Refugee, Asylum seeker & Migrant Action

Action is the antidote to despair

formerly

Refugee Action Colchester

Newsletter – autumn 2026



We're sorry not to be able to include in this newsletter any examination of the latest changes to Indefinite Leave to Remain, as announced by the **Home Secretary** this week.
We will aim to provide a considered update in the next newsletter or possibly before.



Welcome to the last newsletter of 2026. The clocks have changed… and so has the weather! And if this were a different newsletter we could write plenty about the effects of the climate emergency. But sticking to RAMA's main focus, little has changed this year with regard to the **misinformation, disinformation** and **anti-migrant rhetoric** that frustrates us on a daily basis. Referring to asylum seekers as 'illegal immigrants' is common practice that goes unchallenged across most of the national media, and this is tame compared to the lies and commentary on social media platforms where hate speech flows unchecked. The ripple effect of this is profound. We are grateful for the existence of local organisations such as Stand Up to Racism and Colchester Unite Against Racism with whom we have protested this month both in Colchester and in Chelmsford. It has become increasingly apparent (see, for example, the ITVX documentary '*Undercover: A year with Reform*), even were there no refugees or asylum seekers in the country, there would be plenty of victims for the far-right from among others in our communities. The targeting and harassment do not stop at immigration status: anyone who is not white is at risk, as some of our staff can attest. The role of social media in this cannot be overstated, giving a platform as it does to 'opinion-formers' of the worst sort. Chief among these, white supremacist Elon Musk, earlier this year posted almost daily about alleged threats to the white race, along with endorsing politicians like Rupert Lowe, who has called for 'millions' of deportations. Add to this the proliferation of AI-generated images, videos, memes and songs* designed to inflame local anger, including images of 'migrant gangs' of men assaulting white women. (* We've heard these hate-filled creations played at full volume at the weekly anti-migrant protest at the castle gates in Colchester by an antagonistic but modest group of masked individuals.)

One tangible effect of this narrative – alongside the increasing anxiety felt by many of our neighbours and the emboldening of malicious actors on the streets – is **Operation Vanguard**. Introduced by Essex County Council to 'protect' the communities of Colchester, Chelmsford and Braintree from the asylum seekers bussed in from the Wethersfield camp, this operation sees TWO private security guards in each place for a trial period of three months. There was no consultation with any of the local town authorities nor with the police, and when challenged by Colchester City Council during a recent Crime & Disorder Committee meeting, ECC representatives were unable to present any justification for the operation short of a dubious poll. The assessment of its success will, they said, be based on 'evidence' from social media. The local police have categorically stated that there has been no rise in crime or abusive behaviour that can be directly attributed to the presence of asylum seekers in Colchester. As this article states: "studies confirm that when refugees are framed as a 'threat' by the media and policy, the resulting hostilities extend beyond refugees and target broader racial and ethnic minority communities regardless of their citizenship or origin." This is exactly the effect that has been seen in our city of sanctuary.

Our government, instead of challenging extreme far-right narratives, is itself instituting damaging policies. It's a dismaying evolution, 75 years after the signing of the post-war Refugee Convention (1951) – of which Britain was a key architect – which aimed to ensure that those forced to flee their homes could seek refuge and rebuild their lives in a place of safety. Nobody should have to live in fear because of their religion, skin colour or immigration status. It is incumbent on all of us to bear witness. I can't be the only one to have been put in mind recently of the post-war quote by Pastor Martin Niemöller, *First they came…*

NB All blue, underlined words indicate a link to further reading: just click on the word to be taken to another website 😊

With this newsletter appearing only quarterly it's impossible to include ALL our news, but for a snapshot of recent activity, read on…

Hate Crime Support

Many victims of hate crime suffer in silence, a growing issue that significantly impacts asylum seekers and refugees. Victims that we work with often say they live in fear, both at home and when going outside, highlighting the profound impact on their mental health and well-being. It is vital that victims receive the right support to help them cope.

We are a designated Hate Crime Reporting Centre working in partnership with Essex Police. A hate incident is an incident perceived by the victim or anyone else as motivated by prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or transgender identity.

