

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Introduction

As you will have seen, there has been even more focus recently on migration – and so much of it is based on misinformation and scapegoating. It seems timely to spend a few minutes reflecting on this – and also thinking through the role that we can all play in ensuring that misinformation is challenged and corrected.

I am very pleased to be able to include the article by Ambrose Musiyiwa, and four other pieces that help to set the record straight.

It would be good to gather examples where we (libraries, museums, archives, the cultural sector, individuals) have challenged misinformation around migration – if you wanted to send me some examples, I can then include them in future Newsletters.

John Vincent

“Signifying Burnham, Refugees and the English Channel”

Some of you will already have seen this powerful piece by Ambrose Musiyiwa when it was posted on 4 Aug on the Libraries and Museums of Sanctuary JISCMail list.

It makes some extremely important points, and I am really pleased to say that Ambrose has given me permission to re-publish it here.

Ambrose is the Coordinator of “Forced Migration and The Arts”¹.

“On 30 July 2026, four people died trying to reach Britain”².

The BBC says one of the deaths, along with injuries to at least six people and a child, occurred to a boat that had been 'neutralised' and that, in another boat, three women were found dead. This is despite eyewitness evidence showing that French authorities attacked and killed the people.³

On the same day, British Prime Minister Andy Burnham said the UK had made 'significant progress' in reducing the number of arrivals and had more work to do to reduce the numbers even further.

¹ See: <https://forcedmigrationandthearts.blogspot.com/>.

² Maia Davies and Simon Jones. “Four people die after busiest day for small-boat crossings this year”. BBC News, 30 July 2026), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yd2j93r7ro>.

³ Rajeev Syal “French riot police used teargas on people trying to board small boat, charity claims”, *The Guardian*, 30 July 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jul/30/small-boat-deaths-channel-crossing-attempt>.

The people Burnham is referring to as 'small boat crossings', 'arrivals' and 'numbers' are refugees mainly from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia and Sudan⁴, who are coming to the UK because they believe they will be safe and can have a chance at life here⁵.

On 4 February 2026, Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood MP told the Home Affairs Select Committee that the Home Office is brutalising refugees using the English Channel 'to prove concept that this could be done, that it was possible to overcome legal hurdles, practical barriers and obviously we have shown that it can be done and is being done'.⁶

Because of how British politicians, media, newsrooms and corporations do not see African and Asian refugees as human, in 2024 alone, 69 refugees drowned in the English Channel.⁷

The killing by French police of the three women and one man on 30 July 2026, brings the total number of such deaths to close to or more than 200 since 2018.

Unless the British establishment reinstates family reunion, and unless it makes safe routes available to the mainly African and Asian refugees who are using the small boats, Britain will continue making 'progress' in reducing the number of arrivals because refugees will continue drowning and dying or going missing in the English Channel.

Please ask your representative(s), trade union, social, religious, political, professional and other groups and associations you are part of to put the following questions to Burnham and his government:

1. Who are the 200 people who have drowned in the English Channel since 2018? Where were they coming from? What were their hopes and dreams? What led to their deaths? How is the British state memorialising these 200 lives? What steps has the British government taken to ensure that families of the deceased get closure?
2. What steps is the British government taking to make sure that the remains of all who drown in the English Channel are recovered and that the families of the deceased are informed and that the deceased are given proper burials?

⁴ Esme Kirk-Wade "Statistics on small boat Channel crossings", House of Commons Library "Research Briefing", 28 May 2026, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10590/>.

⁵ Diane Taylor "Eighty 'one in, one out' asylum seekers accuse UK of degrading treatment", *The Guardian*, 5 Jan 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jan/05/one-in-one-out-asylum-seekers-accuse-uk-degrading-treatment>.

⁶ Home Affairs Committee "Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood MP questioned on the work of the Home Office", UK Parliament live stream, 4 Feb 2026: 1 hr 23 mins 43 sec in, <https://www.youtube.com/live/IIP5dSuARwg>.

