

Asylum Matters
c/o Amnesty International UK
Human Rights Action Centre
17-25 New Inn Yard
London
EC2A 3EA
info@asylummatters.org

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

9 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State

Covid-19 pandemic: asylum support rates

As over 200 organisations working with and alongside people seeking asylum in the UK, we believe your decision announced to parliament yesterday to grant an increase of just £1.85 in the weekly rate of asylum support is wholly unacceptable.

It would not allow people to meet their essential living needs in normal times; and it completely fails to take account of the additional needs and severe pressures placed on individuals and families during a public health emergency. We urge you to immediately reconsider this decision.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected us all, but it is not affecting us all equally. The challenges for those left to live on little more than £5 a day have been further exacerbated in the current crisis.

We know that people seeking asylum have serious problems being able to afford enough food to feed their families, and are making impossible choices between food, cleaning materials, nappies and over the counter medication. We know families are struggling with the realities of home-schooling without internet access or sufficient educational resources to support their children's development. We know people worry about their ability to self-isolate as they cannot afford to stock up on provisions. Following Public Health England's recent analysis, we know that people from BAME backgrounds, which includes the vast majority of people seeking asylum in the UK, are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Following government guidance to 'stay alert' or 'stay at home' is profoundly more difficult when you are living in poverty.

Welcome measures taken by the UK Government to "strengthen the safety net" for those in receipt of mainstream benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in increases to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by approximately £20 per week. The speed with which these decisions were taken is in marked contrast to the length of time taken to reach a decision on asylum support rates. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, asylum support rates were already significantly less than mainstream

benefits; following the uplift, it is now barely 40% of the allowance people over 25 receive on Universal Credit.

People seeking asylum are effectively banned from working, leaving them entirely reliant upon asylum support to avoid destitution. It is imperative that the safety net for people in the asylum system is equally and immediately strengthened, enabling people to keep themselves and their families safe.

We are united in calling on the UK Government to reconsider its decision; and increase the rate of asylum support to allow people seeking asylum to meet their essential living needs during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

Due to the urgency of the current situation, we are calling on the Home Office to immediately ensure that asylum support rates receive the same £20 Covid-related uplift as Universal Credit.

In addition, we call for the link with mainstream benefits to be reinstated by setting asylum support at 70% of Universal Credit to ensure people seeking asylum are able to meet their needs both during, and outside of, a public health pandemic.

Every week, organisations have provided the Home Office with evidence on how people seeking asylum are struggling to meet their essential living needs in these emergency circumstances. We believe it is both a moral and a public health imperative that asylum support rates are increased immediately.

In recent months the Prime Minister has confirmed to parliament on two separate occasions that the Government will address the wellbeing of people seeking asylum during the Covid-19 pandemic. On 25 March [he told MPs](#) that vulnerable groups including asylum seekers “*will certainly receive the Home Office funding that they need and deserve*” during the pandemic. On 13 May [he stated](#): “*We will make sure that nobody in this country, let alone asylum seekers, is ill-treated*”. It is clear that this decision does not meet those commitments. We urge you to reconsider your decision as a matter of urgency.

We look forward to hearing from you soon and to working with your ministers and officials to address these matters in the very near future.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Housing - Amanda Church-McFarlane, Destitution Project Coordinator

Action for Children - Carol Iddon, Deputy Chief Executive

Action Foundation - Julian Prior, Chief Executive

African Rainbow Family - Aderonke Apata, Founder

After Exploitation - Maya Esslemont, Director

Amnesty International - Steve Valdez-Symonds, Programme Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights

Amnesty Kirklees - Matthew Ambler, Group Secretary

ARC Project Blackburn - Saida Soge, Manager

Asylum Support Appeals Project - Alice Webb, Director

ASIRT - Dave Conroy, Director

ASSIST Sheffield - Richard Chessum and Jerry Seymour, Joint Chairs

Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees - Ali McGinley, Director

Asylum Education & Legal Fund - Amanda Sebestyen, Co-ordinator

Asylum Justice - Emmy Chater

Asylum Link Merseyside - Ewan Roberts, Manager

Asylum Matters - Paul Hook, Project Director

Asylum Seekers and Refugees Group - Peter Gowland, Acting Chairperson

Asylum Welcome - Almas Farzi, Front Line Services Manager

Baobab Women's Project - Sarah Taal, Director

Baptist Union of Great Britain - Revd David Mayne, Moderator of Council

Barnsley Borough City of Sanctuary - Frank Parnham, Chair

Barnsley Stand up to Racism - Fran Postlethwaite, Secretary

Barnsley Trades Union Council - George Arthur, Secretary

BEACON (Bradford Ecumenical Asylum Concern) - Katy Armistead, Team Leader

Bearwood Action for Refugees- Josh Evans, Vice Chair

BIASAN - Sue Balcomb, Campaigns Coordinator

Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid - Shazna Islam, Operations Manager

