

The Illegal Migration Act and the decision backlog

As has been the case for some time, the backlog in decision-making in the UK asylum system remains extraordinarily high, despite the government's claim that last year it successfully reduced 'legacy claims' (those from before June 2022) from 90,000 to just 4,500. The total backlog remains at just over 100,000.

As of April this year, 88% of claims in the backlog have been made since the Illegal Migration Act (2023) was first introduced. The IMA is not yet fully in force, but it has introduced the so-called *inadmissibility* process, which allows the Home Office to refuse to process asylum claims if the claimant has passed through another safe country on the way to the UK. Unsurprisingly, this embraces everybody who arrives in the UK by 'irregular methods' ie small boats, meaning all those who have arrived this way since March 2023 are – according to this Act – inadmissible. Since there is currently no way to apply for asylum from outside the UK, this is effectively a ban on asylum in the UK. According to the IMA, these people will not have their claims processed in the UK, but will be removed. However, as there are only a limited number of countries with which we have arrangements for this in place, it means anyone else (and for those who arrived in 2023 this amounts to 91% of claimants) can only be sent to a third country for processing.... mainly, that is, Rwanda. Except, as we know, the Rwanda plan is not yet operational, and with a potential change of government never will be, meaning the whole expensive exercise has been a colossal waste of tax-payers' money.

By the end of 2024, there may be 105,000 people in the backlog who have been technically deemed inadmissible, stuck in limbo but still requiring support from the Home Office - amounting to an estimated £17 million per day according to Refugee Council calculations. The Home Office ran out of accommodation a long time ago so hotels and large camps are solving that problem for the time being, with funding for this coming from the international aid budget. Even if the Rwanda flights take off, no more than a few thousand will be removed this year. Some of these claimants may decide to disappear, leaving themselves at risk of destitution or exploitation.

What can be done? Faster processing does appear possible – there should certainly be no delays processing people from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea or Sudan. Allowing asylum seekers to work after 6 months would mean they are in a better position to support themselves when they do get a positive decision. At the moment, the majority of people who claim asylum in the UK receive positive decisions, and those who do not are rarely removed. There is much work to be done to make our asylum system fit for purpose... in the meantime, its failings provide constant ammunition for those who choose to use asylum seekers as the scapegoats for all our country's ills. EL



The **RAMA football team** participated in a much anticipated 11-a-side fixture against the teachers from **Colchester Sixth Form College** on 3 July at Essex University. The match was played in great spirit and was thoroughly enjoyed by all involved—a fantastic experience! The RAMA team finished the match with an emphatic 6-1 victory (perhaps they could give the England national team a few pointers at the EUROS!). RAMA would like to extend thanks to Ian Levinson of the college not only for his integral role in organizing this fixture but also his vital involvement helping to arrange (and participate in) the regular twice weekly football sessions at the college. A big thanks to all the teachers and staff too! CM

A reflection from Adenike, one of several Masters' students to work with us this year:

*During my placement at RAMA as a **social work student**, I was welcomed with open arms and treated with genuine warmth and respect. From the very beginning, the staff made me feel like a valued member of their team, always offering support and guidance. Their dedication to mentoring me was evident in the time they invested in teaching me the intricacies of social work, ensuring I gained a comprehensive understanding of the field. The most remarkable aspect of my experience was witnessing their service to vulnerable populations. The compassion and dedication they displayed were truly inspiring. They went above and beyond to provide care, resources, and advocacy for those in need, always prioritizing the well-being of their clients. Their holistic approach and unwavering commitment to making a difference left a profound impact on me. Overall, my time at RAMA was transformative, filled with invaluable learning opportunities and heartwarming interactions. I am deeply grateful for the love, knowledge, and inspiration I received, which have significantly shaped my path as a social worker.* AA

When Mr B first visited the RAMA office, he had a **highly complex case** requiring an intersectional perspective. He needed casework support, psychological support focused on both migration-related and sexuality-related issues, foodbank support, and social support. Mr B is a young gay man who came to the UK to study in 2022 to gain a better position in his father's business. In 2018, his father, the influential leader of a local community, had arranged for him to marry a woman. While studying, Mr B met other gay people for the first time. Having finally had the chance to be himself, Mr B resolved to disclose his sexuality to his mother. A few hours after he did, his father called, asked him to come back home to discuss some issues, and sent him a plane ticket. However, his mother simultaneously contacted Mr B, telling him *not* to return as his father was determined to kill him: homosexuality is totally unacceptable in their culture. Highly distressed, Mr B went to a bridge that same night to commit suicide. Thankfully the police were alerted, Mr B spent the night in hospital, and the next day applied for asylum in the UK. He could not return to his flat because his flatmate knew his family, so after a few weeks in a hotel, he was dispersed to Colchester and came to RAMA. Here he received one-to-one therapy for 12 weeks from our qualified therapist. Mr B was suffering from anxiety and panic attacks, was unable to sleep and was always on the alert since he was expecting to be caught by men hired by his father. Since Mr B had internalised homophobia, as a result of his religion and culture, it took a number of sessions before he accepted himself and was truly ready to talk about his sexual orientation. Once he did, he progressed to joining the LGBTIQ+ gardening group. Though introverted during the first few sessions, he eventually began to relax and talk about his experience, becoming a very active group member, to the extent that he initiated online meetings to support others who had been moved elsewhere by the Home Office. We are happy that the help RAMA provided covered all the obvious practical needs, but also transformed Mr B from a shy, introverted person, unhappy with his sexuality, to an active, extroverted person living openly in society as the person he is.

