

# POLICY & ADVOCACY NEWS

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## Asylum Interviews

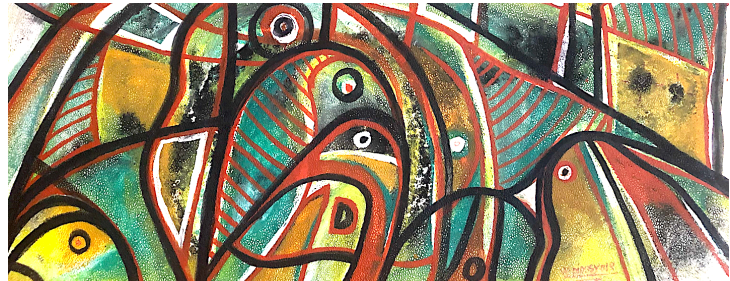
In 2020 we collected research interviews with Birmingham University as part of the [SEREDA project](#). We were contacted by Jenny Phillimore to comment on the current Home Office [Asylum Interview](#) guidance as she was running a series of meetings with the Home Office discussing some of the problems with the asylum and immigration systems and how they interact with/generate and exacerbate SGBV, often undermining recovery.

From casework and discussions with women we suggested issues that they needed to consider, and had a few questions we wanted clarity on:

Pg 13 interview arrangements- interviewers are encouraged to build connect through eye contact, but eye contact for women is problematic, they tell me it's rude to look people in the eye so they avoid eye contact which may be a reason they are viewed as liars.

Pg 14 appropriateness of video conferencing, as the majority of people have trauma and mental health issues- so we suggest its not appropriate way to conduct interviews.

For more info see blog [here](#)



## Project Update

Our Advocacy and Policy project has been busy and quiet since May 2021. In the first 5 months there was work on bringing casework examples into the policy area to create changes in practices. These included:

- accomodation standards with Duncan Lewis,
- the ASPEN transition with ASAP and Asylum MATTERS,
- Home Office interview standards, SEREDA launch and an unfiltered lives campaign with Birmingham UNiversity.

We also contributed to various networking forums including:

- Birmingham Destitution Forum
- Feminist representations
- Migration forum

We worked with the influencers group, and the women with Hope Group.

- Both groups identifying / prioritised areas of focus, and giving examples on what was most important to them.
- Influencer Gimbi attended the SEREDA launch article with info below.

Project worker Sarah took maternity leave in September 2021, and the project was put on hold for 6 months while she played with her new twins! It restarted in March 2022.

## Advocacy & Policy Work

Our project assisted 42 women with casework in the first 6 months, working in partnership with others on policy issues.

### ASPEN Transition

We sent 16 advocacy casestudies to Asylum Matters, who worked with ASAP, and the national asylum support network to present issues asylum claimants faced with receiving, and activating the new aspen card to the Home Office. Home Office have addressed issues and assessed lessons learned.

### Gender Issues in Asylum Claims

Working with Birmingham University we analysed and commented on gender issues in asylum claim Home Office guidance, using examples from our casework to highlight areas for improvement.

### Destitution & Detention

We worked with 17 women facing eviction from Home Office accommodation, appealing evictions, and supporting women to get charity accommodations.

### Legal Representation

We worked with 21 women to gain legal representation, often referring to the Hope Projects legal team, as well as legal aid solicitors.

### Child Nationality

We worked with 2 children, one British one Italian to gain nationality for them, and their parents leave applications. Links to social services.

## House of Lords Meeting

We find almost all women we support have had experiences of gender based violence like those discussed in the recently launched [SEREDA research](#). Over 20 of the Women participants in the research are supported by Baobab, surviving rape and sexual violence in their home countries, on their journeys and in the 'safe' European countries they seek asylum in due to systemic failures of human rights and refugee protection. Gimbi Cham, an advocate and influencer, contributed on Baobab's behalf to the House of Lords meeting organised by Birmingham University to promote their findings saying we support the recommendations made by the [SEREDA Project](#).



Particularly we want to see a central body with SGBV responsibility, where there will be well trained and trauma informed decision makers. Considering the recent report from the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration 'An Inspection of Asylum Casework' decision makers have a lack of training, as well as an ignorance of country conditions. Having decision makers who are competent and knowledgeable in these areas will improve if there is mainstreaming of SGBV responsibility. We know survivors understand, and strongly advocate for them being in the centre of any model to address the issues. Having lived through violence, we also need to be sensitive to their need to stop reliving the trauma and have appropriate support and recognition during engagement. Believing women in their protection claims, rather than refusing them as a norm, then making women destitute must change.

Gimbi explained after to other refugee and migrant women on our whats app group saying 'It was a great launch, the room was full of positive women, Jess Phillips asked to me send support to you and that she will do everything she can to make Asylum Seekers and Refugees voices heard, working very hard to make the government take positive decisions for all women and children.'