Birmingham City of Sanctuary - Dr David Brown, Chairman

Birmingham Community Hosting Network - Andrew Jolly, Trustee

Blackburn Amnesty International Group - Irene Ryan, Chairperson

Boaz Trust - Ros Holland, Chief Executive

Bradford Friendship Choir – Fran Wyburn, Musical Director

Bradford Homeless & New Arrivals Health Team, Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust - Nikki Harvey, Mental Health Practitioner

Bradford Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Survivors Service - Jane Gregory, Manager – Finance, Fundraising & Service Development

Bristol Refugee Rights - Beth Wilson, Director

British Red Cross - Mike Adamson, Chief Executive

Burslem Jubilee Project - Sheila Podmore, Project Leader and Trustee

Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary - Laurence Larroche, Committee Member

Care4Calais - Clare Moseley, Founder

CARIS Haringey - Gloria Saffrey, Director

Central Asylum Yorkshire - Lucy Lucy, Chair

Central England Law Centre - Sue Bent, Chief Executive

City of Sanctuary - Sian Summers-Rees, Chief Executive

Church of Scotland - The Very Rev Dr Susan Brown, Convener of Faith Impact Forum

Cohesion Sheffield – Panni Loh, Cohesion Sheffield Co-ordinator

Connected Voice - Lisa Goodwin, Chief Executive

Coventry Refugee & Migrant Centre - Toni Soni, Centre Director

Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG) – Loraine Masiya Mponela, Chairperson

Creative Minds Community Organisation - Ramatoulie Saidykhan, Chair and Founder

Croydon Refugee Day Centre – Peter D Hall, Co-ordinator

Derby Refugee Advice Centre - Janet Fuller, Project Manager

Derbyshire LGBT+ - Ian Robson, Chief Executive

Destination Barnsley - Alan Curtis, Secretary

Destitute Asylum Seekers Huddersfield - Maeve Larkin, Manager

Destitution Project Bolton - Shaheda Mangerah, Asylum Seekers and Refugees Caseworker

Detention Action - Bella Sankey, Director

Displaced People in Action (DPIA) - Faruk Ogut, Chief Coordinator

Doncaster Conversation Club - Nic Burne and Jan Foster, Trustee

Doncaster Minster - Fr Daniel Parkinson, Assistant Curate

Durham City of Sanctuary - Susan F Frenk, Co-Chair

Eagles Wing Bury - Sue Arnall, Honorary Treasurer

Enable 2 - Liz Weatherill, Managing Director

End Destitution NI - Siphon Sibanda, End Destitution Coordinator

Entraide (Mutual Aid) - Felix Kupay, Chairperson

Europe Roma UK - Ladislav Balaz, Chair

Family Refugee Support Project - Jason Ward, Director / Senior Therapist

Fatima House – Mauricio Silva, Co-ordinator

4Wings Northwest CIC - Ciiku Sondergaard, Director, Projects Coordinator

Freed Voices

Freedom From Torture - Sonya Sceats, Chief Executive

Friends of the Drop in for Asylum Seekers and Refugees - Sandra Watt, Manager

The Gap Wales - Mark Seymour, Refugee Project Manager

Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group - Anna Pincus, Director

Govan Community Project - Traci Kirkland, Head of Charity

Grassington and District Peace Group - Richard Hargreaves, Newsletter Editor and Information Coordinator

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit - Denise McDowell, Chief Executive

Growing Together Levenshulme - Jaqui Cotton, Project Co-ordinator

HAAS - Steve Hibbs, Secretary

Hackney Migrant Centre - Daf Viney, Director of Services

Halton & St Helens VCA - Sally Yeoman, Chief Executive

Haringey Migrant Support Centre - Karolina Maroszek, Centre Manager

Hastings and District Trades Union Council - Ian Stewart, International Officer

Hastings Community of Sanctuary - Polly Gifford/ Jane Grimshaw, Co-Chairs

Hastings Immigration Campaign Team - Dr Felicity Laurence, Director

Hastings Lift the Ban Campaign South - Jay Kramer, Director

Hastings Voluntary Action - The Links Project - Marc Turczanski, Project Coordinator

Helen Bamber Foundation - Kerry Smith, Chief Executive

Help Refugees / Choose Love - Josie Naughton, Chief Executive

Herefordshire City of Sanctuary - Jonathan Hopkinson, Secretary

Honeycomb Group - Diane Thompson, Chief Executive

Hope Projects - Phil Davis, Co-ordinator

Host Nottingham - Jane Henson, Chair

House Of Rainbow CIC - Jide Macaulay, Founder & CEO

Housing 4 All - Aylisha Hogan, Organiser

Iberian and Latin American Association - Dr Patricia Rodríguez-Martínez-Jones, Chairperson

