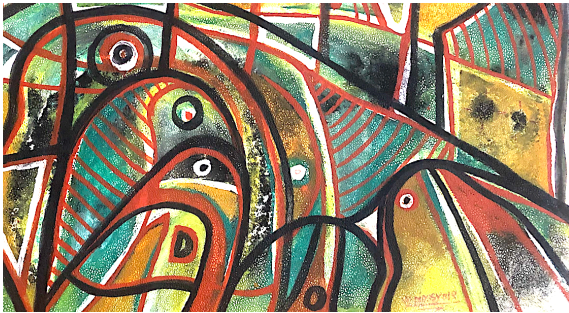


# POLICY & ADVOCACY NEWS

## Project Updates | Policy Areas | Baobab News



### Project Update

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

- Accommodation standard interviews for Duncan Lewis strategic litigation,
- Casestudies on the ASPEN transition for ASAP and Asylum Matters,
- Home Office interview standards, SEREDA launch and an unfiltered lives campaign with Birmingham University.

We contributed to various networking forums including: Birmingham Destitution Forum, Feminist Representations and the Migration Forum.

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

- Both groups identified and prioritised areas of focus, giving examples on what was most important to them.

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 at the end of March 2022.

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### Asylum Interviews

We were contacted by Jenny Phillimore from Birmingham University 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 for example:

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

Pg 15: How do they monitor claimants not being obliged to recount experiences, I am told women are asked same thing in many different ways, often feeling interrogated and criminalised.

Pg 20: Interpreters should automatically be female for women due to majority being GBV survivors, unless a male interpreter is asked for. We have reports of interpreters asking for sexual favours in return for them getting womens papers approved, and of an interpreter refusing to translate rape as he said it make his people look bad.

For more info see blog [here](#)

Interviews provide the forum for women to tell their story and get protection, they must be gender sensitive and improved. This is especially important with the new plan for immigration.

Author: Sarah Taal  
Editor Amrita Dhinsa



## 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 interviews Home Office guidance.

### Destitution & Detention

We worked with 17 women facing eviction from Home Office accommodation, appealing evictions, and supporting women to get charity money & 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, enabling their parents leave applications. Links to family law and social services.

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## SEREDA GBV Research & 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.'

Author: Sarah Taal  
Editor Amrita Dhinsa



## Accommodation Standards

We have been working with Duncan Lewis on accommodation standards getting feedback from families in asylum support.

We made a statement for their strategic litigation, commenting on our institutional experience regarding the adequacy of dispersal accommodation provided by the Home Office to those eligible for asylum support.

I reviewed our client database and was able to identify 53 women with children who were living in asylum accommodation. In August 2021, I telephoned 35 of these women, prioritising those who spoke English, or a language we had a volunteer interpreter for, and asked for their consent to conduct a survey of their experiences in asylum accommodation.

19 women were available to talk and I interviewed all of them. Of the 19 clients who participated, 17 raised concerns about the quality of their asylum accommodation. They spoke about gas and heating problems, mice, rat and cockroach infestations, mould and damp issues, overpowering stench from sewage and dirty carpets, room overcrowding and water leaks.

Problems were repeatedly reported to Migrant Help, and at times SERCO would visit to repair issues, but it was normal that accommodation was left in a very bad state of repair. We are continuing to collect feedback from women.

## Asylum Dispersals

We are concerned about pregnant women and new mothers being dispersed out of the area they access health and community support in. The Home Office policy states that women should not be moved out of area in the 'protected period' which is 6 weeks after giving birth. We have had two women be told to travel to other cities days after giving birth. We highlighted cases to Maternity Action & ASAP.

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## Advocacy & Policy Work

Influencer group updates

### Priority Area List

Influencers wanted to work on issues in this order:

- Policy Focus 1: Asylum Accommodation & Support Standards
- Policy Focus 2: Destitution & Detention
- Policy Focus 3: Mental Health Access
- Policy Focus 4: Legal Representation
- Policy Focus 5: Gender Issues in Asylum Claims
- Policy Focus 6: Child Nationality

### Mental Health Access

Influencer women want access to education to improve their mental health. Links to Refugee study scholarships discussed provided.

### Right to Work

Influencers discussed how important it was to have the right to work. But the right while still seeking asylum was not easy, it was hard to get jobs due to SOL restrictions, waiting for 1 year is too long, if you find a job you lose support, if then women get refused, the right to work is withdrawn, women left homeless, if reapply for support they can be dispersed anywhere in the UK. Bad practice, no guaranteed outcome.

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.

Author: Sarah Taal  
Editor Amrita Dhinsa



## Raising Womens Voices

Baobab Women launched our voices from the front line book during Refugee Week 2021 - to get a copy email [accounts@baobabwomen.co.uk](mailto:accounts@baobabwomen.co.uk)



## Community Advocacy

Our advocacy has evolved to have an administrator, financial resilience caseworker for newly settled women, and a NRPF / asylum caseworker, focusing particularly on destitution casework. Supported by volunteer community interpreter advocates.

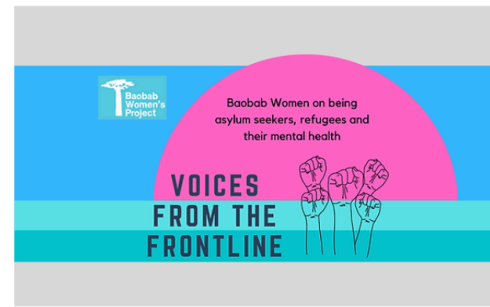
A regular team meeting happens Wednesdays. We are taking new referrals, but remain limited in our capacity to provide advice. To get an appointment women need to contact our advise line 07847271022 Wednesdays between 10-1pm. If we cannot help we will refer to another agency.

## Accounts Team

Our accounts team, continue destitution payments, volunteer expenses, funder budgets. Also we have taken on the financial administration of the Coventry Migrant Womens Houses.

## Resources

We have distributed our 19 Choose Love tablets to NRPF and asylum kids in school. Women give these back when they get their papers so other children can benefit from the resource. So far 20 children have had more access to education due to having tablets. Choose Love have sent us some period products, Bloody Good Period supported many women with pads and cups.



## News and Actions

### Unfiltered Lives Campaign

Telling the stories of real people whose lives have positively changed as a result of Birmingham University research. Through photograph and compelling stories, Unfiltered Lives goes beneath the surface to the heart of why our researchers do what they do. When refuge isnt safe. Uncovering the abuse and failures of the asylum system faced by victims of SGBV,

### New family and private life rules

On 9 July 2022, the first people granted permission to stay under the ten-year private and family life routes will start to qualify for indefinite leave to remain. Now, just in time for that anniversary, the Home Office has introduced what it describes as a "simplified" approach to such cases. [freemovement blog](#)

### Events & Conferences

Status Now for All [2 Year Summit Recording](#)

Womens and Equalities Committee, Refugee womens evidence 23 March 22 [Parliament Live TV](#)

Training for immigration advisers on preparing asylum claims, Wednesday 27 July 10 a.m. on Zoom. To book a place or for more information, email [sue@tactic.org.uk](mailto:sue@tactic.org.uk)