



**Constituency Lobby
26–27 June 2009**

Information Pack



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1. The Campaign

The Let Them Work campaign is coordinated by the Refugee Council and the Trade Union Congress, working with 22 affiliated trade unions and major charities including Barnardos, Shelter, Migrant Rights Network, Brighter Futures, and Still Human Still Here. The aim of the campaign is to allow all asylum seekers permission to work after 6 months in the UK.

Refugees come to the UK seeking sanctuary from persecution. Some wait years for their claim to be finally resolved, yet most are not allowed to work during this time. They want to take responsibility for looking after their families, yet long periods of unemployment during their asylum claim mean that when allowed to stay, they often end up in jobs far below the level of their qualifications and skills. And if they have their claim refused, they may find it harder to get a job when they return home because they have let their skills go to waste.

Did you know? Over 80% of asylum seekers were working or in full time education before coming to the UK. 54% were qualified up to and above the equivalent of A-levels. *The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) S. Waddington (2005) Valuing skills and supporting integration.*

Our society is losing out too because government policy prevents people from contributing to our economy. The great injustice is that people seeking asylum find themselves 'scapegoated' as scroungers, when many would welcome the opportunity to work while they are here.

At a time where the economy is in recession and unemployment is rising, it is bad for the economy and bad for community relations to prevent people who can and want to work from doing so; forcing them into a position where they can be abused and adding to the strain on government resources.

It's time to Let Them Work.

Asylum seekers in employment will support themselves and their families. They will maintain their valuable skills and contribute to the economy. They will be better able to integrate into society and their local communities. If they ultimately return to their home country, a period of work in the UK could help their reintegration.

The Let Them Work campaign calls for a change in policy that will:

- Combat destitution
- Benefit the economy
- Benefit communities
- Help integration
- Re-skill refugees to offer them a better future

The current policy:

- Excludes people from legal paid employment
- Forces people into poverty or even destitution
- Wastes valuable skills and potential tax revenue
- Isolates people and damages their ability to integrate
- Denies people dignity and self-respect
- Contributes to long-term unemployment
- Drives people into unlawful working arrangements



- Panders to media myths

2. What is a constituency lobby?

A constituency lobby is a way of raising issues with your MP in your local area. When campaigning, it's essential to get the support of politicians if we hope to raise questions about government policy. This is why we are encouraging as many people as possible to take part in the constituency lobby and make their voices heard. We want people from all over the country to take part so we can make contact with as many MPs as possible.

All MPs hold regular 'surgeries' in their constituency where you can make an appointment to meet them. Sometimes you will need to telephone in advance to arrange this and some MPs have a 'drop-in' day for which you don't need to book. Contact your MP's office to find out what sort of system they operate. (See the Useful Links section to find out how to contact your MP.)

The national lobby will take place on 26 and 27 June 2009. We're encouraging everyone to do it at the same time, but if you're not able to you can do it on a different day.

We are organising this lobby in conjunction with the Get Fair campaign, a national campaign calling for an end to poverty in the UK by 2020, and would encourage you to do this at the same time as their planned lobby. Feel free to raise the Get Fair campaign with your MPs if it is something you support. For more information on this campaign, visit www.getfair.org.uk.

By taking part in the lobby, you will be joining thousands of other people throughout the UK, sending a loud message to our political parties that it's time to Let Them Work.

3. Getting Ready

Step One: Arrange to visit your MP

Telephone or write to your MP and request a visit during their surgery hours on 26-27 June. Let them know who you are and what the visit is about, and point them to the campaign website if they want to know more.

You can go to your MP as an individual constituent, but a small group may have more impact and show that a wide range of people support the issue. The more people you can inspire to join in the better! If you are taking a small group or delegation to a surgery you will need to consider carefully how many people you are taking from your constituency and what role they will have in the meeting. Aim for a maximum of 5 or 6, ideally a range of people with different backgrounds and experiences. If you can, invite asylum seekers and refugees to join you in the lobby.



We are representing and advocating the voices of people who do not often get the chance to speak. So it is important that within your lobby group you begin by listening sensitively to each other – especially if there are people within the group with relevant or sensitive experiences, or quieter people who may need encouragement to share ideas.

