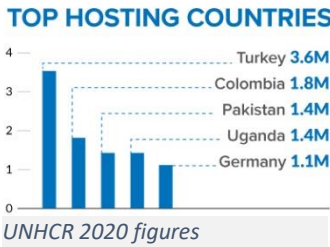




# Grassroots Black Left Position Statement on Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

January 2021

Grassroots Black Left deplores the government’s “hostile environment” policy towards refugees and migrants, which has given rise to the demonisation of desperate human beings fleeing war, persecution, torture, and hunger, often as a direct consequence of the UK government’s own unethical foreign policy. Most of the world’s refugees come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia, with 85% of them fleeing to other so-called developing nations.<sup>1</sup> For example, Bangladesh hosts nearly a million Rohingya refugees who have fled persecution from Myanmar. Contrary to the false narrative of the UK being the most generous country in helping refugees, it takes in significantly fewer refugees than Germany, France, Spain and Greece and provides the least financial support,<sup>2</sup> despite being the fifth largest economy in the world. Furthermore, the UK is the only European country to indefinitely detain people on arrival.



The process of seeking asylum within the UK system is degrading, with refugees, including children being imprisoned in cramped unsanitary conditions, without access to medical care, in breach of the UK’s own human rights legislation as well as the UN conventions to which the UK is signatory.<sup>3</sup> Lawyers helping refugees with asylum applications have been smeared by Home Secretary Priti Patel,<sup>4</sup> leading to attacks on both them<sup>5</sup> and refugees by members of the public manipulated, by unscrupulous politicians and their friends in the news media, into thinking that *they* are somehow the victims of these vulnerable people. This is a

cynical attempt to lay the blame for society’s ills on a tiny number of people who have been victimised, rather than put the blame where it



belongs: the government's unjust immigration policies. GBL condemns this narrative that fans the flames of hatred, which is often fuelled by a racist undercurrent to gain traction. GBL recommends the news media adhere to the National Union of Journalists' guidelines on reporting on refugees and its race reporting guidelines.<sup>6,7</sup>

The toxic government immigration narrative has infected society, leading to racist bullying of refugee children who have been resettled in parts of the UK, sometimes ending tragically with their deaths, such as in the case of 12-year-old Somali Shukri Abdi. The authorities, who have the precious



*Emboldened far-right protests*

responsibility of protecting from harm such vulnerable children, failed in their duty to safeguard Shukri, and many other migrant children. In Shukri's case, the authorities absolved themselves by blaming the victim for her "accidental death" and whitewashing their record as officials. This behaviour by government can only arise from the moral apathy the authorities have towards people even children - who have been dehumanised. Migrants, who have come to the UK to work in key industries with labour shortages, that the UK public is reliant on, in order to maintain the "first-world" lifestyle the public enjoy, are caught



*Protests for justice*

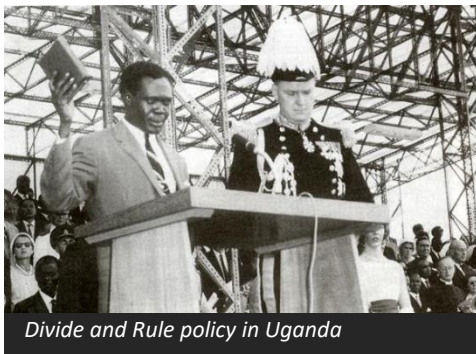
up in this racist rhetoric and are scapegoated for "taking jobs" that few British people want to do. Even so, these essential jobs are often low-paid and insecure due to minimal workers' protections. While at the same time migrant workers are somehow held responsible for the pressures on the NHS and social care where ironically, many of them work. Some migrants have made the ultimate sacrifice in doing their duty, shown by the disproportionate deaths among such workers during the pandemic, as highlighted in GBL's Black People Racism and the Covid-19 Pandemic pamphlet available here: <https://bit.ly/3qHpJhh> .



*Eva Omondi won her fight to remove the NHS migrant worker surcharge*

The punitive nature of the NHS migrant surcharge and *No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)*,<sup>8</sup> which penalise people, denying them fundamental human rights just because they do not have British citizenship, should be a matter of national shame. These policies contravene the UN conventions and need to be scrapped.

The scandalous treatment of the Windrush generation was a direct consequence of the hostile environment.<sup>9</sup> Deportation targets within the Home Office meant that many people of African Caribbean origin, who had lived in the UK for decades, serving the UK population in key industries and paying taxes, were unjustly targeted for deportation, just because they were easy pickings to meet those targets. They arrived in the UK at a time when citizenship was not a requirement to live and work in the country. Despite the embarrassment of the Windrush scandal, and the setting up of a compensation scheme,<sup>10</sup> the government has dragged its feet when paying out that money, with some victims dying before ever being recompensed. Many of the people who have been compensated received paltry payments.

