



General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 September 2017

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-sixth session

11-29 September 2017

Agenda item 6

Universal Periodic Review

Written statement* submitted by The Next Century Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-15587(E)



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Treatment of migrants in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

It is the humanitarian duty of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to offer migrants, who are often refugees from war-torn states, a fair chance to rebuild their lives. The Next Century Foundation notes the concerns expressed in the 2017 Universal Periodic Review. There are major shortcomings on the part of the British government. Specifically:

- The UK government is sometimes a poor listener, which can result in inefficient and ineffective dispersal of aid money. Increased communication with refugees, both in the camps to which they have been displaced in the first instance and subsequently in the UK, would inflate their esteem, morale and resolve. Most particularly with regard to those coming from war torn states, the international community in general and the UK in particular could empower local communities in the region to take control of their own destiny by giving them a voice in regard to the dispersal of international aid.
- An effort should be made to recruit and employ teachers, doctors and nurses or others appropriately qualified who are themselves refugees within the camps wherever possible; and government aid funds should be diverted to this purpose in preference to bringing in Western teachers, doctors and nurses and others to perform these roles. This both lifts morale and provides economic support to key refugees.
- Within the UK, there are initiatives such as Herts Welcomes Syrian Families, Refugee Action, and the Refugee Council, whose support of the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme has positively affected thousands of migrants. However, the “temporary protection” which this programme permits is inadequate. Under this programme, migrants are offered the chance to study or work for a limited five year period only. We urge that this time period be extended or that they are offered fast track citizenship after five years.
- Trained migrant professionals are often not permitted to work in the UK whilst seeking asylum. Asylum seekers should be permitted to work in the United Kingdom whilst seeking indefinite leave to remain, should they wish to do so. The asylum seekers allowance is only £36.95 a week, which is evidently very small, especially when compared to the job-seekers allowance of £73.10. It makes life incredibly tenuous and is utterly unfair, given that they are then unable to work legally and become a burden on the taxpayer. However, whilst it is extremely important that refugees and asylum seekers should have the opportunity to work in the UK, it is also important to bear in mind that safeguards need to be put in place to see that they are not exploited by employers and that they are paid a fair wage for the job that they are doing. This is of importance in preventing bad feeling and resentment on the part of indigenous workers (the “immigrants” should not be perceived as a threat to the jobs and terms/conditions of employment of UK citizens).
- To be granted university places, all migrants whose status has yet to be determined must have lived half of their lives in the UK in order to apply as if they were native citizens. This denial of university education to the majority of young migrants whose status has yet to be determined prevents migrants from rebuilding their lives, and retaining their dignity.
- The Lawyers’ Refugee Initiative advocates the use of humanitarian visas, or “humanitarian passports” – that is to say visas for the specific purpose of seeking asylum on arrival – issued in the country of departure or intended embarkation. We urge that this procedure be used extensively by the United Kingdom.
- In order to speed up the processing of asylum applications and reduce legal costs and emotional strain for all involved, we recommend that the Home Office only appeal decisions in exceptional circumstances, and rarely if the case has been under consideration for more than five years. It should be a statutory duty that all appeals by the Home Office take place within one year and be grounded on strict criteria. The actual asylum

application process should be based on criteria that are generous to genuine refugee claims with a mechanism for withdrawing status on conviction of a crime – and fast track citizenship after five years.

We should regard refugees, whatever their circumstance, with compassion and mercy. Compassion and Mercy are moral virtues which elevate humanity and therefore our obligation to refugees transcends any obligation we may have to accept economic migrants and / or the free movement of labour and should not be confused with any such obligation - and the UK is not yet doing enough.

Note: The Next Century Foundation acknowledges the help of Initiatives of Change, an organisation that co-hosted the migration conference that contributed to the preparation of this submission.
