Migration news roundup 13 January 2025

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Stories that inspired us this week

A hair salon owner in London who came to the UK as a Congolese refugee, shared her excitement after being chosen to braid the wig of the main actor in the popular film Wicked. (Source: BBC)

‘Bike for refugees’, a Scotland based charity, is helping those seeking asylum and refugees to feel socially connected via their cycling activities. Bicycles donated by members of the community make this possible. (Source: BBC)

International news

Sweden has suggested that proposals for the creation of EU ‘return hubs’, intended to accelerate the deportation of migrants who reside undocumented in the European Union, could be seen as early as March 2025. The proposal aims to streamline the return process by relocating migrants to countries deemed safe outside the EU. (Source: Reuters)

Poland has brought forward their committed to constructing a fortified border wall with Belarus as part of its ‘East Shield’ security initiative. Now expected by mid 2025, the project aims to counter hybrid warfare tactics from Belarus and Russia and to

curb migration routes seen as irregular through Eastern Europe. (Source: Financial Times – paywall)

Canada has paused applications for permanent residency status from overseas parents and grandparents of citizens and permanent residents, as part of a new initiative to reduce migration overall. This article examines reasons why popular support for immigration has eroded in Canada. (Sources: CTV News, BBC)

UK borders and migration policy

The upcoming border security bill will include provision for interim orders to restrict the activities of suspected people smugglers, such as travel, and laptop, mobile phone and social media use. Critics have questioned whether the measure will impact the number of people crossing the Channel in small boats. A new ‘sanctions regime’, which will target people smuggling networks, has also been announced. Meanwhile, in light of 2024 seeing a record number of people losing their lives attempting to cross the Channel in small boats, a new report calls for an expansion to safe and legal routes to the UK. This includes a recommendation to pilot a refugee visa for 10,000 people from countries with a high asylum grant rate. (Sources: the Guardian, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Refugee Council)

In December, the Secretary of Defence laid a statement in Parliament announcing the government’s intention to launch the

Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP), a single pipeline that consolidates Afghan resettlement to the UK. (Source: Home Office)

The Home Office has shared details of its recent activities in relation to tackling ‘illegal working’, including enforcement visits to businesses such as nail bars and car washes. The government also reported an increased number of deportation of people who were refused asylum, totalling 16,400 individuals since July, the highest six-month total since 2018. (Sources: Home Office, the Guardian)

All non-EU nationals who are visiting the UK from 8 January are now required to apply for the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) before travel. EU nationals will be subject to the same requirements from 2 April 2025. These changes apply only to visitors to the UK who do not need a visa for short stays and who do not already have a UK immigration status. (Source: Home Office)

This analysis looks back at migration issues over the past year, and anticipates potential developments in 2025, particularly in relation to net migration and small boat crossings. (Source: Migration Observatory)

Specific migrant groups

On Hong Kong BN(O)s, the Hong Kong authorities issued more arrest warrants for political activists, who are based overseas, including UK based student Chloe Cheung. The UK Foreign

Secretary issued a statement condemning the move and re-affirmed commitment to ensure the safety of the Hong Kong community who have relocated to the UK. (Sources: Sky News, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office)

On modern slavery, the government has responded to a recent House of Lords report, which said that the UK has fallen behind in its response since the Modern Slavery Act was passed in 2015. It accepts many of the recommendations, which were made in relation to the impact of the immigration system, the care sector, enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act, and supply chains. Globally, the latest UN annual trafficking report found that the number of victims in 2022 was 25% higher than in 2019, with children and people trafficked for forced labour making up a higher proportion of the total than previously. (Sources: Home Office, UN Office on Drugs and Crime)

There are a few stories on asylum and refugees since the last edition:

- Asylum accommodation provider, Mears, has been accused of a ‘litany of health and safety issues.’ Local councils have recorded cases of mould and pest infestations, hazardous electrical fittings and structural damage to walls.
- As the Bibby Stockholm leaves Portland, perceived failures are laid out in this article, which includes first-hand accounts from both residents and staff who worked aboard the barge.

- The Home Office has been accused of ‘systematic departmental problems and a lack of coordination’ leading to a surge in refugee homelessness. Critics blame a rush to clear the backlog of asylum claims, which has resulted in official documents sent late or to the wrong address. Government statistics show a 251% increase in people becoming homeless after leaving asylum accommodation.

(Sources: MSN, the Guardian, Pressreader, Independent)

On children and young people, The Home Office has updated their guidance on the streamlined asylum process for children, confirming that whilst claims for Syrian children are being paused, claims from the other high-grant nationalities (Afghanistan, Eritrea, South Sudan and Sudan) will continue to be processed. The Home Office also provided additional instructions to inform how high grant nationals should present their statement of evidence. This week Barnardo’s have called for government action on the current shortage of foster carers, with a DFE spokesperson confirming intention to invest more to increase foster placements. (Sources: UK Visas and Immigration, the Guardian)

On international students, UK student acceptances saw a 31% growth in January 2025, according to the UK-based student engagement specialist, UniQuest. The agency sees this as a sign of recovery from the sector's recent crises. (Source: The PIE).

Cohesion and integration

A new report analyses the restricted right to work process for people seeking in the UK. The report finds a significant lack of awareness around the application process and notes the national shortage of specialist immigration advice. Recommendations include a reduction in the waiting period before an individual seeking asylum with an outstanding claim can request the right to work and removal of restrictions on allowed jobs. (Source: Electronic Immigration Network)

Syrian refugees in Scotland have been speaking directly to the First Minister about their future in the country following the fall of the Assad regime. The group presented their concerns about the prospect of returning to Syria, and how their lives and their children's lives are now in Scotland. (Source: Scottish Government)

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