

# Migration news roundup 30 July 2024

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## Stories that inspired us this week

As the Paris Olympics commence, we want to especially wish the Refugee Olympic Team the best of luck! Cindy Ngamba, a 25-year-old boxer, and UK refugee from Cameroon, will be a flagbearer at the opening ceremony. The athlete has trained to become a professional boxer here in Sheffield. (Source: BBC)

The biographies of all 37 athletes that form the IOC Refugee Olympic Team are now available on the Olympic Refugee Foundation website. (Source: Olympic Refugee Foundation).

And beyond the Olympics, Parsa Mirvakili, an Iranian architect who joined the Northern Ireland Football League after fleeing his home country to seek asylum in Belfast, reminds us of the positive effect sport can have on the mental and physical health of so many who have experienced forced migration. (Source: Belfast Telegraph)

## International news

Anti-migrant tensions are ongoing in Dublin, Ireland, with another fire started as part of protests targeting accommodation earmarked for people seeking asylum. Sinn Féin and the Taoiseach have called for an end to the violence and a need to engage with the community. (Source: Irish Independent)

Tillabéri region in Niger has become home to over 220,000 internally displaced people and a further 36,500 people seeking asylum from neighbouring Burkina Faso, severely straining local resources. (Source: UN News)

Libya is attempting to play a leadership role in addressing migration across the Mediterranean, recently hosting an international conference with world leaders. Critics point out how uncomfortably this sits alongside accusations of widespread human rights violations, including recent reports that Libya expelled some 400 people seeking asylum from Niger into the Sahara desert. (Source: InfoMigrants)

An article by Nigerian novelist Samuel K??la?w?le? laments that coverage of migration in both conservative and left-wing media in the West lacks the nuance and perspective necessary for citizens to empathise with migrants, particularly migrants from Africa. (Source: the Guardian)

## UK borders and migration policy

It's been a busy week of policy changes, announcements and enforcement action. The government has introduced Regulations that amend provisions in the Illegal Migration Act. These changes mean that people who arrived via irregular routes after 7 March 2023 can now have their asylum claims considered, and there will no longer be a 'duty to remove' people who arrived after 20 July 2023. The change in policy was announced by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper who also highlighted the costs of the now abandoned Rwanda scheme and said money diverted from this initiative would be used for the new 'border security command'. She also said plans are being

made for fast track decisions and returns to safe countries. On enforcement, she announced that government will target certain business types in the coming months, including car washes and the beauty sector. 46 offenders have been returned to Vietnam and Timor-Leste; the Home Secretary thanked those governments for their cooperation. Former Home Secretary, James Cleverly, accused the government of 'sending subtle but noticeable messages that they are going soft on border control' after a tweet from the Home Office referred to 'irregular' rather than 'illegal' migration. (Sources: X, Independent, BBC, Newsquest, The Telegraph)

The Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB), the watchdog for prisons and immigration removal centres, raised several concerns about deportation flights to Albania, including one case where an individual was removed directly from a psychiatric ward. Their annual report found that the treatment of those concerned 'fell short of fair and humane treatment in all respects' with a fourfold increase in the use of restraints. (Sources: the Guardian, Independent Monitoring Boards)

## **Specific migrant groups**

On asylum and refugees:

- the government has announced it is closing the controversial Bibby Stockholm barge when the contract ends in January 2025, adding this decision will save over £20 million next year. Campaign groups reacted positively to the news, but called for the closure of other mass accommodation sites too. (Sources: Home Office, The Big Issue)
- an investigation found that Home Office records of subcontracted asylum accommodation providers is five years out of date, with several companies missing from these lists. The investigators also found a lack of centralised record keeping on targets such as maintenance and move on times for residents. (Source: openDemocracy)

On Hong Kong, campaigners are calling for the BN(O) visa route to be expanded to allow non-BN(O) visa holders who were children at the time of the 1997 handover to be eligible to come to the UK. They are also urging the new government to address barriers faced by Hong Kongers in accessing higher education and to remove international student status. It is estimated that up to 2,000 young BN(O) visa holders are currently affected by the international student rule annually. (Source: Radio Free Asia)

There are calls for legislation clarifying the rights of EU nationals with pre-settled status after a number of conflicting court rulings issued in relation to housing and homelessness assistance provided by local authorities. Meanwhile, the EU Commission has started proceedings against the UK for the failure to safeguard the rights of EU nationals who are the beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement to freedom of movement. (Sources: the Guardian, Electronic Immigration Network)

In a recent interview Bridget Phillipson, the new Secretary of State for Education, announced the new Labour government will value the contribution of international students and make them feel welcome in the UK. (Source: The PIE News)

On young people, a refugee from Syria initially deemed to be aged 28 by the Home Office, was later found to be just 17 (this builds on previous reports that hundreds of unaccompanied asylum seeking children have been wrongly placed in adult accommodation or detention, putting them at risk). (Sources: The National, Refugee Council)

On modern slavery:

- This report describes how a 'Fair Work Agency,' intended by the new government to act as a single enforcement body for workers' rights, could best respond to the risks of exploitation for care workers who have arrived via the Health and Social Care visa. (Source: Focus on Labour Exploitation)
- Relatedly, a new report recommends scrapping the system of work sponsorship, since it fuels labour exploitation. (Source: The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants)
- There is scope for AI to analyse the support needs of survivors of modern slavery, but human involvement is also needed, according to new research that used software for analysis of service user case notes. The same project identified possible benefits for survivors of using a self-journaling app. (Source: Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre)

## Cohesion and integration

Harehills in Leeds made the national news last week, due to an incident involving children from the Roma community being taken into care. This was part of an ongoing case involving a family, which then escalated into unrest on the streets. The incident was seen as 'fodder' for far-right disinformation, but local Councillor Mothin Ali played a key role in calming the situation on the night and noted how the incident actually brought the diverse community of Harehills together. Leeds City Council, already aware of issues of mistrust in the Roma community, announced a review of the family's case and apologised for not informing the Romanian Consulate previously. The children have been returned to live with a family member. The case continues. (Sources: the Guardian, BBC)

Last weekend the streets of Coventry were lit up by the return of a Carnival celebrating the richness of West Indian culture. There are also related exhibitions on the history of Windrush in the community, the role of Supplementary schools and Rastafari women in Coventry in 1980s. (Sources: BBC, Coventry Observer)

A skills development programme has been launched for professionals committed to working to prevent community tensions and foster good relations. (Source: Belong)

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