⁷ *Deaths in the Channel – what needs to change*. Refugee Council "Briefing paper", Jan 2025, <https://www-media.refugeecouncil.org.uk/media/documents/Deaths-in-the-Channel-Refugee-Council-report-January-2025.pdf>.

3. What happens to unrecovered human remains in the English Channel? How do marine, commercial, fishing and other systems interact with the remains? With what results, effects and implications?
4. Given that the English Channel is also a site of commercial fishing, what are the implications of how some of the unrecovered remains are consumed by marine life that is then harvested from the site and sold and consumed domestically and internationally?
5. What steps is the British state taking to ensure that the multi-million or multi-billion pound (£) deals it is making with private contractors, state and non-state actors and French authorities do not contribute to further refugee deaths in the English Channel, in so-called migrant hotels, disused military barracks, prisons, detention centres and other sites it is isolating and warehousing the refugees in or during removal attempts or after removal?"

“Should Andy Burnham be ‘relentless’ on small boat crossings? Experts react”

Many of the same themes were also covered in this important article in *The Conversation*⁸ including:

- Mihnea Cuibus (The Migration Observatory), who looked at “Why small boat arrivals have declined”:

“Small boat arrivals have declined in 2026. Around 14,000 people crossed the Channel between January and July, 43% fewer than in 2025. Approximately 30,000 people arrived by small boat in the year ending July 31 2026, one-third below the levels seen last autumn, and slightly less than when Labour took office.”

- Simon Usherwood (The Open University) “Britain’s relationship with the EU”:

“Since the UK left the EU, it no longer has access to the Dublin regulation arrangements that allowed it to return asylum seekers

⁸ “Should Andy Burnham be ‘relentless’ on small boat crossings? Experts react”, *The Conversation*, 7 Aug 2026, https://theconversation.com/should-andy-burnham-be-relentless-on-small-boat-crossings-experts-react-288979?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20August%202026%20-%203903439747&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20August%202026%20-%203903439747+CID_c6ecf83eee2ff72b674ecf7e11f69bd0&utm_source=campaign_monitor_uk&utm_term=Should%20Andy%20Burnham%20be%20relentless%20on%20small%20boat%20crossings%20Experts%20react.

to other EU member states without considering their claims. Talking with the EU might sound good, but in practice it will be work with those countries on the edge of the Channel that delivers most results.”

- Erica Consterdine (Lancaster University) “Behind Burnham’s language”:

“Small boat crossings have come to dominate the immigration debate, despite accounting for only a small share of overall migration. Now, they serve as a visible symbol of a government’s perceived control over the border.

Many believe these crossings are a new phenomenon and evidence of a system in crisis. In reality, irregular movement across the Channel has existed for decades. What’s changed is that tighter border controls have made other clandestine forms of irregular entry harder. Successive governments have also restricted safe and legal routes for people to seek asylum in the UK, pushing more desperate people towards dangerous sea crossings.”

- Alex Balch (University of Liverpool) “The ‘taking back control’ narrative”:

“The framing of policy towards small boat crossings as ‘taking back control’ might be seductive to politicians, but it illustrates how little the debate reflects the complexities around managing migration.

The government should be urgently responding to how many people are dying trying to cross the channel through dangerous means, and working hard to provide alternative routes and processes for people to seek protection or entry to the UK [...]

The best alternative to the ineffective (and costly) focus on trying to deter people from crossing is to commit to a more pragmatic and realistic approach to how irregular migration is better managed across Europe. This requires partnership with the non-European countries and regions that people are migrating from. Burnham’s promise to be ‘relentless’ and ‘bring back that control’ sounds familiar and risks the continued disregard for the needs and welfare of people moving across borders.

But the current situation does not work or adequately serve the interests of the country. Enforcement at the border and increasingly inside the country pushes people into ever more dangerous journeys and criminalises those seeking to contribute to Britain and make a better life for themselves and their families.

A different approach may not mean abandoning border controls, but having a more honest discussion about immigration. This includes the rights and dignity of those migrating, the costs of the current policies to the country, practice around detaining and

deporting people, and recognising how the existing approach causes many of the harms we are witnessing.”