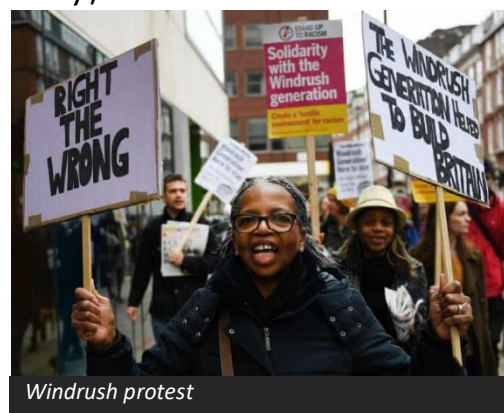


*Divide and Rule policy in Uganda*

The discredited British colonial divide and rule tactic has been shamelessly exploited by politicians who have deliberately lumped together and labelled as “criminals”, people who have served their time for petty crimes, within an already racially-biased criminal justice system. As propaganda to sway public opinion against *all* of the prospective deportees,

government sources fed stories to right-wing tabloid newspapers about a handful of people who had been convicted of more serious crimes. This was aimed at making out that the prospective deportees were unworthy of basic human rights, as opposed to the Windrush victims that the government now pretended to care about. Many of the prospective deportees were brought to Britain by their parents from the Caribbean as children and have put down roots in this country, some of them with

young children they were now forced by the government to abandon.<sup>11</sup> Past crimes do not nullify basic human rights. Separating families contravenes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UK government has knowingly tried to break the law by quickly deporting these people, hoping that they would not have had time to access the legal system to counter the unjust action by the



*Windrush protest*

authorities. Again, it is racism that lies at the heart of this. Black people in the Caribbean are there because of Britain’s role in the slave trade, with that legacy of exploitation still reverberating today in how they are treated after migration to the UK. This history of exploitation should mean

that the UK bears a special responsibility to the descendants of the slave trade and the colonialism which enabled it.

The rhetoric of immigration controls is a populist dog whistle ploy by politicians in order to garner votes when they are fully aware that immigration controls are ineffective in stopping the most desperate people from trying to cross borders to reach safety. The horrendous deaths of thirty-nine Vietnamese people, whose bodies were discovered in a sealed refrigerated lorry in Essex in October 2019, shows this and has rightly led to long prison sentences for the traffickers found guilty of manslaughter.<sup>12</sup> However, the



government too has blood on its hands by not providing safe, legal routes for people to come to the UK. The judge who tried the case said: "The willingness of the victims to try and enter the country illegally provides no excuse for what happened to them."

We do not support a return to the disgraceful "Controls on Immigration" mugs used by former Labour leader Ed Miliband in his 2015 general election bid. Any Labour Party politician using such tactics is acting against the internationalism that is the ethos of GBL and other genuine socialists.

## Recommendations:

1	GBL supports campaigns for refugee and migrant rights such as City of Sanctuary, Patients not Passports, Lift the Ban, Migrant Solidarity Group, Medact and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. We demand an end to the government's "hostile environment", including the NHS migrant surcharge and No Recourse to Public Funds.
2	We join with the royal medical colleges in calling for the NHS surcharge for migrant workers and refugees to be scrapped.
3	We demand that refugees and those going through the asylum process be allowed to work.
4	We demand an end to the detention of people seeking asylum.
5	We demand the closure of detention centres and that the basic human needs, including medical care, are provided to those people seeking political asylum.
6	We demand an increase in the financial allowance for refugees in line with Universal Credit, so that they can adequately afford to keep themselves healthy, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.
7	We demand an end to unjust deportations and that swift and fair compensation be given to victims of the hostile environment, including those people caught up in the Windrush scandal.
8	We support direct action to stop deportation flights and condemn the arrest of peaceful protesters, exercising their right to conscientiously object to the inhumane treatment of fellow human beings.
9	We demand an ethical foreign policy – no more wars or supplying arms or "training" to countries engaging in war, genocide, torture and persecution.
10	We demand that the UK's history of slavery and colonialism be recognised and the responsibility to the descendants of that legacy be incorporated into all aspects of the law and education curricula.
11	We deplore the scapegoating of migrants and refugees by any politician whatever their political Party, including the Labour Party.
12	We support motions being put forward by Labour, trade union and party affiliated organisation members setting out the above demands.
13	We encourage Labour, trade union and party affiliated organisation members to put forward motions on the above demands.

- (1) [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIpeua9LKe7qIVFuDtCh1isqtLEAAYASAAEgLKL\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIpeua9LKe7qIVFuDtCh1isqtLEAAYASAAEgLKL_D_BwE)
- (2) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics#Main\\_countries\\_of\\_destination:\\_Germany.2C\\_France\\_and\\_Spain](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics#Main_countries_of_destination:_Germany.2C_France_and_Spain)
- (3) [Child refugees 'betrayed' by UK as Home Office sends them to adult detention centres | The Independent](#)
- (4) [Top ministers urged Priti Patel to stop attacks on 'activist lawyers' | Priti Patel | The Guardian](#)
- (5) [Knife attack on law firm 'inspired by Priti Patel's activist lawyer remarks' | The Independent](#)
- (6) [Reporting on refugees - Guidance by & for journalists - National Union of Journalists \(nuj.org.uk\)](#)
- (7) [Updated NUJ race reporting guidelines - National Union of Journalists](#)
- (8) [No Recourse to Public Funds \(NRPF\) | London Councils](#)
- (9) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/24/without-paulette-wilson-windrush-may-have-remained-hidden>
- (10) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/21/i-feel-targeted-windrush-victim-decries-compensation-delays-as-racism>
- (11) <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2020/12/samir-pasha-naga-kandiah-uk-jamaica-deportations/>
- (12) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-55765213>