

update

UNHCR/Jesuit Refugee Service

Britain failing to meet needs of disabled refugees

A new report from the University of York shows that the presence of disabled people in refugee and asylum-seeking communities in Britain is overlooked, their needs are largely unmet and agencies are uncoordinated and confused about their responsibilities. The government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the UK is making the lives of already marginalised disabled refugees even worse.

There is no official source of data on the prevalence of impairments and chronic illness amongst refugees and asylum seekers in Britain. However, refugee community groups and disabled people's organisations interviewed for the research identified 5,312 disabled refugees or asylum seekers known to them. Between 3 and 10% of the refugee population in the UK are thought to have a disability. Many have physical impairments resulting from torture, land mines and bullets. Many have multiple impairments (both physical impairments and mental health difficulties).

Unmet personal care needs, unsuitable housing and a lack of aids and equipment are commonplace. Disabled refugees lack knowledge about entitlements or how to get a community care assessment. Most workers in reception organisations also lack knowledge about disability-related entitlements open to their clients.

The researchers call for collection of impairment-related data and its inclusion in official data on refugees and asylum seekers. Staff of the National Asylum Support Service (NASA) need to receive training in disability and equality issues. Working arrangements and division of responsibilities between local authority social services departments and NASA must be overhauled. Above all, there is a need to clarify who is responsible for meeting the financial costs of providing community care services to disabled asylum seekers.

Key findings of the report are available online at: www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/pdf/962.pdf. *Disabled people in refugee and asylum*

seeking communities by Keri Roberts and Jennifer Harris is published for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation by The Policy Press. ISBN 1 86134 479 1. £11.95. Marston Book Services, PO Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4YN, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1235 465500. Fax: +44 (0)1235 465556. Email: direct.orders@marston.co.uk.

Sudanese hopes for peace derailed?

The war in southern Sudan, increasingly fuelled by a struggle for key resources such as oil, has pitted the Arab- and Muslim-dominated north against the mainly animist and Christian south since 1983. In July the peacekeeping initiatives of the Intergovernment Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional grouping of states in the Horn and Eastern Africa (see FMR11 pp37-38), unexpectedly raised the hopes of Sudan's estimated four million IDPs. Amid considerable international scepticism, IGAD convened in Kampala the first-ever meeting between the Sudanese President, Omer Al-Bashir, and John Garang, the leader of the main Southern opposition, SPLA. Both sides signed up to the Machakos Protocol which outlines a broad framework for the peoples of southern Sudan to choose between peaceful secession or regional autonomy.

Negotiations in the Kenyan city of Machakos proved short-lived. Differences over the relations between religion and the state, the proposed structure of an interim government and the geographical boundary between northern and southern Sudan could not be resolved and Khartoum ordered its negotiators home on 2 September, the day after the SPLA captured the strategic garrison town of Torit. The UN estimates that around 100,000 people have been displaced by renewed fighting and resumption of Sudanese government bombing.

A detailed report from the International Crisis Group analyses the competing tendencies towards war and peace bedeviling both the SPLA and the Sudanese government and makes recommendations for more active international mediation at:

www.intl-crisis-group.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=778. For latest news from Sudan, see: www.sudan.net/news/news.html www.sudan.net and the Sudan section of ReliefWeb www.reliefweb.int.

US refugee admissions reach historic low

Security checks imposed in the aftermath of 11 September have resulted in a dramatic acceleration of the existing trend to reduce the number of refugees admitted to the United States. Tens of thousands of people authorised for entry remain in perilous limbo around the world.

The US has been far and away the most prominent of a small group of countries (primarily Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden) which have a regular annual quota agreed with UNHCR for resettling refugees. The number of resettled refugees peaked during the first Bush administration in the early 1990s when the US admitted an annual average of 121,000 refugees. Under Clinton, admissions declined to an average of 82,000. 68,426 refugees were resettled in fiscal year 2001. In November 2001 President Bush authorised the admission to the US of 70,000 refugees in 2002. In a World Refugee Day speech on 20 June, Bush said he was proud that America is the "world's leader in accepting refugees for resettlement."