- Jonathan Darling (University of Durham) “Breaking the cycle: secure housing and the right to work”:

“Burnham has reportedly considered ending the outsourcing of asylum accommodation, a system that is lucrative for private firms and costly to the taxpayer. This failed model of housing damages the lives of asylum seekers, placing them in unsafe and poor-quality accommodation, and creates community tensions through lack of engagement with residents [...]

Where managed effectively and publicly, asylum housing can offer pathways to regeneration, the establishment of new communities and the growth of local economies. Working with devolved authorities to invest in accommodation would also align with the aims of Burnham’s wider devolution agenda.

A second positive step would be to give asylum seekers the right to work after six months in the asylum system. This would reduce costs of support on the state and would enable the economy to benefit from the skills and experience of new arrivals. The right to work would also have further benefits: tackling social isolation, improving mental health and facilitating integration.”

“The EU brings the Rwanda ‘return hub’ plan back – and it already failed once”

The hardening of attitudes in parts of Europe was also highlighted recently in this article⁹ that looks at another Rwanda scheme:

“Representatives from Germany, Austria, Denmark, Greece, and the Netherlands – known in Brussels as the ‘group of five’ – visited Rwanda last week to discuss establishing so-called ‘return hubs’ for people whose asylum claims have been denied. The visit follows the European Parliament’s passage in June of a new Return Regulation, described as the bloc’s strictest-ever migration law, which allows member states to transfer rejected asylum seekers to third countries – even where the person has no prior connection to that country.

⁹ “The EU brings the Rwanda ‘return hub’ plan back—and it already failed once”, *Freedom United*, 1 Sep 2026, https://www.freedomunited.org/news/european-union-rwanda-return-hubs/?trk_msg=FUL6N99RDVIKH7T1O4B5C9E9MC&trk_contact=UEILK0CHEUMSB_UJNJ9JKNB13O&trk_sid=GRHAMH8N7BO97MKBFIJ04QIB8C&trk_link=8ATSMQKG81P414R3D71P7HT2PC&utm_source=Listrak&utm_medium=email&utm_term=Rwanda-EU+show+more&utm_campaign=NewsDigest_06SEP26_Core&utm_content=NewsDigest_06SEP26_Core.

But the plan carries a striking precedent. In 2022, the UK struck a similar deal with Rwanda under then-prime minister Boris Johnson. Only four people were removed under the UK's Rwanda scheme before it was abandoned. Meanwhile, it cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.”

“Guess what was on the jaw-dropping list?”

This article¹⁰ in *West Country Voices* (which they reproduced with permission from the author, Emma Monk) highlights how parts of the media are creating stories which are clearly intended to mislead people and whip up hostility.

It starts by referring to an article¹¹ in the *Express*, “The jaw-dropping list of everything asylum seekers in Thetford were 'given for free'” and then describes the items as “The absolute bare minimum required to cook, eat, sleep and stay clean.”

Emma Monk then goes on to state that the items were:

“For asylum seekers who are not allowed to earn any money, have no choice where they live and will be expected to support, feed and entertain themselves for months and maybe years on £49.18 per week.”

And:

“These kinds of starter welcome packs are not unique to asylum accommodation. Even the same supplier in this case, Thomas Kneale, also supplies social housing.

Charities, councils and housing associations usually provide these kinds of starter packs to help those moving from homelessness into their first houses get set up.

Whenever you see stories in the media about ‘freebies’ being given to asylum seekers, there is always someone claiming ‘but what about British people...?’

In the overwhelming majority of cases, British people get the same, if not far more, support than anything asylum seekers are entitled to. They are entitled to cash benefits and housing support that outweighs anything an asylum seeker gets.

¹⁰ Emma Monk “Guess what was on the jaw-dropping list?”, *West Country Voices*, 14 Aug 2026, <https://westcountryvoices.co.uk/guess-what-was-on-the-jaw-dropping-list/>.

