

Sanctuary in Parliament 2018:

Towards a Fairer System: A short guide to engaging with your MP

This document is meant to be a guide to engaging with your MP, please do not send onto your MP. Whilst this document has been prepared with Sanctuary in Parliament in mind it is important to note that you can engage with your MP at any time on any issue. In particular we would encourage groups who are not attending Sanctuary in Parliament to meet MPs in their constituencies in the forthcoming weeks to raise the three policy asks outlined below.

➤ Find out more about them

If you're meeting for the first time, you can do some research about your MP, including whether they have said anything relevant on asylum or refugee issues. You can do this by looking at their voting record, questions they've asked and motions they've supported, as well as looking at any media coverage or their social media feed. Excellent sources of information about your MP and their record are the Parliament website <https://www.parliament.uk/> and www.theyworkforyou.com. These should help you understand their position on asylum and refugee issues more broadly, and perhaps on the right to work, refugee family reunion or an end to indefinite immigration detention more specifically. You can then think about the messages which will resonate best.

➤ Highlight the experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum

MPs may not hear often from people who have been through the asylum system, and hearing from them directly can have the most impact. If you have direct experience yourself of the issues we are talking about, do share this if you feel comfortable doing so.

➤ Plan your key messages

You may not have much time to get your points across, so before you meet your MP, pick out the top three messages you want to convey in relation to the themes of this year's event, and get them across as quickly and simply as you can. Use our briefing to ensure that you are on top of the detail – and look at our quick guide to engaging with your MP on our asks below.

➤ Be clear about how they can help

We've produced some information on upcoming opportunities around the campaign goals (below), which we hope will help you be clear with your MP about what they can do to help!

➤ Use the media and social media strategy

Have a look at the social media and media strategies for tips on how to ensure that your meeting gets the message out there about the importance of this year's campaign goals! If possible, make sure you get a photo taken with your MP and then – disseminate!

➤ Complete the feedback form

It's really important that conversations at and around the event are captured. Please fill out the feedback form attached and make sure it gets to us! Either hand it in at the event or send it to sipbookings@cityofsanctuary.org

➤ Follow up

Sanctuary in Parliament is all about groups forging long-term productive relationships with their MPs. In advance, think of ways you can involve your MP further in taking forward your cause or getting involved with your group in the local area. Afterwards, write to them to follow up on your discussion and next steps – and to say thank you!

Sanctuary in Parliament 2018: Towards a Fairer System

A short guide to engaging with your MP: upcoming opportunities

Government Immigration Bill (Right to Work, Refugee Family Reunion, Indefinite Immigration Detention):

There is due to be a new government immigration bill towards the end of 2018 or in early 2019, following a yet-to-be-published immigration white paper. The bill is likely to provide an opportunity for MPs to lay amendments on immigration and asylum issues.

Supporters should be making their MP aware that their constituents and experts by experience are pushing for them to support amendments that may be put forward to the bill on the issues raised at Sanctuary in Parliament. Further detailed information about the policy issues covered below is in the policy briefing for this year's Sanctuary in Parliament on the City of Sanctuary website.

MPs who are interested in being more active on the bill are invited to contact the APPG on Refugees at parliamentary@refugeecouncil.org.uk who are coordinating cross-party action on bill amendments.

Right to Work:

We are keen to know where MPs stand on the issue of the right to work for people **who have asylum claims outstanding for more than six months**, unconstrained by the shortage occupation list. **We suggest you:**

- **Ask your MP where they stand on the issue.** There's a good chance that your MP will not be familiar with the detail, so be prepared to walk them through it using our briefing!
- **Ask if they would support lifting the ban on the right to work for people seeking asylum after six months and unconstrained by the shortage occupation list:** if your MP is supportive, you can agree to follow up with additional ideas that can help give profile to the issue and build support for it in the community and in Parliament. If not, or not at this stage, we're keen to understand why not, so ensure you get detailed reasons! A few MPs may never agree, but for others it may be possible to change their minds.
- **Ask them if they would be prepared to vote in favour of reform if and when the opportunity arises,** for example if an amendment were to be secured to the upcoming Immigration Bill.
- **Complete the feedback form**

More information: The **Lift the Ban Coalition** www.lifftheban.co.uk is a coalition of over 100 organisations and groups working to secure the right to work for people in the asylum system. There are further resources, policy reports and an activism pack available on their website, and a petition which can be signed [here](#). MPs and constituents wanting to know more about the campaign to Lift the Ban can contact joseph@asylummatters.org.

Refugee Family Reunion:

The Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill is a private members' bill being taken through parliament by Angus MacNeil MP, which aims to extend which family members can join refugees under family reunion rules. It passed its second reading in March with 131 MPs from all main parties supporting it – a very large number for this kind of bill. It is due to have its next parliamentary stages in the Autumn, at which time MPs will be able to reiterate their support for its provisions and put pressure on government to support it. **We suggest you:**

- **Make your MP aware of the bill.** Ask your MP to support it and ask them to call on government to give the bill enough parliamentary time to be voted on.
- **Ask your MP if they would be prepared to vote in favour of reform if and when the opportunity arises,** for example if an amendment were to be secured to the upcoming immigration bill.
- **Complete the feedback form**

More information: The Families Together coalition <http://refugeestogether.uk/> have been supporting the current private members' bill on Family Reunion and are calling on the government to change the family reunion rules. They are also calling on the Home Secretary to support the bill and change the family reunion rules, something he could do with the stroke of a pen. You can sign Refugee Council's petition to the Home Secretary here: <https://action.refugeecouncil.org.uk/reunitefamilies/>

An End to Indefinite Detention and the introduction of a 28 day time-limit:

The second 'Shaw Report' – a government-commissioned inquiry into immigration detention – was published in July 2018. In response, the government announced a number of 'innovative reforms'.

These included an 'alternatives to detention' pilot to support vulnerable women in the community who would otherwise be detained at Yarl's Wood immigration detention centre, and piloting a change in the existing automatic bail hearing time period from four months to two months.

The Home Secretary also committed to the publication of more data on immigration detention, including an annual monitoring of the effectiveness of the Adults at Risk policy by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, and to an internal review of time limits on immigration detention in other countries.

This is a key time for MPs to interrogate government policy and to push for Ministers to go further on bringing forward a time-limit for immigration detention. **We suggest you:**

- **Ask your MP where they stand on the issue.** There's a good chance that your MP will not be familiar with the detail, so be prepared to walk them through it using our briefing!
- **Ask if they would be willing to ask questions in parliament about the 'innovative reforms'.** If your MP agrees, you can commit to follow up with further information about different aspects of the government's announcement.
- **Ask them if they would be prepared to vote in favour of reform if and when the opportunity arises,** for example if an amendment were to be secured to the upcoming Immigration Bill.
- **Complete the feedback form**

More information: Detention Forum <http://www.detentionforum.org.uk/> is a network of organisations working together to challenge the UK's use of detention. For further information, please contact us at detentionforumcoordinator@gmail.com or via Twitter [@DetentionForum](https://twitter.com/DetentionForum).

