Migration news roundup 27 January 2025

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Stories that inspired us this week

Haven coffee, a refugee-run café in Walthamstow, launched by Usman Khalid in 2019 is a social enterprise that offers space for people to engage in conversations about the experiences of those forced to flee their homes in search for safety. In addition to challenging existing stereotypes, it provides support for people to start lives in a new country. (Source: Essex Live)

Gabriel Pazmino, an international student from Ecuador, currently enrolled at Newcastle University, explains why he chose to move to the UK for studies. He tells us about his love for writing, some challenges he faced upon arrival, and how now, four years since arrival, he feels much more settled. (Source: NorthEast Bylines)

Scottish Refugee Council has redesigned their 'New Scots Connect Map', an online platform that lists the existing organisations and services that support refugees and people seeking asylum, making it easier for people to find support in their local area. (Source: Scottish Refugee Council)

International news

Following his inauguration on 20 January 2025, President Trump issued a series of executive orders around migration, including suspension of refugee programmes. As part of a broader crackdown, the administration cancelled flights for more than 1,600 people from Afghanistan who were previously cleared by the U.S. government to resettle in the USA, leaving them in a state of uncertainty. (Source: Reuters)

Switzerland considers amending its ‘S status’ policy, limiting protection for Ukrainian refugees to those coming from ‘active war zones’. This change, which raises numerous questions including how to define a war zone, aims to limit the number of people eligible for refugee protection to those considered to be ‘real refugees’. (Source: SWI)

During a visit to Greece the EU migration commissioner emphasised the need to implement the Migration and Asylum Pact, reaffirming the EU’s commitment to border management and member state collaboration. (Source: Independent)

Sweden has introduced stricter citizenship requirements, including extension of the minimum residency period from five to eight years, and ‘behaving properly’. (Source: Le monde)

UK borders and migration policy

Chancellor Rachel Reeves has said an immigration white paper will be published later this year, which may include new plans for high skilled visa routes for the AI and life sciences sectors. While the government wants to reduce net migration, it sees the ability to attract talent from overseas as important for economic growth. (Source: Business Matters)

Media reporting of recent Home Office figures on immigration returns has been questioned. Some sources suggested that 16,400 people with a ‘failed asylum claim’ had been returned, whereas the figure actually represented the total number of returns - this includes other groups such as foreign national offenders or people working without the required visa. The number of people seeking asylum returned has not been published, but previous data indicates they are likely to represent a minority of the total figure. (Source: Full Fact)

There was a parliamentary debate on the minimum income requirement for family visas, following the submission of an e-petition. The income required increased from £18,600 to £29,000 last year. Plans for a further rise to £38,700 are currently under review. Campaigners have drawn attention to the impact on families. (Source: BBC)

The immigration rules changed last year making family reunion harder to access for stateless people. These changes are now subject to a legal challenge. A briefing on statelessness has also been published. (Sources: Free Movement, European Network on Statelessness)

The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill reached committee stage in the House of Lords. The Bill is a private members' Bill introduced by Lib Dem Peer Baroness Hamwee which seeks to widen the eligibility for refugee family reunion, namely, to allow unaccompanied children to sponsor family members. A briefing on the Bill has been published by Safe Passage. (Sources: UK Parliament, Safe Passage)

Specific migrant groups

The Home Office has started the process of automatic conversion of pre-settled to settled status EU nationals approaching the end of their leave, with first grants of settled status expected at the end of January 2025. The rollout of the process is phased, initially starting with adult EU nationals and expanding to children and non-EU nationals later in the year. It was further announced that the Home Office is considering the appropriate next steps for cases where a pre-settled status holder no longer meets the conditions of their pre-settled status. (Source: Home Office)

On Hong Kong, one of the democracy campaigners who had a bounty put on her head just before Christmas, has expressed that she worries for her safety, and expected more protection from the UK police. (Source: The Standard)

On international students, following a consultation on remote delivery policy for international students, the Home Office has

tightened the rules for international students' attendance. (Source: Wonkhe)

On children and young people, the Joint Committee on Human Rights has published a correspondence for the Home Secretary enquiring about the children who went missing while in Home Office accommodation. (UK Parliament)

On people seeking asylum and refugees:

- Home Office's safeguarding policies have come under scrutiny as charities accuse the government of inaction in response to multiple recorded acts of violence in asylum accommodation. Residents also reported incidents of hate crime and exposure to drug dealers. (Source: The Guardian)
- The Home Office has also been criticised for policies which prevent people from war-torn countries to reunite with their family in the UK since the visa application centres have closed. Unlike the Ukraine schemes, applicants from Palestine, Afghanistan and Sudan are required to submit biometrics before travelling to the UK, which some have described as a 'two tier system'. (Source: The Guardian)

On trafficking and exploitation:

- A new report recommends that each local authority should have a modern slavery coordinator, or be supported by a regional coordinator, in order to improve their response to the issue. (Source: Human Trafficking Foundation)

- This new exploitation risk checker tool asks a series of questions to help someone understand whether they are being criminally or sexually exploited. (Source: Causeway)

Cohesion and integration

The General Dental Council has introduced a new policy that gives priority for the Overseas Registration Exam to dental professionals with refugee status. The policy is intended to support refugees to overcome the barriers and challenges they face finding professional employment in the dentistry sector. (Source: GDC)

This joint blog post from NACCOM and Homeless Link welcomes the introduction of the new 56-day move-on period from a positive asylum decision as a vital step towards building a better Move-On Service. The post looks at the positive ways in which the new move-on period aligns with service provision, and further long-term recommendations from their latest reporting. (Source: NACCOM)

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