

# Meeting of the CPG on Migration

**Topic:** Pathways to Citizenship & Updates on the Rwanda Bill

**Date:** Tuesday 12th March 2024

**Location:** Committee Room 2, with the option to join remotely via Microsoft Teams

## **MSP attendance:**

Paul Sweeney MSP

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP

Pauline McNeill MSP

## **Non-MSP attendance:**

Guy Ingerson from Office of Maggie Chapman MSP

Annie Wenn of Office of Katy Clark MSP

British Red Cross

Freedom From Torture

Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland

Scottish Detainee Visitors

Maryhill Integration Network

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)

VOICES Network-British Red Cross

Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees

Forth Valley Welcome

Justice and Peace Scotland

ARTconnects

Maryhill Integration Network

Fair Way Scotland

Wellington Church International Welcome Club

Outside the Box

Positive Action in Housing

Citizens Advice Edinburgh

GLADAN

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

And others

## Discussions

### **1. Andy Sirel | Legal Director & Partner | Just Right Scotland**

Andy provided a recap on the trajectory of the Rwanda plan over various bills which have been raised in parliament. He explained that even though the bill is likely to pass into law, there are significant legal challenges which can be made towards the bill. He also detailed that the Safety of Rwanda Bill allows ministers to disregard international law, and also how the bill seems to be trying to exclude a group from existing legislation in the UK i.e. the Human Rights Act 1988.

Questions were fielded on the particularities of the UK legal system, including how

the bill can be delayed, whether the bill was constitutional. Andy explained the bill could be challenged as unconstitutional, but since the UK does not have a codified constitution it may be complicated, but the Commons could pass the bill without Lords approval.

There was conversation on how migration is being treated as a political football and whether the government may decide to “switch on” the Illegal Migration Act 2023. It remains unclear if the bill will be able to clear these hurdles, however it was also highlighted how the Rwanda plan also has various practical pitfalls regardless of legal opposition. The fate of the bill remains uncertain, however it is within the realm of possibility that flights to Rwanda may take off as soon as early summer.

## **2. Baroness Ruth Lister | Member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom**

Baroness Lister gave a speech by way of a pre-recorded video, this detailed her role as a Labour backbencher in the House of Lords and the parliamentary process of “ping pong” as well as the amendments the house had agreed upon. The Baroness relayed her experience that crossbenchers - Lords who have been judges were particularly upset as the Safety for Rwanda Bill 2024 as it seems to blur the lines between government and the judiciary – the bill seeks to assert as a matter of law that Rwanda is a safe country directly against the court decisions. The bill has also been condemned by UNHRC, however the government views this as a difference in interpretation.

There are significant challenges to the bill including the risk of sending trafficking victims or unaccompanied minors to Rwanda. Despite this the Baroness predicted it was likely that very few or any of these amendments would be accepted, and the Lords will have to decide whether to keep pushing the amendments, and predicted it was very likely some people would be flown to Rwanda. She also mentioned the Labour stance is that the bill should be repealed.

There was an update by Andy Sirrel on the PCs union considering legal action to prevent civil servants carrying out the Rwanda plan on the grounds that it would force civil servants to break international law.

## **3. Rebecca Menzies & Gustavo Rodriguez | Refugee Integration Team | Scottish Refugee Council**

Rebecca and Gustavo presented on how the SRC helps those who have recently received their status to remain in the UK through their Refugee Integration Service. This has also been challenging as new refugees have to tackle the hostile environment and these issues have been exacerbated by accelerated decision making by the Home office.

There were questions regarding SRC’s outreach and allowing more people to get in touch with them. It was recognised that more could be done in this regard and that they were working on creating more lines of communication and trying to reach rural areas. There was conversation regarding a new online BRP system as the physical cards are set to expire at the end of the year, however there is no update on this. There were also questions on improving employability for refugees or allowing them to

transfer their skills more efficiently as the UK economy is in need of workers in several fields. The SRC has been running an employability project and seeks to do more in the future.

## Action Points

- There might be a statement from SG on the Rwanda Bill
- APPG on migration and CPG on migration joint meeting
- Mixed meeting in may - tuesday evening - will have confirmed date