LIFT THE BAN

LOCAL ACTIVISM PACK

HOW YOU CAN HELP WIN THE RIGHT TO WORK FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

???

INTRODUCTION

People seeking protection in our country are effectively banned from working. As a result, many are left to live in poverty, struggling to support themselves and their families, whilst the Government wastes the talents of thousands of people.

The Lift the Ban coalition campaigns for and with those who have risked everything to find safety. We are demanding that people seeking asylum are given the best chance of integrating into our communities by restoring their right to work, so that they can use their skills and live in dignity.

During the campaign, the coalition has grown enormously in size and stature. It is now made up of over 240 diverse organisations, including NGOs, think tanks, businesses, trade unions, faith organisations, and many, many more. We have campaigned extensively in every corner of the UK, building mass support and significant political traction in a time where this hasn't always been easy.

However, the fight still isn't won.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PACK

This activism pack is for local organisations and individuals who want to **help win this fight.** It has been updated to reflect all of the work the campaign has done so far, and what still needs to be done to achieve the change we are calling for.

Lift The Ban campaigners gather in **London**, March 2020

SKILLS AUDIT

In May 2020 Lift the Ban carried out a skills audit with 283 people seeking asylum.

45% of respondents' previous occupations would have defined them as

'CRITICAL WORKERS' *

- Read our latest Lift the Ban report here

*Of 283 respondents, 133 answered this question

WHAT'S IN THE PACK?

This activism pack has resources to help support people to campaign and to equip them with the tools to do so. There are also case studies throughout to inspire your activism. It includes information on how to:

1 ENGAGE YOUR LOCAL MP

Build parliamentary support:

- Find your local MP
- Template letter to your MP
- Organise a meeting
- Other ways to engage MPs

2 ENGAGE LOCAL DECISION MAKERS

Raise the profile of the issue locally and urge decision makers to:

- Join the Lift the Ban coalition
- Write to the Home Secretary
- Submit a motion to their council

3 ENGAGE LOCAL MEDIA

Publicise your Lift the Ban activities in local media:

- Prepare a clear and impactful press release
- Find a local angle
- Include a good quality picture

4 GET OTHER PEOPLE INVOLVED

Enlist support from a diverse range of individuals and organisations.

- Start a local petition
- Hold a local event
- Create social media content

Read about how the **#WalkforWork** campaign got media coverage on page 9

Read about **Day of action** events on page 11

ENGAGE YOUR MP

Lift the Ban campaigners spell it out to MPs outside the Houses of Parliament in December 2018

Since the campaign began in October 2018, the coalition has built support among parliamentarians from all political parties and across the UK.

However, since then, we have had a General Election which vastly changed the political landscape. Many new MPs who have not yet been engaged in the campaign, or indeed other issues affecting people seeking asylum, are now in Parliament.

We want to rebuild support among parliamentarians, including new allies and long-standing supporters. We want them to publicly back the campaign and call for reform. To achieve this, we need to make the case directly to them, to ensure they feel confident they have the backing of the people they represent.

FIND YOUR MP

The most effective way you can act is by focussing on your local MP, whose responsibility it is to represent you in Parliament. You can find out who your MP is, their contact details, including their email address and how to access their website by going here.

TEMPLATE MP LETTER

We have uploaded a template letter to the resources section of our website. You can use and edit the letter in your outreach to your MP, which introduces the campaign and requests the MP take action. Find it here.

It is important to note that this letter is something for you to personalise as you see fit with your own reasons for wanting to restore the right to work. It is always powerful to share your personal experiences. If you are currently or have previously been banned from working, you should certainly describe your motivations for wanting to see change. If you represent a group or organisation, you could describe to the MP how the ban negatively impacts on your local community, or describe the impact you feel that reform could have in your area.

ORGANISE A MEETING

MPs will often offer you the opportunity to meet and to discuss the campaign further. This can be the most effective way of enlisting the MP's support for the cause. There are a few elements you might choose to consider in order to make a potential meeting as effective as possible:

Meetings in the time of Covid-19

At the time of writing, physical meetings for most MPs will still be an impossibility. Instead, lots of MPs are conducting their meetings over video link, so you shouldn't give up on the prospect of having a meeting. If the MP is able to meet, they will be able to organise a video conferencing link for you to dial in on, such as Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Teams. We may be able to offer financial support with the cost of data to enable campaigners to engage with their MP online. This funding is restricted to expert by experience-led groups. Please contact us at **lifttheban@asylummatters.org** if you would like to apply for this support.

Researching the MP

If you're meeting for the first time, you should do some research about your MP, including their party's position and whether they have said anything relevant on asylum or refugee issues. You can do this by looking at their voting record, questions they've asked, or just their social media feed. Find their voting record here.

