



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

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Relating to those seeking sanctuary.

A SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

- Those seeking asylum should be treated humanely, with compassion and respect, including those who are eventually returned. A climate of fear helps no one.
- The asylum system should be improved so that it properly upholds obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and at the same time minimizes potential for abuse.
- The Home Office is not fit for purpose and needs radical reform. The political influence must be taken out of decision making.

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 and
- **Retain, alongside refugee status, humanitarian protection status**, reiterating our commitment to the principle of *non-refoulement* as applied in international and European human rights law.

DECISION MAKING

We will:

- Review and reform all aspects of the 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**;
- **Speed up processing asylum claims** whilst ensuring careful consideration of all evidence and provision of legal advice;
- Make available better interpretation and translation services at each stage, ensuring more decisions are right first time and reducing the cost, number of appeals and stress;
- **Establish a new dedicated unit for asylum applications**, independent of central Government, to improve speed and quality of decision-making, ensuring better decisions, right first time;
- Take political influence out of decision-making on applications for visas and sanctuary;
- **Provide better training for staff**, particularly those dealing directly with more vulnerable groups e.g. victims of torture or trafficking, mentally ill people, pregnant women, children & 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;
- **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;
- **Increase the timescale for asylum seekers to find accommodation from 28 to 60 days** after receiving a positive decision and **remove the time limit entirely for vulnerable people**;
- Only remove from the country with humanity, when, at the end of all the processes, people have been dealt with justly, fairly and with compassion, following the National Independent Commission on Enforced Removals recommendations on how removals should take place, seeking to keep

families together, allowing people to exhaust appeals in-country and securing 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**.
- We have a new policy of **detention as a 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.
- **We will ensure 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 for more than 72 hours without judicial oversight.

BEING PART OF OUR COMMUNITY

We will:

- **Provide free basic English lessons to any seeker of sanctuary. We would start these lessons at the earliest opportunity**, so that people would be able to integrate and work in the UK as soon as possible. Also they would then be able to engage, participate and contribute fully to the local community and British society, as so many express the strong desire to do;
- **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*;
- Ensure the level of support for asylum seekers is at the same level for all and that all can use the Aspen Card to withdraw cash;
- **Grant all asylum seekers the right to work**, if they wish, 3 months after applying for asylum. The new unit would be required to assist the asylum seeker to exercise this option, through facilitating access to training and to accreditation through relevant qualifications;
- Require asylum seekers able to work 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 to find a job more easily when given the right to remain.
- Destitution for asylum seekers is unacceptable, especially as they are not allowed to work.
- The level of benefits must be reviewed to ensure they are set at a fair level. Benefits for asylum seekers should be updated in line with other benefits.
- 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; and 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.
- **We endorse *The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill***.

REFUGEES

We will:

- **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**;
- Speed up processes for taking unaccompanied children with established family links in the UK;
- Participate in EU search and rescue operations and tackle criminal people-smuggling