

2007/08

Dear Colleagues,

Re: Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) Membership

In 1999, the UK government decided to revolutionise asylum-seekers' housing and support by establishing the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to provide for their basic needs. NASS was disbanded in April 2007 and asylum support decisions are now made by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA). While there is a right of appeal to the Asylum Tribunal (AST) where support has been refused or withdrawn by BIA, no public funding is currently available for legal representation for asylum seekers at these hearings despite years of lobbying by concerned law practitioners and voluntary organisations.

In order to assist those asylum seekers at an AST hearing who are faced with the loss of support and possible destitution, the Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) was established in 2005. ASAP provides free legal representation at AST and also advises Refugee Community Organisations and other agencies who are advocating on behalf of asylum seekers whose housing and welfare support has been terminated or refused. Through specialist training and support, we also aim to build up RCOs' capacity to advise and represent their asylum-seeking clients at an AST hearing and challenge BIA decisions.

ASAP believes that all asylum seekers have a right to competent, free legal advice and representation on asylum support issues and would like as many people as possible who share our belief to support our organisation and shape our future by becoming a member.

We welcome both individuals and organisations who meet one of the following criteria to become our members:

- a) refugee community organisations and non-statutory organisations which offer or would like to offer individuals seeking asylum in the United Kingdom legal advice, support and representation
 - b) firms of solicitors or individual solicitors who represent and advise individuals seeking asylum in the United Kingdom
 - c) individuals whose particular skills, qualification or knowledge may be of assistance in the attainment by the ASAP of its objects
 - d) individuals who have an interest in the welfare of individuals who seek refugee status, asylum and support in the United Kingdom
- (Please also note that each organisation can appoint two authorised representatives.)

Please note that ASAP membership is free. Members receive quarterly newsletter and invitations to AGM. Organisational members are also invited to our free asylum support training sessions. Once you become a member, there is no need to renew your membership. However you have an option of annulling membership at any time. ASAP will review its members' list every year.

If you have any questions about our organisation's activities, please do not hesitate to contact us. We wish to thank you for your support and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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