



## LEWES ORGANISATION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

[www.losrras.org](http://www.losrras.org)

*Lewes Town Hall, Lewes, BN7 2QS – email: [lgsrraslewes@gmail.com](mailto:lgsrraslewes@gmail.com)*

### Next Open Meeting:

#### **The Hummingbird Project: celebrating innovative work with young refugees**

**Elaine Ortiz** (founder and director of the project) and young leader, **Mohamad Aljaseem** will talk about this Brighton initiative to provide aid and solidarity to unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February 7.30 pm** at the **Phoenix Centre, 26 Malling Street, Lewes, BN7 2RD**

**Please note the change of venue** – free parking in the evenings at the Phoenix Causeway Car Park

Tea/coffee/soft drinks and biscuits available from 7.15 pm

### News from local refugee families supported by LOSRRAS

In December we were delighted to witness some reciprocal support by a member of one of our befriended families. A young Syrian man responded to a call on Facebook from a Lewes resident seeking Arabic tuition.

In terms of English tuition, our next initiative is to provide more 1:1 ESOL support at home to meet the needs of individual family members and match volunteers with suitable experience. *(If anyone has English teaching / ESOL experience and would like to get involved in our work, please do contact us.)*

Our families have had great success with the “Let’s Get Working” scheme. This initiative supports people with long term health needs getting back into, or ready for, work. Five people we support have benefited from this scheme. All but one successfully passed their Food Hygiene Course. One received help with vocabulary necessary for his bike test, another was helped to volunteer locally, yet another will take part on an upcoming Construction course.

We are also pleased to report that we are supporting a new person, recently moved to the area.

### ‘80 Years On’

LOSRRAS committee members were invited by Safe Passage to attend a commemoration of the Kindertransport on 15<sup>th</sup> November. It was exactly eighty years ago, a week after Kristallnacht, that Jewish leaders approached the UK government to take in vulnerable children from Nazi-occupied countries. Ten months later nearly 10,000 children had been fostered throughout Britain.

Friends House Euston, which had been the base for Kinder liaison, hosted an astounding event: a mixture of stories from the past, iconic music, input from the multi-faith leaders and testimony from today’s child refugees. Ridwan from Eritrea spoke of his two year journey during which his mother and brother drowned. He hopes to become a civil engineer so as to build happy communities. Five impressive refugees from Brighton’s Hummingbird Young Leaders Programme announced the pledges to date from local authorities to accommodate child refugees.

Safe Passage’s Our Turn Campaign, set up to bring unaccompanied children with a legal right to be here, is led by Lord Dubs: his Children’s Fund is helping form Safe Passage Legal to provide the necessary legal experts. For more information visit [www.safepassage.org.uk](http://www.safepassage.org.uk). To support Alf Dubs Children’s Fund: [www.80yearson.org.uk/donate](http://www.80yearson.org.uk/donate)



HOLOCAUST  
MEMORIAL  
DAY 27/1

**Torn from Home:** A weekend of events at the Depot Cinema commemorating Lewes Holocaust Memorial Day with films, workshops and presentations that focus on the impact of the Holocaust and other genocides on Roma, Jews and other targeted groups

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January at the Depot Cinema, Pinwell Road, Lewes BN7 2JS.

Details available from the Depot and the Tourist Information Centre: to book go to:

<https://lewesdepot.org/news/holocaust-memorial-day-at-depot>

## LOSRRAS Book Box

We have some new titles, which you are welcome to borrow. They will be available at the open meeting on 12th Feb.

### Non Fiction:

*The UK Border Regime; a critical guide.* Corporate Watch

*Prison Island*, prison expansion in England, Wales & Scotland. Corporate Watch

*Bordered Lives; How Europe Fails Refugees and Migrants*, Hsiao-Hung Pai. Hsiao-Hung Pai shows, through her time spent with migrants and asylum seekers who have found their way into Europe, that the 'refugee crisis' is really a crisis of Europe's response to the human movement precipitated by the political and economic turmoil, faced by so many in today's world.

*Escaping War and Waves; encounters with Syrian Refugees.* Drawn and recorded by Olivier Kugler. A graphic journalist Olivier Kugler has gathered stories from Syrian refugees whilst working with Médecins Sans Frontières

### Fiction:

*Welcome to Paradise;* Mahi Binebine. A debut novel set in Morocco, where seven, would-be immigrants gather on the beach waiting for a signal from a trafficker, to tell them the time has come to try to cross the Straits of Gibraltar.

