

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party  
*for the South East of England*

Liam Byrne MP  
Minister of State for Borders and Immigration  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008

Dear Liam,

Last month I met with volunteers and clients at the Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group to learn about their experiences of the asylum system. One issue was raised time and time again that I would like to specifically bring to your attention - work permits.

One young man that I met, from Eritrea, applied for asylum in the UK seven years ago. Two years later he was granted a temporary work permit whilst his application was considered. Now it has been withdrawn again, leaving him with no means to support himself and no clear idea about the timescales involved in determining whether he will be granted further leave to remain or residency. He is effectively condemned to poverty and, through no fault of his own, is open to attack for conforming to the media perpetuated myth of someone too lazy to work and happy to live of the state.

I understand that under current rules, only those asylum seekers experiencing a delay of more than 12 months attributable to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate are eligible for a temporary work permit. Yet a *Strangers into Citizens* poll carried out last year showed that 67% of the British public believe asylum seekers should be allowed to work.

I would argue that granting asylum seekers temporary work permits allows them to contribute to both society as a whole and specifically to the economy. It can also help asylum seekers integrate into their adopted communities and address problems such as racism and isolation. Being able to work would help asylum seekers access a decent quality of life, would afford them dignity and would reduce the number of illegal workers in the UK. Furthermore, it would remove some of the burden on the tax payer and go some way to end a situation in which those seeking asylum are unfairly penalised because of their nationality.

Given that the government is committed to reducing the number of people working illegally, surely forcing vulnerable people to choose between poverty and illegal employment is counter productive? Evidence suggests that the vast majority of asylum seekers want to work, yet the current regime makes them open to exploitation by

unscrupulous employers, as well as prosecution or immediate deportation, if they seek work.

A range of organisations support calls for asylum seekers to be able to work, including the TUC, Barnados, and the Immigration Advisory Service. I would like to add my voice to these calls and enquire whether the government has any plans to review the current discriminatory guidelines on work permits.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.