



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

# NEW POLICIES from “PROSPERITY and DIGNITY IN MIGRATION” debate at September 2018 conference. Relating to those seeking sanctuary.

## A SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

- We will **end the practice of the “hostile environment”** approach which includes everything from multiple expensive and inhumane immigration detention centres to making civil society the frontline of immigration control, resulting in mistakes and unfairness on an industrial scale.
- **Ensure that victims of trafficking are supported** so that they can give evidence against their traffickers and never be returned against their will to their country of origin where their traffickers would have access to them all over again.
- Retain, alongside refugee status, humanitarian protection status, and reiterate our commitment to the principle of *non-refoulement* as applied in international and European human rights law.

## DECISION MAKING

- Review and reform all aspects of current asylum rules and operations that offend basic measures of fairness and justice. We particularly seek to **change the culture of disbelief that affects all people applying for asylum.**
- **Establish a new dedicated unit for asylum applications**, independent of central Government, to improve speed and quality of decision-making, ensuring better decisions, right the first time. The new unit would work with local authorities on dispersal and settlement issues.
- Take political influence out of decision-making on applications for visas and sanctuary.
- **Provide better training for staff** particularly those who deal directly with more vulnerable groups such as victims of torture or trafficking, mentally ill people, pregnant women, children and LGBT+ people.
- **Review and reform all aspects of current asylum rules and operations**, with an initial focus on how the rules affect LGBT+ applicants, child-led family reunification applications and those who fled because of their religious or non-religious beliefs, or who are at risk if returned because they have since converted to another faith or belief. Never, in any circumstances, refuse an LGBT+ applicant on the basis that they could be discreet. Have a presumption in favour of family reunification except in those rare cases where it is not in the interests of the child.

At the end of all the processes, when people have been dealt with justly, fairly, and with compassion, and have to be removed from the country, we will only do so with humanity, and following the National Independent Commission on Enforced Removals recommendations on how removals should take place, seeking to keep families together, allow people to exhaust appeals in-country and secure safe destinations for people to go to.

## DETENTION

We have reaffirmed our pledge to **end indefinite detention with a maximum time limit of 28 days.**

- A new policy of **detention as last resort**, using community alternatives to detention such as more case-work in the community, thus allowing the closure of eight of the UK's ten immigration detention centres.
- **No detention for vulnerable people**, such as pregnant women and those who have mental health problems or been subject to torture, and that no one is detained more than 72 hours without judicial oversight.

## BEING PART OF OUR COMMUNITY

- **Increase timescale for asylum seekers to find accommodation from 28 to 60 days** after receiving a decision and **remove the time limit entirely for vulnerable people.**
- **Provide free basic English lessons to any seeker of sanctuary.** We would start these lessons at the earliest opportunity, so that they would be able to integrate and work in the UK as soon as possible.
- **Endorse *The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill.***
- **Support restoring the arrangements for legal aid** for seekers of sanctuary that existed before *The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012.*
- The level of support for asylum seekers should be at the same level for all, and all should be able to use the Aspen Card to withdraw cash.
- **All asylum seekers should be granted the right to work**, if they wish, 3 months after applying for asylum. The new unit would be required to assist the asylum seeker exercise this option through facilitating access to training and accreditation of relevant qualifications. Asylum seekers able to work would be required to do so 6 months after applying for asylum. Safeguards will be in place to ensure that no one is compelled to work who is unable to do so. It would give them dignity, ability to use their skills, and be better able to find a job when given the right to remain.
- All future government-tendered contracts for asylum-seekers' housing should be rewritten to ensure that a local authority or group of local authorities can compete for them; that housing conditions which compromise human dignity, will be grounds for termination; that existing specific laws on rental housing standards will be fully applicable.
- **We would abolish all forced bedroom sharing of unrelated adults.** It is completely wrong that an asylum seeker has no place for privacy. Also, it is wrong that those with no shared language, country, culture, or faith share bedroom space.

## REFUGEES

- **Offer safe and legal routes to the UK for at least 10,000 refugees each year** by expanding the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, both to help a greater number of people from that region and to cover other conflict zones such as Myanmar.
- Provide an effective mechanism to implement in full Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 that commits the UK to welcoming unaccompanied refugee children, this scheme to be expanded **to welcome 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children over a period of 10 years.**