The **Ukraine team** were asked by funders to get feedback on the services provided to clients, so they distributed questionnaires. We—and the funders—were delighted to read the results! Some examples below... and sincere thanks to Maud-May and Natalie for going above and beyond in every case.

Everything was amazing and my impression was more than positive. I am very grateful to Natalia and Maud May and other RAMA's staff who helped me in my difficult situation. They were always friendly, knowledgeable and gave expert useful advice.

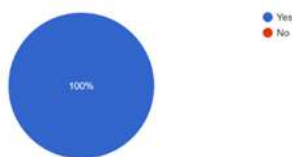
RAMA employs highly qualified specialists who make every effort to help refugees, and also help with adaptation & assimilation in UK.

Maud-May and Natalie help me and solve my every problem. I am very grateful to Natalie for her support at any time to solve any problem my family has here. She is well-versed in all areas of migrants and very quickly responds to requests and provides help, advice, physical support, filling out various types of applications. Natalie's actions are always clear and correct and the result is always positive. Without your support and help it would be a thousand times more difficult for me! Thank you ❤️❤️❤️

It is difficult to find words that can convey the degree of care, moral and tact that we received from these people. Our problems were resolved quickly & efficiently and we felt a genuine desire to help us. We'll never forget this!

All RAMA employees are high-level professionals. The quality of their work is much higher than my expectations, they do everything perfectly. Their consultation and assistance provided me with great encouragement, guidance and moral support. I can say this about every employee from RAMA with whom I came across there.

2. Has the issue been resolved? Чи була ваша проблема вирішена? Была ли ваша проблема решена?
48 responses

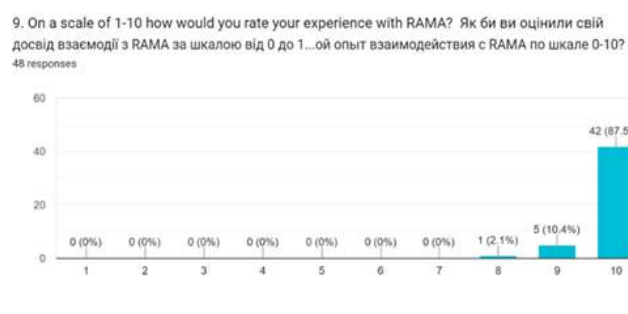


Our family expresses our deep gratitude to all RAMA employees for their support and help! For the care and caring attitude towards everyone who crosses the threshold of this organisation.

Many people in England are suffering (especially refugees) do not know their rights and an organisation like RAMA should develop and cover other cities, not only Colchester. These are the only people who really help people in need in difficult life situations and they do it for free.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the staff of RAMA.

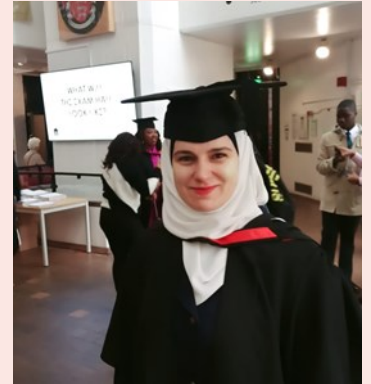
[...] Their professionalism in solving these difficult situations and their humane attitude helps a person not to despair and gather strength to move on. [...] Thanks to this support we are safe! This is the most important thing! My daughter has a happy childhood without sirens and explosions and gets an education at school! Thanks to such a positive example, I also try to be useful to people, now I work and study. This is all that we have now thanks to these kind and professional people! Who came to the rescue and supported us in time, helped me not to break down, and showed that our world is not without kind people!



We are delighted to share the news that **Shelley Braddock-Overbury**, for 5 years a familiar face at RAMA who had to step back for several months owing to other commitments, is now once again able to contribute to our work. Shelley helped develop RAMA's complex casework capacity through her own tireless commitment to resolving the most complicated issues faced by clients with nowhere else to turn. In the process she shared her skills, knowledge and connections to the benefit of the rest of the team. Shelley has agreed to join the Board of Directors: we know she will bring her valuable insight and compassion, as well as some useful business skills, to all our future decisions.

