

Dear Home Secretary,

Congratulations on your appointment to one of the great offices of state. You will lead the Home Office through a period of great challenge, but at a moment of great opportunity for reform. We are writing to you as organisations that work with, are led by, or represent people who have moved to the UK and have made it their home. We want to raise a number of pressing issues, which require action if the immigration and asylum system is to regain the trust of the public.

### **Allowing people who seek safety in the UK to re-build their lives**

As a global power and as the fifth richest country in the world with a proud history of providing safety to those in need, Britain has an obligation to lead by example and guarantee shelter and safe passage to those who seek asylum or refuge from conflict, persecution and crisis. We can and must build a system where safe, legal routes to asylum are accessible to all who need them. We must build a system where asylum decisions are made quickly and fairly, so that people can rebuild their lives in the UK. Currently, people seeking asylum in the UK are effectively banned from working, meaning that they are at a high risk of destitution and denied the opportunity to provide for their families and contribute to the economy. Funding cuts to ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes must be reversed and new long-term funding guaranteed. We need comprehensive support systems which help those who seek asylum to navigate life here and become active members of their local communities by allowing them to work and study.

### **Keep families together**

All families belong together. Under current rules however, British nationals must demonstrate they earn an income well above the minimum wage in order to live with their partner in the UK. British nationals with parents abroad find it almost impossible to bring them here as they grow older. As a result, tens of thousands of British families live in separation, with children unable to see their parents except through Skype. The UK should make it easier for its citizens to build a life here with the people they love. Refugees in the UK who have lost everything should have the right to be reunited with their close family in the UK so that they can make a fresh start together and integrate in their new community. Reintroducing legal aid is vital for them to navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.

### **Secure the rights of European citizens and their family members and protect vulnerable groups**

We welcome the Prime Minister's announcement to guarantee the rights of European citizens in the UK, but we urge the government to enshrine those rights in UK law. The Home Office must step up its efforts to provide adequate and concrete information about the EU Settlement Scheme to EU citizens and their family members who are often non-EU nationals. This should include targeted outreach activities to vulnerable EU citizens such as elderly people, children in care, disabled people, rough sleepers and victims of domestic violence. These groups are at risk of not being aware of the scheme at all, of being misinformed, of not having access to accurate information and support services to navigate the scheme and of eventually facing the hostile environment if they miss the application deadline.

### **Stable work and study routes**

Our current immigration system ties workers to employers, distorting the market and creating opportunities for exploitation and short-term visas. Ever-changing requirements make workers' lives unstable. We need more sensible, more flexible rules that encourage long-term integration and

stability for families. Children and young people who grew up in the UK or were born in this country should have equal access to education and work as their British peers regardless of their parents' immigration status. The Home Office should guarantee easy and affordable access to citizenship for this young generation.

### **Treat human beings with humanity and end indefinite detention**

Our immigration enforcement system treats people brutally: families are woken in the middle of the night by immigration raids and parents are taken away in front of their children. Too many people are detained unlawfully and with no idea when they may be set free. Access to healthcare within detention is often inadequate. The Home Office under your predecessors started to take important steps in reforming immigration detention and pursuing alternatives to detention. There is cross-party support in Parliament for a 28-day time limit on detention. We ask you to pursue these reforms with urgency.

### **End the Hostile Environment**

Our communities, our public spaces, our public services and our workplaces should be places open to us all, where no one fears discrimination or persecution. The hostile environment builds a border through our hospitals, homes, schools, police stations and communities. Doctors, landlords, police officers and teachers have been tasked with verifying immigration status and often people who look or sound 'foreign' are asked to show their papers in order to see a doctor or go to school. We are also concerned about the collection and processing of increasing amounts of personal data of migrants and the lack of safeguarding in place to regulate its use in the broader immigration process. We must end the hostile environment so that discrimination is effectively challenged and communities can unite, build bridges and prosper. Additionally, the recommendations of Wendy Williams' Lessons Learned Review must be published immediately. We ask you to commit to ending the Hostile Environment.

### **Build a better Home Office**

The Home Office should make timely, correct and fair decisions about people's status, supporting people to get on with their lives and become active members of their community. It should not price people out of status or citizenship and should be transparent and accountable. Cuts to funding and a lack of investment in training and support mean that caseworkers are overstretched and the department struggles to retain staff. Only a department that works efficiently, values its staff, embraces transparency and uses evidence to make policy can deliver an immigration system that earns public trust. We ask you to invest in that reform as a matter of urgency.

Recent governments have seen scandal after scandal rooted in the failure of the immigration and asylum system to work effectively and fairly. Building a better one will not be easy, but it is more essential than ever. We look forward to working with you and your department to make it happen.

Yours sincerely

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Tahmid Chowdhury, Joint-CEO, Here for Good

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Wayne Myslik, Chief Executive, Consonant  
Emily Crowley, Chief Executive, Student Action for Refugees  
Dr Laura Miller, Interim Director, Solidarity with Refugees  
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Kate Smart, Director, Asylum Welcome  
Sarah Teather, Director, Jesuit Refugee Service UK  
Jo Cobley, Director, Young Roots  
Jill Rutter, Director of Strategy and Relationships, British Future.  
Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director, The Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE)  
Nicolas Hatton, CEO, the3million  
Hazel Williams, National Director, NACCOM Network  
Rt Revd Jonathan Clark, Chair, Churches' Refugee Network  
Kat Smithson, Director of Policy and Campaigns, National Aids Trust  
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