Essex Police Hate Crime statistics for **September 2026**:

- Racial incidents: 32
- Disability-related incidents: 5
- Homophobic incidents: 3
- Religious (Jewish) incidents: 2
- Religious (Muslim) incidents: 0
- Transgender-related incidents: 0

While racial incidents remain the most frequently reported, these figures do not fully reflect the true scale of the problem, as many incidents go unreported. Victims often hesitate to come forward due to fear of retaliation, lack of awareness, reporting barriers, or the belief that the police will not take action.

To address this gap and encourage reporting, RAMA is working alongside Essex Police and Colchester City's Community Safety teams. Through Essex Police, we will be holding sessions to make the reporting process clearer and more accessible. Additionally, we will provide further training for our volunteers, staff and clients on how to report hate crimes and navigate the process.

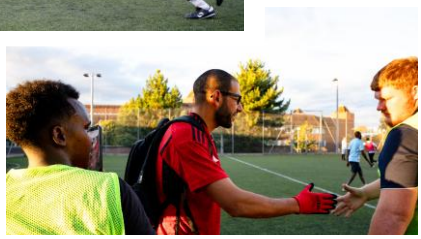
People are seeking safety and reassurance. As part of Colchester's identity as a City of Sanctuary, we are proud to collaborate with local policing and community safety teams to combat hate and foster unity. Please remember that we all have a role to play in stopping hate. **HU**











Let's draw happiness together!

Many Ukrainians have arrived in Colchester since the start of the hostilities against Ukraine. Some of them prefer to socialize only with their family and friends, while others choose to interact exclusively on social media. RAMA has been running a group for some time on Saturdays, where any Ukrainian can come, and over a cup of coffee or tea, chat, find things out or share information of their own. In addition, we draw together, which helps us relax and cultivate a sense of beauty, under the guidance of an experienced mentor who is passionate about drawing and painting.

When we take a brush or a pencil in our hands, we are transported to another wonderful world, where our hands create something unique. Engaging in art influences your state of mind—calms, inspires, and motivates you—sometimes better than any therapist. In addition to drawing on paper or canvas, some of the activities offer you the opportunity to decorate your clothing, footwear, bags, and scarves with your own creations.

You do not need to bring your own art supplies: paints, brushes, markers, and pencils are provided by RAMA. And having created your first work with your own hands, you will certainly feel happier! **Svitlana, Art teacher**

Who we are and why our work matters – a reminder

RAMA is an independent organisation with its office in central Colchester. We deliver **casework** to clients locally, and through outreach, to Tendring. Specialist services also operate across Greater Essex, with in-person, online and partner-based support.

Our mission is to **offer support and advocacy** for all seeking sanctuary and to work with relevant partners to ensure **equity of opportunity** for our clients. We organise our work around four connected areas: (1) Casework and advocacy, (2) Regulated immigration advice, (3) Mental health, wellbeing and community activities, and (4) Dedicated Ukraine support. **Emergency practical assistance** runs across these services.



Who we support

RAMA supports people from 157 countries:

Refugees and people seeking asylum
Ukrainian nationals displaced by conflict
People with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)
Survivors of domestic abuse
People with insecure/irregular immigration status
EU nationals requiring assistance
Victims and potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery
Individuals and families facing homelessness, destitution or serious hardship

These groups intersect. A person may simultaneously be a survivor of **exploitation**, have **insecure immigration status**, experience **poor mental health** and be **homeless**. Migration status alone does not describe a person's health, vulnerability or capacity for independence. Many cases are highly complex.

Why a trusted community service is necessary

Clients frequently face simultaneous barriers: unfamiliar systems, limited English, lack of money or digital access, trauma, discrimination, insecure accommodation and uncertainty about entitlements, existing services without commissioned translation/interpreting facilities, lack of understanding around cultural factors or immigration status. A referral or information leaflet may be insufficient. People may need practical help to complete an application, communicate with a service, travel to an appointment and remain engaged until support is in place or sufficient knowledge is gained to achieve independence. Having all these services in one location helps create a trusting relationship that prevents more serious issues developing and increases clients' access to services they may otherwise avoid, only presenting themselves at a time of crisis. National migrant-health guidance recognises the importance of safety, basic needs, social integration and removing barriers to mental healthcare. It also identifies financial insecurity, immigration uncertainty and discrimination as potential sources of distress. This supports the rationale for RAMA's integrated approach.



