Migration news roundup 26 February 2024



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Stories that inspired us this week

Hear about how people seeking sanctuary in Halifax are enjoying table tennis sessions. (Source: Table Tennis England)

Music fans will be interested in the new album ‘I Am Kurdish’ from Syrian musician Mohammad Syfkhan, a former nurse now living in Ireland. (Source: the Guardian)

International news

Ghana is considering whether to pass a stricter law targeting LGBT people, which could result in prison sentences of up to 10 years. (Source: Reuters)

An agreement to open two immigration processing centres for Italy in Albania has been passed by the Albanian parliament. The Italian government plans to send up to 36,000 people seeking asylum to the two camps, and once their asylum applications are processed they would either be allowed to enter Italy or returned to their country. (Source: InfoMigrants)

A report from the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed concerns about the safety of aid workers and staff members from rescue organisations assisting asylum

seekers in Europe, who have been subject to harassment, death threats and even being held at gunpoint. (Source: the Guardian)

UK borders and migration policy

David Neal, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, has been sacked by the Home Secretary James Cleverly, because he shared information from unpublished reports to the media relating to a lack of security checks on private jets. Neal had expressed concern that the post would be vacant during the period when the government is attempting to implement its Rwanda scheme. (Sources: BBC, the Guardian)

There have been 19 arrests in Germany following a major investigation by Europol involving 600 police into a Kurdish Iraqi people-smuggling gang responsible for small boat Channel crossings. Meanwhile, in the first case of its kind, a Senegalese man who was piloting a boat when four people drowned, has been convicted of manslaughter. (Sources: the Guardian, BBC)

There's been further criticism of the Rwanda scheme, this time from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, who says the legislation currently going through parliament will 'undercut basic human rights principles'. (Source: United Nations)

This article highlights the plight of 61 people stranded on the island of Diego Garcia, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), currently being used as a military base. Most are Sri Lankan Tamils, some of whom arrived in the island in 2021 when

attempting to sail to Canada. They are claiming asylum, however the British government is arguing that the refugee convention does not apply in BIOT. On a recent visit, UNHCR staff heard reports of self-harm and suicide attempts, and allegations of sexual assault. Their draft report says the situation 'amounts to detention under international law' and that the individuals should be 'urgently relocated'. (Source: BBC)

An opinion poll has found that people in the UK are more likely to view a country as 'safe' when being asked in the context of returning people seeking asylum. (Source: YouGov)

Specific migrant groups

On asylum, the Home Office has paused processing inadmissible asylum claims that were lodged between January 2022 and June 2023 following the Supreme Court's decision that the Rwanda scheme was unlawful. The pause relates to inadmissible claims where a notice of intent to remove the person to Rwanda had been issued. (Source: Home Office)

On Ukraine, the government has begun winding down the Ukraine Scheme, formalising amendments through a change to the Immigration Rules. The Ukraine Family Scheme closed on 19 February 2024, whilst the Ukraine Extension Scheme is set to close in May 2024. The Homes for Ukraine scheme will remain open, but new applicants will only able to receive 18 month leave to remain rather than 30 months. It has also been confirmed that current visa holders from Ukraine will be able to

apply for an 18 month extension when their current leave expires. (Source: Gov.uk)

On Hong Kong, this article highlights the racism experienced by HongKongers arriving in Blackpool during the pandemic . (Sources: Blackpool Gazette)

On Modern Slavery, this blog describes the development of a new accreditation model for independent advocacy in the modern slavery support sector. Meanwhile, this report explores the impact of the hostile environment on modern slavery survivors. (Source: Hope for Justice)

On children and young people:

- ECPAT UK raised concerns around the sacking of Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, David Neal, at a time when 15 inspection reports remain unpublished. This includes a second report on accommodating unaccompanied children in Home Office run hotels, as well as an inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector. (Source: ECPAT UK)
- ECPAT UK also recently released a report alongside University of Nottingham Rights Lab which highlighted insecure immigration status as a key risk factor increasing vulnerability to exploitation amongst children and young people. The report warns that legislation such as the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and Illegal Migration Act 2023 may further increase risks to vulnerable young people and prevent victims from coming forward due to fear of

removal. (Source: ECPAT UK)

On international students, twenty-three students have filed a lawsuit against the Home Office after a Court ruled they were wrongly accused of cheating on their English tests. Meanwhile, Universities UK (representing 142 institutions) has launched a manifesto in anticipation of the general election, urging leaders to maintain the Graduate Route for post-study work. This article describes some of the hidden pressures experienced by international students such as coming from ageing societies and the related social and educational expectations upon them. (Sources: the Guardian, Universities UK, The Pie News)

Cohesion and integration

On faith and the legacy of colonialism, Westminster Abbey has agreed in principle to return a sacred tablet to Ethiopia after it was looted by British forces in 1868. (Source: the Guardian)

Also on faith, the 'Inter Faith Network', set up 40 years ago to improve understanding between faith groups, has announced it will be closing. The government is cutting the IFN's funding for appointing a trustee associated with the Muslim Council of Britain. Zara Mohammed, general secretary of the MCB, said, 'When there is a real need for cohesion and for bringing people together, to withdraw funding for the Inter Faith Network for the reasons given is a shock.' Meanwhile this article explores the impact of immigration on faith in the UK and the recommendations of the Bloom report in 2023 , calling for

government and educational settings to adopt a ‘faith sensitive’ approach to engaging with communities. (Sources: BBC; the Conversation)

On the far right, it has been reported that the owner of GB News (currently bidding to buy The Telegraph and The Spectator) has been retweeting far-right content under an anonymous Twitter account, including a tweet about ‘fake refugee invaders’. (Source: Hope Not Hate)

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