If you'd like to read some true stories of what asylum seekers have to go through, you can find a few examples at:

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigning/letthemwork/real_stories/

Step Two: Researching your MP

It is helpful to know some information about your MP before you lobby them. Find out what they do; what committees they are on; what their specialist areas are. What particular responsibilities do they hold? Are they already interested in asylum in the UK?

You can begin your research at <http://www.theyworkforyou.com> which contains up-to-date Parliamentary information and can link you to MPs' own websites.

MPs are obliged to support their constituents and their local area, so try to provide some accurate information about local refugee or asylum seeking communities, as well as national information provided by the campaign.

Use this information to target your lobbying. When you speak with your MP, consider emphasising the areas they are particularly interested in.

Example You discovered that your MP takes an interest in issues affecting children and families. Using this knowledge, your group plan to explain how the Let Them Work campaign will improve the lives of families going through the asylum process, and an asylum seeker prepares a short personal testimony about the human impact of the government's policy from a family perspective. You hope that your MP will see the connection and take action on your behalf to support Let Them Work.

Step Three: If you need more information...

This pack and the Let Them Work website contain all the information you need to start lobbying. But if you need any further support or clarification, contact the Campaigns Team at campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk or see our details on the last page.

Unfortunately we cannot provide local facts and figures about asylum seekers in your area.



4. Key things to tell your MP

What we are asking for

- **We want the Government to allow asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting longer than six months for a full resolution on their asylum claim.**
Until 2002 asylum seekers could work if they'd been waiting longer than 6 months for an initial decision from the Home Office.
- **We want the Government to ensure that permission to work remains for people whose claim for asylum is refused, but they are unable to return home immediately through no fault of their own, and are complying with instructions to report to authorities.**

We call on the government to Let Them Work.

What we want MPs to do

We want the government to act now to reverse this unjust policy towards some of the UK's most vulnerable people.

Parliamentary support for this campaign is crucial and we are asking MPs to

- Sign the Let Them Work Pledge (see Appendix A)
- Sign the Let Them Work EDM 960 (see Appendix B)
- Write to the Home Office and raise this with the Minister responsible, Phil Woolas MP
- Write to other relevant Ministers sharing concerns about these issues
- Become a Parliamentary champion for the campaign, by contacting the Refugee Council Campaigns Team
- Write to the local Chambers of Commerce encouraging them to support the campaign and sign the pledge
- Attend the Refugee Council fringe meeting at their Party Conference in the Autumn
- Agree to attend other campaign events in their locality and in Parliament

5. Lobbying Tips

- **Book in advance** – make an appointment by phone, email or letter, letting them know exactly how many people will be coming, what you want to talk about and how long you need.



- **Make sure you are their constituent!** MPs' surgeries are for people who live in their area.
- **You can give them a chance to research what you want to talk about** by sending them a clear letter or email in advance of your meeting.
- **MPs are busy people so make your point clearly and concisely** – try to stick to the point and use the information in the campaign pack for guidance.
- **Don't be nervous** – you have a right to meet with your MP and the MP has a duty to listen to you and take you seriously.
- **Feel free to talk about your personal experience** if you think it would help explain what you're trying to say.
- **Don't get angry or assume ignorance** – they may be on your side, and may have researched the issue before your visit.
- Make sure to **follow up from the meeting** promptly with anything you have agreed to do – strike while the iron is hot and encourage your MP to do the same!

6. Following up

To ensure your local lobby has a powerful and long-lasting impact, you must follow up the meeting quickly. It is also good to share the success of what you have achieved with others to encourage them we can make a difference! Here are a few things you should do:

Follow up with your MP

After the meeting, send your MP a letter to thank them for meeting you, and confirm in writing what they have agreed to. You should also ask them if you can meet them again in three months to see how they have got on with addressing the issues you raised in the meeting, and to invite them to further Let Them Work events you will be holding in your area.

Let us know how you got on

It is vital that you tell us about the meeting with your MP.

The Let Them Work lobby will be happening all over the country, so we will collect all the local information together to create a complete overview of which constituencies have been targeted and how MPs have responded. If you don't tell us, we won't know! So please let us know how the meeting went and what the result was.

Why not share the success of your campaign action as widely as possible, telling all your supporters and the rest of the campaign? If you send us good news, you could find your story told on the campaign website and national newsletters!