Who you attend with

It can often be beneficial to work with others, so that as wide a range of experiences and viewpoints as possible are shared with the MP. If you yourself do not have lived experience of the ban on the right to work, it is particularly helpful to work with those who do so they can describe the personal impact of the policy.

Plan messages and actions

It is best to arrive at your meeting with very clear messages you want to convey (as well as resources, such as a copy of the Lift the Ban report, to help convey them), but also to be clear on the actions you want them to take. This could be publicly stating their support on social media, asking a question in parliament, or writing to the Home Secretary, for example.

After the meeting

It is always helpful to publicise the meeting on social media, and ideally using photos if everyone is comfortable with this (at the moment this may just be a photo of a Zoom screen!) Equally, it is valuable to follow up with the MP by email after the meeting to ask about the actions they said they would undertake, and to thank them for their time. Finally, please do let us know how it has gone!

The Lift the Ban team is always happy to help you to prepare for these meetings, and you can contact us on **lifttheban@asylummatters.org**

Campaigners show support for Lift The Ban at the **Sunderland Walk of Sanctuary** in June 2019

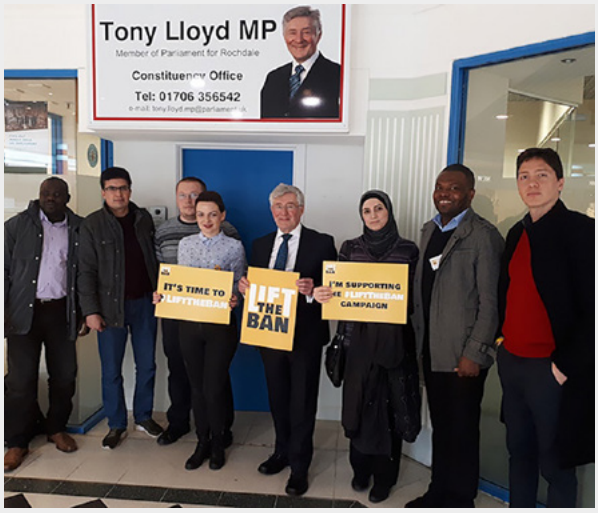
CASE STUDY: RAS VOICE

RAS Voice is a group of refugees and people seeking asylum based in Greater Manchester. They campaign on various issues affecting the lives of people in the asylum system, and have been tireless campaigners on Lift the Ban.

They have identified the MPs that represent their members, contacted those MPs about the Lift the Ban campaign by email, and made the case to them directly for reform through meetings they have organised. They have lobbied both Conservative and Labour MPs through this route.

They have also used creative ways of speaking directly to their MPs. For example, members of the group attended hustings debates ahead of the 2019 General Election to press the candidates directly on their views on right to work.

Those MPs have gone on to take lots of actions both in Parliament (including asking questions directly of Government) and privately (including writing letters to the Home Secretary). Crucially, these MPs continue to be allies of the campaign. RAS Voice has shown expertly how to build trusting relationships with MPs through the Lift the Ban campaign.



OTHER WAYS TO ENGAGE MPS

It is important to note that, though it is desirable, you don't have to meet the MP to engage and influence them effectively.

Indeed, often receiving a response by email that sets out the MP's position (particularly when it is supportive!) is certainly a success in itself. If they do set out their support to you, you should encourage them to take action publicly or privately to advance the campaign.

These actions might include:

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTION

It is always welcome for an MP to publicly set out their support for the campaign on social media, using the hashtag **#LiftTheBan** and calling for reform on the issue.

ACTION IN PARLIAMENT

MPs are also able to ask questions on the right to work, or to raise the issue for debate. This is another way of showing their support for reform while demonstrating to the Government the high level of interest in the campaign. They will have staff who are experienced in drafting questions, but you can support them to do so using your expertise.

WRITING TO THE HOME SECRETARY

The Home Secretary has the power to change the rules on these issues when they like. It is therefore important to influence them directly, and MPs writing a letter to them is an effective way to do this. This is particularly powerful when the MP is from the governing party, and is well respected in Parliament.

In our 2020 survey

77%

of respondents had already, or would like to,

VOLUNTEER TO HELP THE NHS*

*Of 283 respondents, 133 answered this question

CASE STUDY: ZOOM MEETINGS

One coalition member, a local City of Sanctuary group, began a dialogue with their new MP, a Conservative in a marginal seat. After initial positive engagement, the group decided to ask their MP for a meeting, inviting him to offer a date and time he was available. Initially, his staff member set up a meeting on Microsoft teams; but this platform does not work on some devices and would therefore have excluded people from attending. Instead, the group requested a Zoom call, which was agreed.

Prior to the meeting, the campaigners arranged a pre-meeting call to: agree the order they would speak; decide what each person was going to say; make sure they stuck to time as the meeting would only last 25 minutes; and decide what single action to request of the MP at the end of the meeting. They also prepared by practicing answering questions before the meeting.