1. <u>Casework and advocacy</u>

RAMA assisted approximately **2,900 people this year.** Support includes:

- Access to asylum accommodation and subsistence payments
- Escalations when support is delayed, interrupted or unsuitable
- Housing applications and refugee move-on support
- Benefits applications and employment-related support
- Specialist assistance with Personal Independence Payment, Work Capability Assessment processes and Disability Living Allowance
- GP registration and applications for help with health costs
- School and college applications
- Work-readiness activities and permission-to-work applications where appropriate
- Finding legal representation and supporting communication with legal teams
- Practical help with online Home Office and legal appointments
- Appeals-related assistance within the team's regulated Immigration support work
- Safeguarding referrals and coordination: identifying to the appropriate teams the the incidence of children in adult accommodation or adults with mental health / learning difficulties and supporting them while awaiting outcome of these referrals (to avoid crisis or escalation).



Our **Casework and Advocacy team** deal with up to **400 client interactions each week**. These are asylum seekers and newly granted refugee individuals and families. Some complex refugee cases require up to **40 hours of support in a month**. This intense engagement is significant. A completed application or successful handover can require repeated evidence gathering, explanation, liaison and follow-up. Interaction counts alone do not fully reflect this work. Clients arrive suffering from numerous conditions. Not all have PTSD, but a significant proportion do. Some are engaging with the national offender's team or have been released from prison or detention. Many families arrive without the knowledge or ability to successfully access support, healthcare, or education, not knowing where they are and with no clue as to how to access support, GP or schools.

2. **Regulated immigration advice**

RAMA offers FREE Immigration advice at Levels 1, 2 and 3. We supported approximately **240 immigration advice clients last year** and forecast supporting **at least 600 in the current year**, following expansion of the team and a rising demand. We also work with approximately **600 complex cases annually** involving migrants with insecure or irregular status. Work includes domestic abuse, human-rights applications, No Recourse to Public Funds and other complex immigration matters. RAMA supports **1,259 people with NRPF**, with approximately half described as children or dependants. Around half were destitute when they approached RAMA. This is an unseen and unrecorded population who are not counted as residents of Essex by the County Council. They are often not allowed to work and must pay for NHS services beyond GP appointments. Specialist advice can address a barrier that otherwise leaves a client without stable income, personal safety planning, housing or a secure route forward. Many complex cases involve individuals and dependants living in unsafe situations, so expert knowledge and prioritising urgent cases are key.

3. **Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)**

RAMA provides trauma-informed, person-centred mental health and psychosocial support, combining individual work, group activities and practical assistance. This includes:

- Two qualified clinical psychotherapists
- A mental health lead who is an experienced qualified and regulated psychotherapist with lived experience of forced migration
- Collaboration with local psychosis and psychiatric teams
- Individual therapeutic support and community wellbeing activities
- Greater Essex-wide MHPSS provision for asylum seekers.

The MHPSS work shows **2,500 group-activity participation sessions** and **48 individuals** receiving or offered a programme of **twelve weekly one-to-one sessions**. Our MHPSS Lead has also created a qualified and regulated team of additional volunteers able to work with more clients on a one-to-one basis to increase capacity. She is also involved with the Research Engagement Network (REN) – showcasing the extensive work we do with research teams around the country, enabling them to hear clients' voices in a meaningful way.

RAMA's community provision complements NHS Neighbourhood plans for treatment and specialist care. It also provides a route through which distress and unmet need can become visible and be addressed.

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We provide support to approximately **350 dispersed asylum seekers** at any one time in Colchester and a rising population in Tendring. As people move through the asylum system, existing clients continue to need support while new arrivals enter the service. For example, when an asylum seeker receives a decision, that person becomes either a refugee needing move-on support or a failed asylum seeker also needing support, either lodging an appeal or accessing a voluntary return pathway. The vacant space is filled immediately by a new asylum seeker who will require arrival support. As well as those who are awarded refugee status and choose to settle in our city, there are also a rising number of destitute families with refugee status who are accommodated in Colchester at the request of London boroughs and Chelmsford Council, who cannot afford to house them in their own area. Most arrive with no furniture or benefits or support in place.