As soon as possible after the event please send us your **photos, stories, and response letters** to: Let Them Work, Campaigns, Refugee Council, 240 -250 Ferndale Road, London, SW9 8BB or email campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk



7. Planning checklist

This is a guide to help you plan your local constituency lobby on 26–27 June 2009. There are a number of stages to go through to make sure you prepare for an effective meeting with your MP.

Task	Tick
Get the date in your diary and book the day of work if you need to	
If necessary, form a planning group	
Invite people to share stories and experiences of how they have been impacted by being unable to work when claiming asylum	
Research your MP to find out their areas of interest and gauge their level of support	
Send round emails and flyers to mobilise others from your own and nearby constituencies	
Telephone or send a letter to your MP detailing when you would like to meet them and how many people will be coming with you	
Rehearse the lobby, who will say what in the meeting. Practice who will reply if your MP asks a question about a particular point	
Contact the local media by press release and phone if you wish	
Lobby!	
Send follow-up letter to MP	
Send feedback, photos and stories to Let Them Work	



Contact Details and Key Links

Finding out who your MP is

You can find out who your MP is by:

- Calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272
- Visiting the website www.theyworkforyou.com and entering your postcode

Getting in contact with your MP

You can find out your MP's contact details using one of the following methods:

- The best way to get in contact with you MP is to **telephone** their office. You can ask to be put through to your MP by calling the Parliamentary switchboard on 020 7219 3000.
- You can also find your MP's contact details by visiting the following **websites** which should have their phone number, email address and a link to their own website.

www.writetothem.com

www.theyworkforyou.com

- You can write to them, addressing the envelope to:

MP's name, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Researching your MP

Find out a bit about your MP, and see if they already support Let Them Work.

- Check if they have signed our Pledge, by visiting our website www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigning/letthemwork/supporters
- Check if they have signed the Let Them Work EDM 960 by visiting the website <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/Search.aspx>
- Have a look at your MP's website. You should be able to find this using one of the methods above for contacting your MP.

Keeping in touch with the Let Them Work team

Please keep us updated on your meeting with your MP by:

- Emailing us at campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk
- Writing to us at Campaigns, The Refugee Council, 240 – 250 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8AA



- Telephoning us on 020 7346 1214
- Sign the Let Them Work pledge if you haven't already:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/letthemwork

Let Them Work Campaign Pledge

LET ASYLUM SEEKERS WORK

Since 2002 the government has refused permission for almost everyone claiming asylum to work.

Refugees come to the UK seeking sanctuary from persecution. Some wait years for their claim to be finally resolved. They want to take responsibility for looking after their families and escape from destitution when they cannot access government support. Yet long periods of unemployment during their asylum claim means that when allowed to stay, they often end up in jobs far beneath their qualifications and skills. And if they have their claim refused, they end up returning home with out of date skills and find it harder to get a job than before they left.

Our society is losing too. The UK taxpayer foots the bill for a policy which prevents people from contributing to our economy. The great injustice is that people seeking asylum find themselves scapegoated as scroungers, when they would welcome the opportunity to work while they are here.

We want the Government to allow asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting longer than six months for a full resolution on their asylum claim. Until 2002 asylum seekers could work if they'd been waiting longer than 6 months for an initial decision from the Home Office.

We want the Government to ensure that permission to work remains for people whose claim for asylum is refused, but they are unable to return home immediately through no fault of their own, and are complying with instructions to report to authorities.

We call on the government to allow people seeking asylum to work.

Name

Address

City

Postcode

Email Address



Signature



EDM 960

Let Them Work Campaign

That this House welcomes the Let Them Work campaign to allow asylum seekers permission to work while they are waiting for a decision about their claim; notes with concern that asylum seekers who fled persecution in their own countries are among the most vulnerable people in the UK and are being denied the opportunity to work to support themselves and their families, to pay taxes, and to contribute to the economy; is additionally concerned about the situation of those asylum seekers without status who are unable to return home, many of whom spend years in limbo and are reliant on charity hand-outs or forced into illegal work just to survive; is alarmed that this leaves already vulnerable people open to destitution and exploitation; and therefore calls on the Government to allow asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting longer than six months for a full resolution on their asylum claim and to ensure that permission to work remains for people whose claim for asylum is refused, but who are unable to return home immediately through no fault of their own.

Signed

Name

Please send directly to the Table Office