

# Government must increase support for asylum seekers

The latest Immigration Statistics, published this morning, show that 51,906 people are waiting for an initial decision on their asylum claims, an increase of 33% since last year. 31,516 have been waiting for more than six months, a 68% increase.

People who've come to the UK having fled war or persecution should be welcomed, not trapped for months on just £5.39 a day

Currently, asylum seekers are banned from working while they wait for a decision and **forced to rely on asylum support payments of only £37.75 a week – just £5.39 a day.**

All of our MPs have written jointly to the Home Secretary urging her to increase asylum support by £20 a week during the coronavirus crisis – in line with the increase to Universal Credit. This matches calls from charities Refugee Action, the Salvation Army and others.

In the letter, we also called for asylum seekers to be given the right to work if they are waiting for a decision for more than three months.

This would allow them to fill essential roles during the pandemic, as well as to support themselves, integrate in their communities and contribute through taxation.

## **Our Home Affairs Spokesperson, Christine Jardine said:**

“The coronavirus crisis is leaving the most vulnerable in our society at risk. We must ensure no one is left behind.

People who've come to the UK having fled war or persecution should be welcomed with compassion and enabled to contribute to our society, not trapped for months on just £5.39 a day – especially now during this pandemic.

The way the Home Office is treating these vulnerable people is appalling and unacceptable. The Government must urgently increase support for asylum seekers in line with the emergency increase for people on Universal Credit.

Ministers should also finally give asylum seekers the right to work, allowing them to fill essential roles during the pandemic, as well as giving them a sense of dignity, more money and the ability to contribute to the economy.”

Christine A. Jardine MP  
Edinburgh West



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

7<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Priti,

**Support for asylum seekers during the coronavirus crisis**

We the undersigned are writing to urge you to provide further support to those seeking asylum during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

During this difficult and unprecedented time, it is important that the most vulnerable members of our society are protected and supported. This includes those seeking sanctuary from war and persecution.

When people come to the UK having fled war or persecution, we should welcome them with compassion and enable them to contribute to our society. Instead, those seeking asylum face long waiting times for decisions on their application, they are unable to work, living in crowded conditions and reliant on a handout of less than £40 a week.

Numerous charities have raised concerns that those seeking asylum are being made to live in conditions that make observing official social distancing guidelines impossible. The Public Law Project has said that failure to move individuals who have been granted Section 95 support to alternative living arrangements is unlawful as it falls far short of compliance with social distancing regulations set out in current guidance. The Home Office must urgently make sure that people can properly self-isolate, socially distance and maintain their hygiene in line with vital government advice.

The charity Refugee Action has found that at this time people are struggling even more to get by on inadequate asylum support payments. The already substantial challenge of living on £5.39 per day is made more acute; ASPEN cards are only uploaded with subsistence support weekly, making it very difficult for people in the asylum system to buy food and other essentials in sufficient quantity to minimise trips or prepare for self-isolation. Those seeking asylum may be housed a significant distance from large supermarkets and local

shops, requiring the expense of a long journey for each shopping trip. With support services on which people usually rely closed, people seeking asylum are having to make choices between food and medicine.

In the context of the current pandemic, the Home Office must urgently ensure that asylum support rates also receive the same £20 COVID-related uplift as other mainstream benefits.

Furthermore, as a permanent solution, asylum seekers must be allowed to work after three months. This would vastly improve integration, help people rebuild their lives, and save the taxpayer millions in support payments. These policies will help people seeking asylum to meet their needs both during this pandemic and beyond.

We look forward to receiving your response. We must all work together to ensure that people seeking asylum can avoid danger and destitution during the coronavirus crisis and beyond.

Yours sincerely,



Christine Jardine MP

Alistair Carmichael MP  
Wendy Chamberlain MP  
Daisy Cooper MP  
Ed Davey MP

Tim Farron MP  
Wera Hobhouse MP  
Layla Moran MP  
Sarah Olney MP

Jamie Stone MP  
Munira Wilson MP

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## [The Government must extend the Brexit transition period](#)

Today we have introduced a Bill to require the Government to seek a two-year extension to the Brexit transition period, in light of the Coronavirus pandemic.