Housing need is central to our work. This includes asylum accommodation; newly granted refugee move-ons; Ukrainian hosting scheme move-ons; homelessness, unstable or informal accommodation; and domestic abuse situations. We help with refuge placement and transitions into independent housing as well as emergency

provision for victims of modern slavery and trafficking. Our **complex casework** frequently concerns people with complex and hidden needs such as domestic abuse, trafficking, modern slavery and severe exploitation. Many of these people have NRPF. Our work seeks an appropriate route out of destitution: for example, removing an NRPF condition where eligible, pursuing an immigration application that may establish access to public funds, or supporting an informed voluntary return (subsequent to receiving immigration advice) where this is the client's chosen and appropriate route.

Referrals into RAMA's services come from the police, social services, local authorities and housing services, social prescribers with GP services, mental health teams, NHS staff and hospital discharge teams, voluntary organisations and community networks, Migrant Help and many more. **This shows that RAMA serves both as a direct point of access and as a specialist partner for agencies encountering problems they cannot resolve alone.**

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Sanctuary Scholarship



It is with great pleasure and pride that we can share the news that our client, Mohammed Gana Mohammed, successfully secured a full Sanctuary Scholarship to read Mechanical Engineering at the University of Kent, from September 2026. Since Mohammed registered as a client with RAMA in January 2025, he has always shown a keen and continuous interest in advancing his education. Having been moved on several occasions by the Home Office, and due to his immigration status, Mohammed has faced many obstacles in accessing education.

As a young man, Mohammed completed secondary education in Nigeria and achieved excellent grades from the Ramat Polytechnic in Maiduguri, graduating from the Department of Mechanical Engineering in 2018. Studying a range of subjects, Mohammed obtained a diploma equivalent to a UK Level 3, achieving A and B Grades in Mechanical Engineering, Science, mathematics and other related courses. Mohammed progressed to a university course in Mechanical Engineering but had to flee his country during the first year of his studies due to the insurgency by the group Boko Haram in the northeast of Nigeria.

Travelling first through Libya, then Italy and France, Mohammed arrived in the UK where he has now spent nearly two years trying to settle and make a new life for himself. Since arriving, he has experienced delays in his asylum process and multiple other challenges, being relocated to Colchester after stints in Portsmouth and at Wethersfield Immigration Centre.

Shortly after arriving, Mohammad attended the RAMA football programme (which he went on to attend regularly throughout his time here). While he never revealed the full details of his history, he alluded to events in his young life including suffering at the hands of extremists. He has physical scars on his forehead and elsewhere that match his mental scars. Spending time with peers, who generally have an understanding of his pain, was beneficial: the football programme's ethos is to encourage the release of pent-up frustration in a positive and therapeutic way rather than elsewhere in everyday life. Mohammed slowly made friends, began to smile more and channelled his focus into learning.

Despite the challenges he was facing, Mohammed remained steadfast in his belief that education is the key to rebuilding his life and giving back. He finally made the courageous step of applying for the scholarship, his dream being to complete his studies and to make a positive impact in the engineering community. He remains an asylum seeker who was trapped in an unforgiving system for nearly two years… but in spite of the hardship he continues to endure, he has given himself - and all who know his story - hope for a brighter future. We wish him all the very best of luck in the next stage of his life in the UK and look forward to hearing about all he achieves!

JW & CM





All football pics show caseworker / coach Colm and clients in action at football practice at Colchester Sixth Form College. *Courtesy of photographer Tracy Davies*



Legal Brief

Beyond the Sponsor:
Who protects family life under proposed UK immigration reforms?

The Immigration and Asylum Bill 2026 (Bill 105) proposes introducing a new category, described as a "sponsor's human rights claim", through amendments to the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. The new proposal gives rise to issues regarding the connection between immigration cases based on family life and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which is the right to respect for family life, as well as the extent of the United Kingdom's extraterritorial human rights obligations.