At the Zoom meeting, the MP listened intently as the group introduced themselves and their work in his constituency, outlining the current issues faced by the asylum seeking community, including the ban on working. It was clear that the MP had been previously unaware of the issues and seemed moved by hearing a first-hand account from an expert by experience. Following the meeting, only three days later, the MP spoke in Parliament, telling the Immigration Minister about the group's work and inviting the Minister to come and meet with them.

Key learnings from the MP Zoom meeting:

- Be polite but also persistent
- Request a Zoom call from the beginning as other platforms may exclude others and most people know how to use Zoom. You can also then record the Zoom meeting easily (but make sure to get everyone's consent, especially the MP's)
- Organise a pre-meeting call to work out a running order and what each person will speak about
- Make sure there are some of the MP's constituents in the meeting and make them aware if there are people joining from outside their constituency. If possible, ensure one or more experts by experience are able to speak
- If it's a first meeting, limit yourselves to asking just one thing of the MP. View the meeting as the beginning of a conversation and longer-term relationship
- Request further meetings and, if possible, set a date
- Follow up with a thank you and further information, such as reports on the topic you discussed

If you are an expert by experience and you would like to support other Lift the Ban campaigners to approach their MP in constituencies where fewer experts by experience may live, please contact **lifttheban@asylummatters.org**

We hope to ensure as many MPs as possible have the opportunity to engage with people with direct experience of the ban. These testimonies are undoubtedly the most powerful.

ENGAGE LOCAL DECISION MAKERS

Whilst securing the right to work for people seeking asylum requires change at a UK level and the primary targets for our campaigning are therefore MPs, local decision-makers have an important role to play in raising the profile of the issue locally and putting pressure on national decision-makers.

You can find the contact details for your local councillors here. You can contact representatives from different devolved administrations across the UK through their individual websites.

Ask regional leaders to support the campaign and:

JOIN THE LIFT THE BAN COALITION

As with other coalition partners, their involvement beyond being listed as a coalition member can be as limited as they choose, and we would always ask them to opt into any further joint initiatives of the coalition. However, this would be an excellent way to enlist their support.

WRITE TO THE HOME SECRETARY

Having backing from regional leaders who have responsibilities to help people seeking asylum is a valuable way to show the breadth of support for change. You could ask your local council, or a group of local councillors, to write to the Home Secretary about the campaign. You could also go a step further and coordinate a joined-up initiative, encouraging different councils, regional leaders (such a Metro Mayors) or members of your devolved administration to write collectively to the Home Secretary.

SUBMIT A MOTION TO THEIR COUNCIL

This is a statement of support or commitment to action that is proposed by an individual councillor and voted upon by full council. The Lift the Ban coalition has a template motion that councils up and down the country have used, which you can find with our **Local Authority briefing** here.

Teesside Lift the Ban Day of Action

CASE STUDY: NORTH EAST

In the North East, campaigners have been passionately making the case for the right to work, targeting their local decision makers and campaigning alongside their local authorities as momentum has built up.

Several council motions, through which local authorities express their support for a campaign issue, have been passed in support of Lift the Ban. This has been thanks to brilliant local campaigning, with coalition members writing to their Council Leaders to highlight the stories of community members affected by the ban, inviting them to attend local events to learn more about the campaign, and asking them to take motions forward.

In January 2019, **Newcastle City Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council** and **Gateshead Council** took the pioneering step of becoming the first councils in the UK to pass motions in support of Lift the Ban. This set the wheels in motion for a wave of local authorities across the region to show their support for the campaign, with five councils having passed supportive motions and joined the coalition by 2020.

This wave of support continued even though the local elections in May 2019 saw a considerable shift in the political make-up of local authorities in Teesside, that signalled the potential for increased challenges to passing progressive motions. Local coalition members kept up the engagement with their councillors through letters, meetings and events. In June, the Teesside Lift the Ban Day of Action was organised by local campaigners, and they successfully encouraged both the newly-elected independent Mayor and Labour MP to attend. As a direct outcome, **Middlesbrough Council** passed a motion with cross-party support.

Finally, in their communications with councillors, campaigners in Hartlepool were able to point to the other motions passed in the region, and, in September 2019, **Hartlepool Borough Council** became the next council to pass a motion with cross party-support. A Labour councillor proposed the motion, which was passed with the support of Independent, Conservative, and Brexit Party councillors, demonstrating how unifying an issue the right to work truly is.

ENGAGE LOCAL MEDIA

Publicising your activities in local media is a great way to bring the campaign to a wider audience, build support for its aims and influence local decision-makers.

You can do this by writing a press release about the campaign with a strong local focus to try to give the issue some publicity. Download a **press release** template **here**.