Ice and Fire - Sebastian Aguirre, Director - Actors for Human Rights

International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS) - Michal Chantkowski, Development and Services Manager

Islington Law Centre - Roopa Tanna, Solicitor

Jewish Council for Racial Equality - Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director

Jesuit Refugee Service - Sarah Teather, Director

Jill Franklin Trust - Norman Franklin, Trustee

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants - Satbir Singh, Chief Executive

Just Fair - Jess McQuail, Director

Justice First - Barbara Hungin, Chair of Trustees

Kings Heath Action for Refugees - Rosie Gunn, Chair and Founder

Kirklees Multi-Agency Group - Bill Dennis, Chair

Learn for Life Enterprise - Hayley Nelson, Director

Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network - Jon Beech, Director

Leeds Refugee Forum - Ali Mahgoub, Director

Leeds Unity Centre - Natasha Jarratt, Director

Leicester City of Sanctuary - Pete Hobson, Chair of Trustees

Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network - Rosario Guimba-Stewart, Chief Executive

LGBT Health and Wellbeing - Maruska Greenwood, Chief Executive

Lifeline Options - David Forbes, Manager

Mafwa Theatre - Keziah Berelson, Co-Artistic Director

Manchester City of Sanctuary - Liz Hibberd, Strategic and Partnership Lead

MAP Middlesbrough - Ailsa Adamson, Project Manager

Mary Thompson Fund - Pete Widlinski, Chair

Maternity Action - Ros Bragg, Director

Meeting Point Armley - Emma Crossley, Project Manager

Mencap Liverpool & Sefton - Sarah Jones, Chief Executive

Merseyside Law Centre - Siobhan Taylor-Ward, Solicitor and Our Liverpool Coordinator

Merseyside Refugee Support Network - Seána Roberts, Manager

Methodist Church in Britain - Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

Micro Rainbow - Sebastian Rocca, Founder and CEO

Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit (MiCLU) - Lisa Payne, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer

Migrant Voice - Nazek Ramadan, Director

Migrants at Work - Ake Achi, Founder and Director

Migrants' Law Project - Sonal Ghelani

MindOut - Helen Jones, Chief Executive

Minsteracres Retreat Centre - Liz Holmes, Outreach Coordinator

MotherShip - Leonie Hart, Chair

NACCOM - Hazel Williams, Director

North East Law Centre - Clare Hurst, Senior Solicitor

North of England Refugee Service - Dr Mohamed Nasreldin, Director

Northumberland County of Sanctuary - Ben Hopkinson, Secretary and Trustee.

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum - Matt Atkins, Director

Nottingham Arimathea Trust - Caron Boulghassoul, Chief Executive

Oasis Church, Birmingham - Rob & Margaret Hooper, Church Pastors

One September Ltd, Liverpool - Aleasha Chaunte, Co-Director

Open Door (North East) - Louisa Henderson, Destitution Services Manager

PAFRAS - Karen Pearse, Director

Penistone Asylum Seekers and Refugee Support Group - Gina Hawkins, Chair

Praxis - Sally Daghlian OBE, Chief Executive

Project 17 – Abi Brunswick, Director

Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) - Catherine Henderson, Steering Group Lead

Rainbow Haven – Kate Percival, Manager

RASA (Rape & Sexual Abuse) Merseyside – Sarah Wood, Wirral Centre Manager

Reach Project Huddersfield - Rev. Ernie Whalley, Chair of Management Committee

Refugee Action - Stephen Hale, Chief Executive

Refugee Action York - John Williamson, Volunteer Co-ordinator

Refugee Council - Maurice Wren, Chief Executive

Refugee Education Training Advice Service Leeds - Fidelis Chebe, Operations and Development Manager

Refugee Support Devon - Nelida Montes de Oca, Casework Co-ordinator

Refugee Women Connect - Alison Moore, Chief Executive

Regional Refugee Forum - Suraiya Riyaz, Secretary

REPOD Resettlement Programme for Overseas Doctors - Dr Margaret Hinman, Volunteer