In the current system of immigration applications based on family life, the refusal to allow a family member to enter the UK would be unlawful under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, as it would constitute a breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, the new proposal frames the claim in a way that focuses on a person already present in the United Kingdom; therefore, it raises questions as to how the circumstances and rights of a family member seeking entry from abroad would be assessed.

This article will examine:

a) whether placing the sponsor at the centre of a claim concerning the admission of a family member from abroad could affect the established approach of UK courts to the unitary nature of family life,
b) the implications of this question for the territorial scope of human rights protection,
c) whether the United Kingdom's exercise of administrative authority over immigration applications made abroad raises broader questions about its obligations under Article 1 ECHR and the concept of effective control.

The unitary family life principle recognises that family relationships cannot always be assessed adequately by examining the position of one individual in isolation. The rights of one family member may be closely connected to those of others with whom family life is enjoyed. This was laid down by the House of Lords in Beoku-Betts v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2008] UKHL 39, where it was ruled that when assessing the effect of an immigration decision on family life, one should bear in mind the consequences that such decision had for the rest of the family.

The issue of whether Beoku-Betts applies only to people who are already within the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom or how it relates to extraterritorial jurisdiction and applications for entry clearance has been the subject of appeal, for example in later decisions such as IA & Others v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2025] EWCA Civ 1516. These distinctions have become particularly important following the Court of Appeal's judgment in *IA*. The judgment is important because it demonstrates that two propositions can coexist. Family life, once established, is unitary; nevertheless, the legal assessment does not necessarily treat the Article 8 rights of every overseas relative as independent rights that must be given equal weight in the proportionality exercise. However, it is important to bear in mind that this judgment was related to adult dependent relatives; therefore, the threshold for bringing adult dependent relatives to the UK is extremely high, even for families living in Gaza (according to the Court of Appeal). Therefore, we believe that this decision might not be directly relevant or applicable to the sponsor's human rights claims, but it shows the possible approach to be taken when it comes to the Article 8 rights of every overseas family member. This is because their rights might not be given equal weight in the proportionality assessment as in the *IA*, and especially after the proposed change.

We believe that the proposed change is likely to be interpreted by the Home Office in a way that narrows the assessment to the sponsor's individual circumstances. If that interpretation excluded consideration of the established family relationship and its consequences, even to some extent, it would raise a more substantial question about compatibility with the unitary family life principle identified in *Beoku-Betts* and subsequently considered in *IA*.

The framework, in turn, leads to the question of the connection between the concept of unitary family life and the territorial scope of Article 8.

Article 1 ECHR requires states to secure the protection of Convention rights for everyone within their jurisdiction. The Court has recognised limited circumstances in which jurisdiction extends beyond a state's territory, but the existence of administrative authority over an immigration application has not yet automatically established jurisdiction over the applicant.

The distinction between administrative authority and human rights jurisdiction is key in analysing the extraterritorial aspects of sponsor-based human rights claims. In M.N. and Others v Belgium (2020), the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights established that the exercise of administrative control or public powers in determining visa applications, and the resulting impact of such decisions on applicants living outside the jurisdiction of the state, do not create jurisdiction under Article 1 ECHR. Therefore, this decision runs counter to the view that an individual falls under a state's jurisdiction within the meaning of the Convention merely because that state possesses the legal authority to make a decision regarding an application that affects its own interests.

However, comparative regional jurisprudence shows that the relationship between authority and jurisdiction is not necessarily articulated in the same way in all human rights regimes. The Inter-American Court in its Advisory Opinion OC-21/14, Rights and Guarantees of Children in the Context of Migration and/or in Need of International Protection, held that jurisdiction as per Article 1(1) of the American Convention consists of those who are present in the territory of the state or otherwise under the authority of the state.[1]

Although existing jurisprudence provides a framework for determining when a state's conduct abroad may engage its human rights obligations, considerable uncertainty persists concerning the precise circumstances in which the exercise of public authority over individuals outside national territory is sufficient to establish jurisdiction. This uncertainty becomes particularly significant where states increasingly regulate migration through administrative procedures and legal mechanisms that determine access to their territory without requiring physical contact with the individuals concerned, as in immigration controls.