FIND A LOCAL ANGLE

This could be about your own experience, or the experiences of people in your community being banned from working, and about the work they want to be involved in if the rules were changed.

ENSURE THE PRESS RELEASE IS CLEAR AND EYE-CATCHING

This includes simple things, such as ensuring the news angle has a punchy and clear headline and introduction of the issue, and answers the following questions: who, what, when, where, and how?

INCLUDE A GOOD QUALITY PICTURE

This could be of you and other people campaigning.

Campaigning for change in **Calderdale**

CASE STUDY: #WALKFORWORK

In June 2019, campaigners in Bradford organised a **#WalkforWork** to draw attention to the injustice of the ban on working and show solidarity with people seeking asylum. The group strode out from Centenary Square in Bradford, where the Lord Mayor and supporters waved them off on the 11-mile trek to Kirkstall Abbey in Leeds.

Before the big day, coalition members **BEACON Bradford** and **Bradford City of Sanctuary** reached out to local news outlets via an official press release to notify them of the upcoming #WalkforWork. Bradford Community Broadcasting sent a reporter to join campaigners, interviewing them as they walked and broadcasting the action live to listeners across the city, while BBC Radio Leeds spoke with campaigners and the Lord Mayor herself, broadcasting clips at regular intervals throughout the day as an item on the local news bulletin. Campaigners also secured coverage of the #WalkforWork on the Yorkshire & Lincolnshire BBC Sunday Politics show, with a TV crew awaiting their arrival at their end destination.

Off the back of this coverage, local business owner and expert by experience, Diana Flores, was invited to join a panel of local MPs on the Sunday Politics show to discuss the issue of the right to work. By building momentum around the event and getting their story out there, campaigners were able to secure a platform to reach even wider audiences.

Diana Flores on the Sunday Politics Show

GET MORE PEOPLE INVOLVED

Finally, one of the best and most important ways to show the breadth of support for change is to enlist it from a truly diverse range of individuals and organisations. Again, this could be done through some small steps:

START A LOCAL PETITION

A great way to demonstrate local support to your local decision-makers would be to organise a local petition. This could target a local MP, drawing support from within their constituency, asking them to take action to call on the Home Secretary to Lift the Ban. If you manage to collect 1,000 signatures from constituents (including their postcodes) you can request a hand-in meeting with the MP where your group can take a photo with them to share on social media and send to local media via a press release. You can find a **petition template** here.

HOLD A LOCAL EVENT

One of the best ways to raise awareness about an issue and encourage people to support is to hold a local event. For inspiration, you can read about the many diverse events coalition members held during the Month of Action last year on our **Month of Action blog** which you can see here.

As above, you can request Lift the Ban stickers, posters and badges to use at an event by contacting us at **liftheban@asylummatters.org**. Despite restrictions on events during the Covid-19 pandemic, you can still hold an online event and invite members of your community to attend, just as you might invite them to an event in person. This includes decision makers, who may well welcome the opportunity to meet with the people they represent without the necessity of travel. For advice and support with hosting an online event, please do contact us at the email address above.

Leeds Day of Action July 2019

CREATE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Throughout the campaign, people have shared their testimonies and experiences in blogs, videos and podcasts. These are a powerful way to speak directly to a large audience about the urgent need for reform. If you do produce such content, do let us know so we can promote it to the wider coalition.

CASE STUDY: ONE MINUTE WONDER

"How many arguments for the right to work can I fit into 1 minute?"

This is the question Lift the Ban campaigner, Catherine, asks the audience at the start of her campaign video, before firing off a stream of compelling arguments for lifting the ban at a truly impressive pace.

With so much engagement with the tweet, Catherine's creative video is a perfect example of engaging, shareable content that helps deliver our campaign message to new audiences.

- Watch the video here
- See the tweet here

CASE STUDY:
DAY OF ACTION EVENTS

During June 2019, alongside other coalition members in towns and cities across the UK, Sisters United and St Augustine's Centre organised a Day of Action in Halifax to progress the Lift the Ban campaign locally. The event was positive and community-orientated, celebrating the incredible work of Sisters United and with attendees sharing food from around the world. Importantly, members of Sisters United with lived experience of seeking asylum spoke out about their experiences of the ban on working and its impact on their lives.

Sisters United were joined on the day by many supporters and key local decision makers, including Halifax MP Holly Lynch, who spoke to give her full support to the campaign. The event received coverage in the local media and inspired the councillors who attended to propose a motion in support of Lift the Ban at Calderdale Borough Council. This motion was eventually passed, making Calderdale the first local authority in Yorkshire to show its support for the campaign.

- **Read the full press article here**

Campaigner Flo meets MP Holly Lynch at the Day of Action in **Halifax**

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www.lifttheban.co.uk

#LiftTheBan

August 2020