*Sea Prayer*, Khaled Hosseini, Illustrated by Dan Williams. A beautiful illustrated prayer from a father to his son as they flee Syria and wait for a boat on a beach.

*The Lady from Tel Aviv*, Raba'i Al-Madhoun,. Telling descriptions of life in Gaza and the horror of closed borders.

*The Secret Son*, Laila Lalami. Set in Morocco, a vivid account of the contrast between the wealthy and those who dwell in a poor area of Casablanca, with dreams of migration.

### For young children:

*My Name is not Refugee*, Kate Milner. This lovely and moving picture book for young children won the V&A illustration Award in 2016.

## Update on Stansted 15

The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) states that at least 99 humanitarian volunteers and anti-deportation activists were placed under criminal investigation or prosecuted by EU states in 2018. This includes 'Stansted 15', the human rights defenders who surrounded a plane at Stansted Airport in March 2017 to stop what they believed was the unlawful deportation of 60 people on a charter flight to Ghana and Nigeria. The Stansted 15 group was initially charged with aggravated trespass, but were convicted in December 2018 with "endangering an aerodrome" under the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990. This Act was passed in relation to international terrorism after the Lockerbie bombing and has only been used on one occasion when a pilot intentionally flew his plane at a control tower in Coventry airport soon after '9/11'. IRR state that it is the first time such "draconian legislation" has been used for a protest action designed specifically to protect human rights. The conviction can be compared to that of seven protestors from "Plane Stupid" who occupied a taxiway at Aberdeen Airport in 2009, and were subsequently convicted of the far lesser offence of aggravated trespass. Indeed, argument of the prosecution for Stansted 15 is not based on any terrorist intent, but instead on health and safety, with Judge Morgan instructing the jury to disregard all evidence put forward by the defendants to support the defence that they acted to stop human rights abuses and consider a verdict only in relation to a 'real and material' risk to the airport. Defence barristers have said this amounts to a direction to convict.

Two of the protesters, Tamlit and Smoke, describe the convictions as an "unprecedented crackdown on the right to protest". They insist that their actions were justified by the "brutal" and "racist" deportation policy that sparked their protest: "We were charged with endangering life but we took the actions at Stansted to try to protect life."

Stansted 15 is hoping that they will be given non-custodial sentences but face the prospect of a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Their legal team has started preparing an appeal. Amnesty International declares that "the rights and freedoms of all of us are being eroded" and are running a support campaign for Stansted 15. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 11,264 letters of support had been received; AI is aiming for 15,000. If you would like to participate, please use the link:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-for-rights/action/stansted-15>

### **Fund raising gig:**

The fund raising charity gig held on November 24<sup>th</sup> at All Saints Centre was a great success both as a very enjoyable social event and as a fund raiser: £1,460 was raised for LOSRAS. Huge thanks and gratitude go to all those involved in organising the event – especially Gill Lipson, Michael Munday, Anna Taylor and Lou Glanfield – but also the musicians ‘Known Associates’ and ‘Magowiji’ and volunteers on the night.

### **Update on UK immigration policy**

In December the long-awaited Immigration White Paper, *The UK's future skills-based immigration system*, was published. Following a phased ending of free movement for EU nationals (except Irish citizens), UK Immigration Rules are to apply to all – EU and non-EU citizens alike. However the distinction made between so-called ‘low risk’ countries whose citizens do not require visas to visit the UK, and the rest who do, is maintained.

As Teresa May trailed in her conference speech, the cap on skilled workers (roughly A level equivalent or above) will be removed, but the minimum salary requirement of about £30,000 will remain. Less skilled workers to fill job shortages will only be admitted temporarily and only from ‘low risk’ countries, they will need a visa and be unable to bring dependents. The aim is to phase out this category of migrant labour entirely.

Chapter 10, *Protecting the Vulnerable*, deals with asylum, and contains welcome positive proposals to:

- continue the current resettlement schemes (including the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme which has brought Syrian families to the Lewes area)
- ‘secure an ambitious and well-funded English language strategy’ to promote integration of refugees
- consider allowing asylum seekers to work, recognising the ‘importance of work when it comes to physical and mental well-being’
- negotiate an agreement with the EU to bring unaccompanied children into the UK to join ‘close family members’ already here. A review of the level of grant funding to enable local authorities to look after other unaccompanied asylum seeking children coming under the so-called Dubs amendment, is also underway.