By the end of July 2002, with only two months remaining of the fiscal year, the actual number of arrivals was a mere 20,413. Refugee advocates have called on President Bush to admit more refugees in order to rescue some of those blocked by the new security restrictions. Among them are Sudanese 'Lost Boys' who fled slavery and religious persecution (see p7), Iraqi refugees who at the behest of the first President Bush turned against Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, and Burmese fleeing ethnic cleansing at the hands of the oppressive military regime.

Refugee advocates urged the Bush Administration to raise the 2003 quota to 145,000 to compensate for the failure to meet 2002 admission targets and to restore partnership arrangements (whereby US NGOs work with the State Department to refer candidates for resettlement). They are



disappointed that at the end of September the Administration announced that 2003 quota will be between 50 and 70,000. It is unclear whether those promised but denied entry in fiscal year 2002 will be included.

The Refugee Council USA is a coalition of US NGOs focused on refugee protection. Its refugee admission recommendations for 2003 are online at: www.refugeecouncilusa.org.

Australian refugee policy: not for export?

Australia's right-wing government has embarked on a vigorous international campaign to promote its controversial hardline approach to asylum.¹ Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock used the meeting of UNHCR's Executive Committee in early October 2002 to again deliver the message that unauthorised 'secondary movements' of refugees from country to country should be prohibited.

Under a policy described by the Australian government as "the Pacific Solution", 433 refugees from the infamous MV Tampa were moved in August 2001 by the Australian Navy to the near bankrupt island of Nauru. In return, Australia paid Nauru \$30 million. Amnesty International, granted a one-off visit to Nauru before the island was closed to lawyers and journalists, argues that the Pacific Solution has been a costly experiment that has provided no answers as to how best to protect those who are fleeing human rights abuses. It argues that "the unilateral policy of the Australian government can be described as burden shifting, taking UNHCR resources away from regions where they are most needed and creating further uncertainty and hardship for individuals, many of whom have fled persecution."

Human Rights Watch has released a briefing paper accusing Australia of being on an "aggressive mission to muster international support for the Pacific Solution" which it condemns as a violation of the Refugee Convention. HRW interviews with Afghans and Iraqis seeking refuge in Australia indi-

cate that many have legitimate, protection-related reasons for doing so.

In September UNHCR told European Union Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs that UNHCR supports the creation of a new international agreement on "secondary movement." Human Rights Watch believes the UN proposal and other initiatives under development in the EU must take care not to end up mirroring the Australian approach. "When a refugee can't get effective protection in one place, he or she has every right to try to find it somewhere else," the report argues. "Australia's current refugee policies raise serious human rights concerns, including the use of interception and detention of asylum seekers at sea under 'inhuman and degrading' conditions. This sets a poor example for all coastal states, and is particularly dangerous at a time when Greece and Italy will hold the next two EU presidencies."

Human Rights Watch's report is at www.hrw.org/press/2002/09/ausbrf0926.htm. The Australian branch of Amnesty International has fact-sheets on Australian refugee policy at: www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/ref-factsheets.html. BBC New Online examines the Pacific Solution at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/2279330.stm>

Palestinian children bear the brunt of Israeli clampdown

300 of the 1,600 Palestinians shot dead by Israeli soldiers since the Al Aqsa Intifada started in September 2000 have been children. Six hundred children have been arrested. B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organisation, reports that over 100 Palestinian chil-

dren under the age of 18 are held in Israeli jails, many of them tortured systematically. Imprisoned children are denied the right to education and visits from family and lawyers.

As military curfews, closures and home confinements reach unprecedented levels, more than 226,000 children have been unable to reach their regular classrooms and at least 580 schools have been closed. Many Palestinian school children are now being home-schooled or are gathering in makeshift classrooms such as mosques, basements and alleys. Even when children are able to reach school, many parents are no longer able to afford school fees due to the economic paralysis caused by Israeli restrictions on movements of people and goods.

UNICEF has condemned Israel for denying Palestinian children their right to education and pointed out that Israel is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention governing the rules of war and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which it has signed.

International donors estimate that Israel's military offensive in May caused physical damage estimated at more than \$361 million. Among the facilities of the Palestinian National Authority which were systematically ransacked by the Israeli army was the Ramallah headquarters of the Education Ministry.

For a child-focused perspective on the impact of the occupation on children in the West Bank and Gaza, see: www.savethechildren.org.uk/eyetoeye

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