The academic literature highlights the limitations of a jurisdictional framework centred predominantly on territorial presence and conventional notions of effective control. Moreno-Lax's analysis of 'meta-borders', 'contactless control' and 'functional jurisdiction' goes some way to undermining the orthodox position that state power must be exercised physically over a person or over territory in order for human rights obligations to arise. Her approach is to reconfigure the notion of jurisdiction as something more functional, concerned with how public powers are exercised and how they affect the position of the individual in question.[2] Similarly, Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan show that extraterritorial migration control will require accountability to be considered across a range of different legal regimes and jurisdictions rather than simply through a territorial lens. Wissing and Desmet point to the very real difficulties in determining where the extraterritorial reach of human rights obligations lies and how they should be allocated in the migration context. All of this indicates that the legal relationship between the exercise of state power beyond national borders and the protection of human rights remains, to a large extent, variable in nature, and that much more doctrinal research is required in this area. When we consider the potential negative impacts of the current proposal of the "sponsor's human rights claims" on families, it is our view that, rather than deepening our understanding of various human rights concepts, we are witnessing and being swept up in a backlash against human rights.

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[1] *"State's obligation to respect and ensure the human rights of "all persons subject to [the] jurisdiction" of the State in question, that is, of every person in the territory or who is in any way subjected to its authority, responsibility or control – in this case upon trying to enter the territory – and without any discrimination for the reasons stipulated in the norm."* See paragraph 61 of the Advisory Opinion OC-21/14, Rights and Guarantees of Children in the Context of Migration and/or in Need of International Protection, the Inter-American Court stated that jurisdiction under Article 1(1) of the American Convention.

[2] Violeta Moreno-Lax, 'Meta-Borders and the Rule of Law: From Externalisation to "Responsibilisation" in Systems of Contactless Control' (2024) Netherlands International Law Review, accessed 20 October 2026 and Violeta Moreno-Lax, 'The Architecture of Functional Jurisdiction: Unpacking Contactless Control—On Public Powers, S.S. and Others v Italy, and the "Operational Model"' (2020) 21 German Law Journal 385–416, accessed 20 October 2026.

Old Hall Community: Agricultural Wellbeing Project



Partnering with **Old Hall Community** in East Bergholt and **Essex Cultural Diversity Project**, our RAMA Wellbeing Team was invited to bring clients to participate in a unique programme over the summer months in the delightful grounds of Old Hall. The programme incorporated communal farming, crop growing, mindfulness activities and cooking, and ran twice from June to September, each time for six weeks.



Clients threw themselves into the outdoor activities – planting, growing, harvesting, picnicking, feeding, swimming – which helped them connect with nature and, for many, reconnect with agricultural traditions from home. Notwithstanding some record-breaking temperatures along the way, everyone had a wonderful time.

Beyond sharing their impressive grounds, the Old Hall Community welcomed us into their "home" each week, treating everyone to delicious shared lunches made from vegetables and ingredients grown on their land.







We extend our heartfelt thanks to **Daisy Anna Lees**, the main project organiser, and all the residents at Old Hall Community for their warmth and generosity and the time they dedicated to volunteering alongside each group.



Special thanks must also go to Suffolk-based interdisciplinary artist, **Lora Aziz**, who not only evaluated the project but also informally provided invaluable Arabic translation for our second group.

The project ended memorably at the start of October with a tree-planting celebration. We hope this marks the beginning of a long, fruitful partnership, and we look forward to RAMA clients returning to join future Old Hall Community volunteering days. **JW**

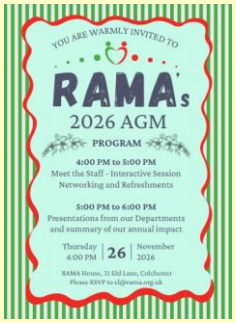
Our two fabulous Occupational Therapy placement students, Jodie & Charmaine, preparing an activity.







Nature weaving project



We will be holding our **AGM** on **Thursday 26th November** between **4pm and 6pm** at RAMA. Join us for presentations, snacks and an interactive challenge! If you plan to come, do let us know.

Contributors: Gülberk Gür, Maria Wilby, Jenny Wilson, Colm McDonald, Hasina Udin, Elizabeth Long
We hope you've found this informative. Please address any comments to the editor: el@rama.org.uk