Leena Alfrhat has worked with RAMA for over a year, but has recently been promoted to a significant new role. She holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology and an MA in Refugee Care, complemented by 14 years of professional experience abroad.

In 2011, Leena graduated from the University of Damascus with a BA in Psychological Counselling. During the Syrian war, she participated in several training programs facilitated by international organizations. She worked with the International Medical Corps (IMC) where she received regular supervision and training in Family Therapy and Narrative Exposure Therapy, conducted by experts from Lebanon and Germany. She later moved to Turkey, where she spent five years working with various organizations as a psychologist, MHPSS & CP officer, and MHPSS manager. Her roles included managerial responsibilities such as budget management and team supervision.



In pursuit of further education, Leena relocated to the UK and completed her MA in Refugee Care at the University of Essex. Her dissertation explored countertransference, burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma among caseworkers assisting refugees and asylum seekers. She undertook a student placement with RAMA to develop her understanding of the asylum system in the UK.

After that, Leena was able to begin as a full-time caseworker and interpreter with RAMA, supporting vulnerable individuals from asylum seekers and refugee backgrounds. This role has provided her with insights into navigating and referring to various organizations and services within Colchester and northeast Essex. Promoted to a new role as the MHPSS Lead at RAMA, she is very excited to contribute to projects supporting the well-being of marginalized and vulnerable clients.

LAT

Originally from the States, **Nathan Niesley** comes to us directly from Hong Kong, where he was involved with charity groups working with people with various vulnerabilities. He has been with us for six months now, having jumped right into the complex casework surrounding the Immigration Team, providing help and support to our most at-risk clients.

Nathan's connection with vulnerable groups and displaced communities began when his family were deeply involved with South-East Asian communities displaced by the Vietnam War. He grew up in a multicultural and welcoming environment that made him appreciate the diversity of cultures and customs around the world. His involvement expanded to include migrant communities in Philadelphia, where he was involved in activist groups on campus with a special focus on issues surrounding homelessness and lack of government support. Later, in Vancouver, he was involved in supporting those on the streets and dealing with issues of substance abuse. He also worked closely with Karen refugees from Myanmar, and travelled to Uganda and Kenya to support community programmes there.



Nathan then relocated to Hong Kong, where he worked with migrants and those coming out of drug abuse and the criminal justice system in rehabilitation programs to facilitate their healing and re-entry in society. (Although he still misses Hong Kong, he does - believe it or not - enjoy the weather much better in the UK!)

This is Nathan's second time in the UK, his first being to complete studies in philosophy in Oxford. Since then, he has received a Masters in Linguistics, and pursued doctoral studies in leadership. He also spent some of his time in Hong Kong as a debate coach, expertise he draws upon when he needs to convince certain partnership groups to provide care for those who desperately need it. Nathan's undergraduate studies involved a specific emphasis on justice: his hope is that we may see more of it in our lifetime, especially for our most vulnerable neighbours.

NN

Focus on Pride

Pride Month is an annual celebration of the many contributions made by the LGBTQ+ community to history, society, and cultures worldwide. In most places, Pride is celebrated throughout June in commemoration of its roots in the Stonewall Riots of June 1969. The rainbow-striped flag is the most used and recognized symbol representing the LGBTQIA community; in recent years this flag has been updated to represent the intersectional diversities of those it represents.

In the twelve months to 31 May there were 4,293 hate crimes recorded in Essex; just under 548, 13%, were homophobic. We know this number is nowhere near the amount of people targeted simply for whom they love.

Unfortunately since Nigel Farage announced his candidacy for Clacton in national elections, there has been a significant rise in hate crime in this area. Hasina, our Lead for Hate Crime Reporting, recently organised training on this issue by the police, for our own staff and volunteers and also for those from our partner Calais Light, who work closely with the clients in the Tendring hotel. We are grateful for our excellent relationship with the local police who are always quick to respond or to make home visits.

Colchester Pride celebration will be held on Sat 17 August at First Site. [Home | Colchester Pride](#)



We are daily grateful for this striking piece of art, gifted to us by **Ismail Uzumlu**, a talented and well known Turkish calligrapher, to celebrate the opening of RAMA House and to welcome staff, volunteers and clients from 116 countries. **Welcome** in so many languages ensures all visitors know they are in a safe place. For further information or to commission a piece by Ismail, please scan this QR code or email ismography@gmail.com



Contributors: Sue Duffy, Elizabeth Curry, Nathan Niesley, Hasina Udin, Leena Alfrhat, Maria Wilby, Adenike Ademola, Ayse Uzun Demir, Colm McDonald, Elizabeth Long
We hope you've found this informative. Please address any comments to the editor: el@rama.org.uk