Restore - a project of Birmingham Churches Together - Jeremy Thompson, Manager

Right to Remain - Lisa Matthews, Co-ordinator

Room to Heal - Elli Free, Director

Saabat Gallery - Azad Mohammed, Director

Safe Passage International - Beth Gardiner-Smith, Chief Executive

Salaam Community Centre - Zeba Alam, Manager

Saltburn and East Cleveland Befrienders - Alan Hiscox, Treasurer

Samphire Ex-Detainee Project - Tanya Long, Director

Sanctuary Hosting - Sarah Wahby, Service Manager

Sanctuary Kirklees - Jane Wood, Trustee

Sanctus - Revd Sally Smith

Sante Refugee Mental Health Access Project - Edward Milner, Chair

Scottish Episcopal Church - Most Reverend Mark Strange, Primus and Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness

Scottish Refugee Council - Sabir Zazai, Chief Executive

Shap Ltd - Janine Iyanda, Operations Manager

Sheffield City of Sanctuary - Thomas Martin, Director

Shpresa Programme – Luljeta Nuzi, Chief Executive

Shropshire Supports Refugees - Amanda Jones, Director

Sisters United - Veecca Smith Uka, Chair

Skipton Refugee Support Group - Judy Rogers, Vice Chair

SOGICA Project - Dr Carmelo Danisi, Dr Moira Dustin, Professor Nuno Ferreira, Dr Nina Held

Solace - Kathryn Ashworth, Chief Executive

South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group - Stuart Crosthwaite, Secretary

South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice - Hilary Smith, Co-ordinator

St Bede with St Clement Church - Elaine Jones, Vicar

St Mary's Cathedral Justice and Peace Group - Teresa Lyth, Chair

St Peter's Church, Stockton-on-Tees - Revd Bill Braviner

St Augustine's Centre - Becky Hellewell, Senior Caseworker

Stafford Welcomes Refugees - Netta Cartwright, Founder and Educational co-ordinator

Staffordshire North and Stoke-on-Trent CAB - Jude Hawes, Specialist Services and Equalities Team Manager

STARCH (South Tyneside Asylum Seekers and Refugees Church Help) - Margaret Gregg, Secretary

Steve Biko Housing Association Ltd - Tracey Gore, Director

Stonewall - Leanne M MacMillan, Director

Stories of Hope and Home - Steph Neville, Project Manager and Founder

Student Action for Refugees - Emily Crowley, Chief Executive

Suffolk Refugee Support - Martin Simmonds, Fundraising & Communications Officer

Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network Limited - Michal Chantkowski, Board Secretary

Sustain the Alliance for Better Food and Farming - Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive

Swansea Asylum Seekers Support - Professor Tom Cheesman, Chair of Trustees

TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru/Together Creating Communities) - Kay Polley & Sam Rex-Edwards, Lead organisers

TGP Cymru - Mike Clark, Director of Family Services

The Anchor Project - Indi Elcock, Project Co-ordinator

The Brunswick Centre - John McKernaghan, Chief Officer

The Church at Carrs Lane - Rev Dr Neil Johnson and Rev Cristina Cipriani

The Greenhouse Project - Debbie Wright, Chief Executive

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue – Alexandra Wright, Senior Rabbi

The Refugee and Migrant Centre Ltd - Arten Llazari, Chief Executive

Tiber Community Building - John Ramsden, Chair

Together with Migrant Children - Nick Watts, Director

Trinity Centre - Heather Cox, Treasurer

Tyne and Wear Anti Fascist Association - Mick Bowman, Chair

UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group - Leila Zadeh, Chief Executive

United Reformed Church - Revd Nigel Uden, Moderator of General Assembly

Unity in Diversity - David Borwell, Secretary and Co-ordinator

Unity in Poverty Action (UPA) – Mary Halsey, Development Worker

University of Liverpool Law Clinic - Judith Carter, Lecturer and in-house Solicitor

Unseen - Kate Garbers, Director

Upbeat Communities - Andrew Jackson, Chief Executive

Upper Wharfedale Refugee Support Group - Stella Perrott, Coordinator

Voices in Exile - Mel Steel, Director

Volunteers Together Project - Marie Allainguillaume, Project Coordinator

Waging Peace - Maddy Crowther, Co-Executive Director

Wakefield Baptist Church - Flora Davies, Farsi Worker

Wakefield City of Sanctuary - Geoff Fielding, Trustee

Walking With in North Tyneside - David McKenzie, Chair of Trustees

Welcome Group Halesowen - Andrew Harwood, Project Manager and Chair

Welsh Centre for International Affairs - Susie Ventris-Field, Chief Executive

Welsh Refugee Council - Andrea Cleaver, Chief Executive

West London Welcome Centre for Refugees and Migrants - Joanne MacInnes, Director

Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary - Alan Marriott, Chair

Women for Refugee Women - Natasha Walter, Director

Women Centre Kirklees - Sobiya Din, Senior Mental Health Facilitator and Volunteer Coordinator

Yarls Wood Befrienders - Nicky Woods, Chief Executive