To choose a No Deal Brexit and crash out, when the option to extend the transition is possible, would be an act of national self-harm – especially when our NHS, economy and food supply chains are already stretched and struggling.

To crash out of the Brexit transition period when our NHS & economy are already stretched due to COVID-19, would be unthinkable

**Speaking ahead of the Bill's presentation, Liberal Democrat Acting Leader Ed Davey said:**

"It is clear the government have not made nearly enough progress on the Brexit trade talks.

To crash out of the Brexit transition period when our NHS & economy are already stretched due to COVID-19, would be unthinkable.

It is time the Prime Minister did the right thing. That is why Liberal Democrats are today presenting legislation that would enable the government to seek an extension to the transition period."

To crash out of the Brexit transition period when our NHS & economy are already stretched due to COVID-19, would be unthinkable.

While Gove has admitted there will be checks on goods going from Britain to NI, there is still significant detail lacking in these documents.

With just weeks to go until the deadline, the Government must extend the transition period as a priority.

<https://t.co/I8z6e5laPm>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [May 20, 2020](#)

*European Union Withdrawal (Implementation Period) Bill:*

*A Bill to require Her Majesty's Government to seek a two-year extension of the implementation period under Article 132 of the Withdrawal Agreement; to repeal the prohibition on agreeing to such an extension under section 33 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020; and for connected purposes.*

The Presentation Bill will face its second reading on 12th June 2020. However, the extension request has to be made by the UK before the end of June.

**With just weeks to go until this deadline, it is clear that the Government must extend the transition period as a priority.**

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## [New Liberal Democrat leader elected this August](#)

Last week, we published the frank independent review [into the 2019 general election](#). It rightly received plaudits in the media for its candour.

**This review challenges us to change as a party and to change the country for the better.**

We now need to get on with that work – and that's what we've done with a set of key decisions by your Federal Board.

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## [International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia](#)

In the midst of the Covid 19 crisis it is easy to think it is the only issue in town. But there is another issue that as Liberals we should not need reminding of.

One aspect of it was highlighted to me this week when **a friend told me that he cannot give blood.**

My friend would like to help by providing blood from which plasma could be used in the fight against COVID-19 but regardless of how rare his blood group might be, of how healthy he is, he cannot donate because he is gay.

**I was stunned.**

We must surely recognise that there are still elements of our lives which label and marginalise the LGBTQ community

So I checked and, to be fair, the NHS site says all men must wait 3 months

after having sex with another man before donating. It doesn't claim to be a ban, and says it is regardless of sexuality. But the reality is that as someone in a long term committed single-sex relationship that almost automatically excludes him.

And it is not the only example.

**More than once in the past three years I have pressed the Government to fulfill the promise of its LGBT action plan and ban gay conversion therapy.**

Today is International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia.

I would not suggest for a minute that safeguards to ensure donated blood is healthy is by its nature homophobic. I cannot say the same about the lack of a ban on gay conversion therapy.

We must surely recognise that there are still elements of our lives which label and marginalise the LGBTQ community and that this is one of them.

**As Liberals we should be aware of the danger of assuming that everybody feels equally respected and protected in the current crisis.** These past two months have posed problems for us all that we never thought we would have to face, and demanded strength we did not know that we had.

**But we are not there yet.**

In striving to reach that moment we would do well to remember the words of US politician Daniel Patrick Moynihan:

*"The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society.*

*The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself."*

**That is the task we must set ourselves.**

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## **[2019 Election Review](#)**

Following the 2019 General Election, the Federal Board commissioned Dorothy Thornhill and her team of fourteen to conduct an independent review of the Party's performance.

The Liberal Democrats are committed to a fair and open society and reflect that in our internal approach to transparency and accountability. The

resulting report is therefore available here in its entirety.

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