Unfortunately the emphasis on creating ever greater barriers to refugees reaching the UK from Europe rather than providing safe passage shows no sign of abating. Instead the White Paper proposes to seek agreement with the EU to implement similar arrangements to the current Dublin agreement under which asylum seekers may be returned to their first ‘safe’ point of entry to Europe. The attempt to widen family reunion to allow unaccompanied children in the UK to be joined by immediate family beyond Europe has also fallen on deaf ears.

As expected, there is no reference to a time limit on detention, but there is a commitment to consider alternatives, ‘starting with an intention to pilot a scheme to manage vulnerable women in the community’. Other Shaw recommendations are taken up – improving support to vulnerable detainees; greater transparency through published data and inspection reports, and improving provision, exemplified by a pilot enabling detainees to Skype families overseas.

None of these policy proposals are in the Immigration Bill, which simply repeals the EU freedom of movement provisions and provides the Home Secretary with very wide rule making powers, so that most if not all the proposals will be introduced through that mechanism, which tends to reduce parliamentary scrutiny as well as making progressive amendments to the Bill less likely.

However, Labour MP Tulip Siddiq has introduced a private members Bill, *Immigration (Time Limit on Detention)* limiting immigration detention to 28 days. It will receive its second reading on 25<sup>th</sup> January when we hope Maria Caulfield MP will give it her support as she has told LOSRAS committee members that she is committed to this humanitarian reform and signed the Refugee Tales pledge to that effect.

## Refugee Channel crossings:

Recent reports document the increasing urgency and desperation of people trying to cross the channel to claim asylum in the UK. The exaggerated reaction of the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, that the numbers arriving constitute a “major incident” has been criticised.

Oliver Graystone’s tweet on December 29<sup>th</sup> 2018, puts into perspective the reality that the number of refugees arriving on UK shores is in fact extremely small:

### On an average day in the UK:

**3,700 are forced to visit a food bank.**

**5,400 suffer domestic violence**

**4,750 sleep rough on the streets**

**4 migrants arrive in boats across the Channel**

### Guess which one the government is calling a “crisis”?

After the Home Office’s initial refusal to give official figures on the number of migrants who have crossed the Channel over the past few months, figures were finally released on 31 December 2018. These state that 539 migrants attempted to travel to the UK on small boats in 2018 with the majority (434) making their attempts in the last three months of the year, but of this number, 227 (42%) were intercepted by the French before they made it to the UK. Javid’s ‘major incident’ therefore amounts to 312 people arriving on UK shores in the whole of 2018.

The Refugee Council state that Britain received around 6% of all asylum claims made in the EU during 2018 indicating that the number of people claiming asylum in the UK is far lower than that of our European counterparts. In Germany alone, a total of 160,600 asylum applications were made in 2018.

### Dates for your diary:

April: Next Open Meeting: details tbc

May 12<sup>th</sup>: Sponsored Walk

May 18<sup>th</sup>: Plant Sale

June 17<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>: Refugee Week

July 6<sup>th</sup>: Refugee Tales Event, Christchurch, Lewes

**\*\*\*And please don't forget to renew your LOSRAS membership if you haven't already done so!\*\*\***

### \*\*\*Urgently wanted:

**Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group** needs men’s clothes: warm hats and gloves (not scarves), trainers, T-shirts, jeans - waist size 32, 34 & 36 only, jogging bottoms – M, L & XL only, jumpers/hoodies/fleeces - warm coats/jackets.

Collections at All Saints Centre, Friars Walk, Lewes, open Mon - Sat 9-11 am. Ring 01273 486391 for other times (if door shut, try office on the right side of the building). Please bring items in a carrier bag and put in black 'LOSRRAS' box inside entrance. Contact Val or Arnold Simanowitz on 01273 480011 with any queries.

### LOSRRAS aims to promote the welfare of refugees & asylum seekers in and beyond the Lewes District by:

- raising awareness of issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers
- providing practical help and responding to local issues as they arise
- advocating and lobbying to improve the rights of refugees and asylum seekers

### Committee:

**Chair:** Jody Harris [info@losrras.org](mailto:info@losrras.org)

**Treasurer:** Tony Sims

**Membership Secretary:** Belinda Kirby 01273 474935, [belinda.kirby@btinternet.com](mailto:belinda.kirby@btinternet.com)

**Members:** Jane Andrew, Alison Bell, Jean Gould, Jane Lancashire, Gill Lipson, Jane McIntosh, Annie Ralph, Gill Tipping