## Community Advocacy

Our community advocacy has had a lot of changes due to Covid. Our office team are working hard and getting organised thanks to Bridget Obi our advocacy coordinator. The team are happy to get back to face to face appointments with weekly Covid testing for advocates.

A regular team meeting has been established for case allocations and reviews Wednesdays. We are taking new referrals, but remain limited in our capacity to provide advice due to limited resources. In May 2021, four advocates worked on 69 cases of which 45 were resolved. The remaining 24 cases continued into June.

## Financial Resilience Project

During Covid we set up a weekly zoom meeting to support women emotionally and with information on services and issues we were hearing about.

We have had a number of talks including: Therapeutic sessions from Inini in Coventry, the Peoples Backpack, Advocacy information sessions from community advocacy team, Womens Aid sessions on violence against women, Allies Network on FGM.

## Accounts Team

Our accounts team, led by Talhatou Diallo are learning on the job, and training with KBM Training and Recruitment, taking their Accounts Assistant Practical Training course.

They are very busy with year end, finalising payments of the previous years zoom meetings, allocating ongoing transactions, paying destitution grants to women, and grants for household items received from Norton Foundation, and Glasspool Charity trust.

@baobabwomen

[www.baobabwomensproject.net](http://www.baobabwomensproject.net)

Author: Sarah Taal  
Editor Amrita Dhinsa

## News and Actions

### Right to Work

Influencers discussed how important it was to have the right to work.. quotes...

Sadly on the MPs reject plan to cut time asylum seekers wait to work in March 2022. [BBC News reports](#): In all, 66 Tory politicians wrote to the PM last week, urging a change to the Nationality and Borders Bill.

It would have let asylum seekers work if they were still waiting for a decision on their application after six months, rather than a year.

But the government did not back the move and it failed by 291 votes to 232 in the Commons.

### Nationality and Border Bill

Privacy International are working hard on ASPEN privacy issues, specifically around the monitoring and tracking of asylum seekers. [Read more here](#).

### Detention

Agnes Tanoh and Sisters not Strangers/ Women for Refugee Women are leading the petition to stop the new detention centre for women. Read about it in a [Mirror article here](#), Sign the petition on [change.org here](https://change.org).

### Book review

Leah gives a passionate and direct narrative of how borders can and are being resisted. See [blog review here](#).

Listen to the radicals in conversation,



## Raising Womens Voices

Baobab Women met in person before Covid at Elmwood Church, then on zoom after Covid to discuss problems that they face as refugees and migrant women in the UK. They worked with community artists to create pictures and poems relating to their issues, creating a book.

We launch the book during Refugee Week 2021 - event opens at 5pm with welcomes and networking, then have three speakers, and other contributors attending who will give brief talks and answer questions in a Q and A format from 5.30-7pm. Books will be on sale, proceeds go to Baobab to support our ongoing advocacy work, core costs & provide grant support for destitute women.

Event working with Refugee Week Artist Millicent Chapanda, Zimbabwean singer and Mbira player- Music from 7-7.30pm. Tasty vegan food provided by Sol cafe. Tickets are sold out - but email us to get the book: [volunteer@baobabwomen.co.uk](mailto:volunteer@baobabwomen.co.uk)

## Strategic Review

As an organisation our aim is to provide quality casework services to women wanting help. It is getting increasingly difficult, as our work with destitute forced migrant women has expanded to include women granted residence, those who are settled for some years and sometimes even naturalised British women having health, money or housing problems approach us for help.

We have many volunteers, and requests to volunteer, including student placements. People who have much to contribute, with language help & office admin being leading activities. We need a better organisational structure and support to utilise the skills of the inspired people involved in our work.

We are undertaking a strategic review to set priority areas for the next 3 years. Our focus is on ensuring that we have the capacity and resources, to do what we are doing well. We are aiming to improve our work and develop robust partnership working, in line with the values at the heart of the Baobab Women's Project.

[@baobabwomen](https://www.baobabwomen.net)

[www.baobabwomensproject.net](http://www.baobabwomensproject.net)

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## BOOK LAUNCH

### voices from the front line

Asking for justice and equality  
Can you join us and help make a difference?  
Be with women creating change

21st June, 5-8pm

5 - 7pm: Book sales, talk & Panel Discussion with Baobab

Music from 7.15-8pm: Millicent Chapanda, Zimbabwean singer and Mbira player

Food Provided by Sol Cafe  
The warehouse café  
54 - 57 Allison road  
Birmingham B5 5TH



## News and Actions

### RAS Voice group Refugee Action

Continues its work on New Plans for Immigration exposing the shortcomings of the whole process. They are appalled by Britain Thinks' involvement, read their letter and sign it [here](#) . The deadline is COB Friday 18<sup>th</sup> June

### Events & Conferences

Refugee Week Events: West Midlands

Rosa Summer Conference: 23-24 June

Homeless Link Womens Homelessness Conference: 29th June

Feminist Representations: 25th June



