,000: number of the above who were probably here already (a guess)

??: Number of people illegally in the UK (nobody has found a way of counting them yet).

in their immigration plans, on the grounds (not altogether implausible) that there is some overspill from illegal immigration to asylum. They plan to withdraw from the 1951 Refugee Convention and accept only asylum claimants certified by the UNHCR (the latter pioneered by David Blunkett and torpedoed in Exeter when the Gateway scheme was rejected). Anyone who applies for asylum within the UK will be deported to a centre created in a third country by agreement with the UK government, where their claims will be processed (also tried by Labour).

The Tory proposals are full of condemnation of Labour, much of it distorted or incorrect; otherwise, with regard to immigration it would probably *in practice* be not very different from the Roche/Moraes proposal. A Tory government would not be able to afford a complete frontier surveillance system (90 million people travel into and out of the UK in a normal year), and pressure on them from employers would be just as strong as it is on Labour. Withdrawal from the 1951 convention is almost certainly