



ICAR

the INFORMATION CENTRE
about asylum and refugees
IN THE UK

Response to *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (Home Office White Paper February 2002)

Forward

The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) was set up in 2001 to promote information-based understanding of asylum and refugees in the UK and information-based debate and policy-making. It aims to fulfill this charitable objective through collecting, compiling and disseminating up-to-date, comprehensive information and data about these issues. ICAR is part of the School for Social Science and Public Policy at King's College London. It is not a lobbying organisation but it presses for more research and evidence upon which public debate and policy may be based.

ICAR's analysis of the White Paper's proposals is framed by its objectives as an organisation and focused on the aspects of the proposals that relate to ICAR's area of expertise. ICAR has examined *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* principally against the extent to which the policies and policy changes proposed to the asylum system are based on research, evidence, review and evaluation, and offer the opportunity for informed public scrutiny. ICAR has based its comments on its knowledge of the best available information and evidence on these issues, drawing on a range of international, national and local material generated by the statutory, voluntary and academic sectors. Where appropriate, ICAR has provided references to this material.

ICAR will continue to examine and record available evidence relevant to the policies and policy changes proposed in the White Paper after the deadline for comments and will disseminate its findings on its website www.icar.org.uk. The comments put forward in this document are also a research project in progress. ICAR recognises that other organisations and service providers are better placed than itself to comment on specialist issues.

ICAR's comments presented in this document evaluate the White Paper's proposals against the following criteria:

- 1. Are the proposals outlined in the White Paper based on evidence wherever possible?**
- 2. Can the proposed policy changes and the asylum system be independently scrutinised?**

Section 1

Are the proposals outlined in the White Paper based on evidence wherever possible?

In responding to an ambitious White Paper which tackles a wide range of complex and interconnected subjects, it may seem odd to single out for praise the very last sentences of the last section, 'Annex G: Supporting Information and Research Requirements'. ICAR especially welcomes the appearance of the section, its commitment to the role of the academic sector in developing its evidence base, to using comparative research from other countries, and 'to an on-going programme of statistics, evaluation and research and thereby an on-going process of refining and improving policy' (Annex G10).

- The Home Secretary and his predecessor deserve encouragement for their commitment to a vastly increased Immigration Research and Statistics Service (IRSS) research programme. Specifically, ICAR welcomes the commitment expressed in a number of parts of the document to consultation, to building on evidence, to evaluation and to piloting new policies rather than introducing them across the board on untried foundations, for example:
 - to consultation and debate on the use of identity cards (5) and on issues of nationality, immigration and citizenship (Executive Summary);
 - to examining and building on the evidence that refugees find it difficult to move from support to independence (4.90) and to evidence that family visit appeals need rethinking (7.15- 7.16);
 - to piloting new policies rather than introducing them across the board, including involvement in a European feasibility study to establish a Europe-wide refugee resettlement programme (4.3 + 4.18) and the piloting of accommodation centres (4.30) (See sections below);
 - to conducting and commissioning research which examines and evaluates the effects of policies and interventions in order to develop a successful national integration policy, and to build up 'a national base of properly evaluated, fully recorded best practice' to be shared across the UK (4.104);

- ICAR however, regrets that, having commissioned a programme of research in the last few years, the Home Office has missed the opportunity to publish completed research which would have promoted more informed public debate and commentary on the White Paper. So far unpublished material includes:
 - A survey of asylum applicants' motivations, characteristics and experiences.
 - Research into the decision-making of asylum seekers and the images they have of the UK before arrival.
 - Research into the impact of asylum policies and practice on asylum applications in the EU states.
 - A study of the social networks of asylum seekers and the dissemination of information to countries of origin.
 - A mapping exercise of existing and planned research on asylum policy and process in the UK.

- The IRSS' own evaluation of what country information is needed within the asylum determination and the appeals process.
- Research mapping the current issues in research about integrating immigrants and refugees.
- An evaluation of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).
- Action research on dispersal.
- A review of asylum seekers' access to support services.
- Statistics measuring:
 - the timeliness of asylum decisions;
 - the characteristics of asylum seekers applying for asylum support;
 - the supply and demand for asylum seeker accommodation;
 - the costs of asylum support, including costs to DSS and local authorities.

ICAR presses the Home Office to disseminate publicly the results of these research projects as soon as possible.

- The generally positive approach to research, evidence, review and evaluation is not extended equally to all aspects of the White Paper's proposals regarding the asylum and integration process. Although ICAR welcomes research into 'the evaluation and improvement of the asylum processes for Induction Centres, Accommodation Centres, resettlement programmes, Reporting Centres, Removal Centres and the process of removals, as well as the associated appeal process' (Annex G.7), other areas such as border control and the asylum decision-making process do not benefit from the evidence-based approach that has been applied elsewhere. In particular, ICAR regrets the omission of any reference to the need to review the quality of decisions on asylum applications.

ICAR believes that no asylum process can succeed in gaining public confidence unless it is based on achieving high quality decisions on applications and presses the Home Office to fund publicly available research into the quality of its asylum application decision-making.

- The commitment to good information management systems is also welcome (Annex G.7). ICAR is aware that publicly available statistics are improving but regrets that these do not yet enable the public to answer questions of interest easily and can even be misleading.

ICAR presses the Home Office to move towards providing easily understandable statistics on the following:

- ***The outcomes for applicants from any one year cohort.***
- ***The percentage of rejections on non-compliance grounds.***
- ***How many initial rejections are overturned on appeal.***

Section 2

Can the proposed policy changes and the system in its totality be independently scrutinised?

A good asylum and immigration policy should be able to withstand independent scrutiny. ICAR is concerned that the White Paper further increases Home Office control over the asylum and immigration system without independent safeguards. While admiring the scope of David Blunkett's '*Secure Borders Safe Haven*', ICAR regrets the lack of input independent of the Home Office into these important policy areas.

- In Germany the Sussmuth Commission, which is made up of independent experts, recently reported on a similar range of interconnected migration, immigration and asylum policy areas in '*Structuring Immigration, Fostering Integration – Report by the Independent Commission on Migration to Germany*' (July 2001).

ICAR suggests that in future, taking the example of the Sussmuth Commission, the Home Office provide more openings for independent input into the asylum, immigration, integration and citizenship debate at the policy planning stage.

- In this context the proposal to examine the case for establishing an independent Documentation Centre 'funded by, but independent of, government' (Annex F) is very welcome, as is the research project to evaluate the content and use of country of origin information that preceded it.

ICAR suggests that the idea behind the proposal to examine the case for an independent Documentation Centre is taken a step further and that opportunities be examined for incorporating other independent elements into the decision making process taking the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada and the proposals made by Professor Guy Goodwin Gill as a point of departure.

ICAR presses the Home Office to increase the funding available for open-ended research to supplement the existing policy oriented Home Office research agenda.

ICAR presses the Home Office to collect and publish statistics which encourage independent scrutiny and informed understanding of the issues by the general public.

