



Jean Lambert MEP
Green Party Member of the European Parliament
for London

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Wednesday 20 June 2018

Dear Home Secretary,

Re: Three 'Simple Acts' for Refugee Week

The theme of this year's Refugee Week is 'Simple Acts', encouraging us to make small changes that will positively impact the lives of refugees and asylum seekers.

In your first few months as Home Secretary, it's encouraging to see that you've already taken some simple actions that will improve the UK's asylum system – including new provisions for Afghan translators and unaccompanied minors who arrive under the Dubs amendment.

However, you could build on this progress by committing to the following three 'Simple Acts':

1. Access to healthcare

Firstly, the Government urgently needs to scrap its policies that block undocumented migrants, and hinder some refugees and asylum seekers, from accessing free NHS healthcare.

Under the current system, it is difficult for health professionals to accurately identify who is chargeable and who is exempt. Although refugees and most asylum seekers do not have to pay for NHS treatment, they are regularly denied healthcare or charged sky-high fees. Those who are most adversely affected are often the most vulnerable, with little understanding of their rights or require a translator.

Designed to tackle deliberate 'health tourism', which is thought to cost the NHS no more than £300m each year, this policy puts thousands of lives at risk and puts our medical professionals in an extremely difficult position.

The only way to clear up the confusion around this issue, and protect the health of refugees and asylum seekers, is to ditch this nonsensical and dangerous policy altogether.

Greens in the European Parliament

London office: Office of the Green MEPs, CAN Mezzanine, 49-51 East Road, London N1 6AH
jeanlambertmep.org.uk | jeanlambert@greenmeps.org.uk | [@GreenJeanMEP](https://twitter.com/GreenJeanMEP)

2. Access to the labour market

Secondly, asylum seekers must have permission to work in the UK while their claim is being processed.

The current policy which forces these individuals to live on benefits of just £37.75 per week – one third of the income of the poorest 10% of British households – is cruel and inhumane. Not only is it deeply damaging to people's mental health, but it increases their vulnerability to exploitation through working illegally.

Scrapping this outdated policy also makes sense from an economic perspective. A study from Warwick University has found that even if 25% of asylum seekers were employed, the Government could save £70m a year in asylum support costs.

As we approach Brexit, official government figures show that skilled EU nationals are leaving the UK in their droves – leaving many industries with a growing skills gap. Whether they are relatively unskilled or highly specialised, asylum seekers are ready and waiting to step in and fill these vacancies.

3. Access to ESOL

Finally, refugees must be provided with the help they need to learn English.

Since 2009, funding for Government-funded ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lessons has been slashed by 55%. Many colleges and organisations that provide these classes have commented that quality is diminishing, while waiting lists have grown. In some parts of the UK, it can take up to three years for refugees to win a place in the classroom.

The Government should heed Refugee Action's call for it to provide every refugee in the UK with a minimum of eight hours of ESOL lessons per week. This will help people to feel at home and make friends, as well as preparing them to enter the labour market and engage with their new communities.

In summary, these three simple (and entirely achievable) acts would transform life in the UK for thousands of refugees and asylum seekers. They would also benefit the UK as a whole, both culturally and economically.

As you seek to put your own stamp on the Home Office, this Refugee Week is the ideal time to commit to making these changes in the coming year.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this matter. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,



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