¹¹ I would not normally credit something like this, but, as I am referring to it, feel I should this time:

Jon King “The jaw-dropping list of everything asylum seekers in Thetford were 'given for free'”, *Express*, 7 Aug 2026, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2237137/thetford-asylum-seekers-free-goods-list>.

For example, a 24-year-old with no family, out of work with no sickness or disability, living near Thetford would be entitled to £98.05 per week in Universal Credit, as well as housing support from the council – double the weekly cash take-home compared to an Asylum seeker.”

Finally (and I make no apologies for quoting this at some length), Emma Monk states:

“Asylum seekers don’t receive support *instead of* struggling British families; they receive support *alongside* struggling British families.

And yet the media routinely pit them against each other. British veterans do not lose homes to asylum seekers. They are both supported by the State when needed. No, Afghan Refugees Didn’t Take Veterans’ Homes

And yes, far more support could be given to all those in our society who are struggling, but the same media and commentators who suggest that asylum seekers are somehow responsible for struggling British families are also very quick to denigrate those claiming benefits as ‘scroungers’.

Whenever you see a headline clearly designed to make you angry about what asylum seekers are being ‘given’, please take it with a huge truckload of salt.

Read the article rationally and ask yourself if what they are being given seems reasonable in their circumstances. And then ask what support is available to non-asylum seekers in the same situation to assess if this really is a ‘perk’ of being an asylum seeker or simply the bare minimum of support needed to keep someone sheltered and alive while they are not allowed to work.” [emphases theirs]

The RNLI

Finally, as I am sure you will have seen, the RNLI¹² and its volunteers have become targets of abuse. For example:

“Hundreds of anti-migrant protesters blocked roads and faced off with police in Portsmouth, Hampshire on Sunday, September 6, after around 140 people were rescued from a single dinghy that had crossed the English Channel from France.

Names, addresses, and photographs of some of the RNLI volunteers involved in the rescue, were later shared on social media by far-right

¹² “The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea”, see: <https://rnli.org/>.

activists linked to the protest, alongside posts branding them as ‘traitors’ for helping those brought ashore.”¹³

The RNLI has been forced to issue general statements about their work¹⁴:

“Anyone can drown. No one should. RNLI crews launch to the rescue, doing everything they can to save lives, without any thought to where the people they rescue are travelling from, nor their migrant status. Our lifeboat volunteers treat casualties with skill, care, and respect. They then pass over responsibility for the casualties to the most appropriate agency – this could be the ambulance service, police or UK Border Force.”

as well as some dealing with the current spate of misinformation¹⁵:

“Recent events have generated deliberate misinformation and a misunderstanding about the RNLI – our purpose, our tasking, and particularly our lifesaving work in the Channel. Sadly, as a result, some of our volunteers and staff have been the subject of online and, in the worst cases, physical abuse. The RNLI’s people represent the very best in our society, they selflessly give up their time to keep others safe. Yet they and their families are being threatened by those who would hide behind a balaclava or a keyboard. Their action, in contrast, is wholly unacceptable in a civilised society. We will take whatever steps we can, to care for and protect our people and their families.

RNLI lifeboats were tasked by the coastguard and launched 9,058 times in 2025: 109 of those launches were to those in distress in the Channel, representing 1.2 per cent of the RNLI’s total rescue work. Nearly 95 per cent, of those who crossed the English Channel in small boats last year, one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, were picked up by the UK Border Force. Our mission, and our tasking is to rescue those women, children and men in danger of drowning. Anyone rescued from a small boat by the RNLI is immediately handed over to the UK’s immigration authorities. Illegal immigration is a political issue; the RNLI exists to save lives at sea.

I have seen ludicrous rumours that we house asylum seekers on RNLI premises, or that there are RNLI missions to move migrants to secret locations. These rumours are completely baseless and untrue.

Illegal migration is a polarising subject that generates strong views, locally and nationally. But please be mindful of misinformation, the impact

¹³ Sophie Watson “Far-right activists identify RNLI volunteers online”, *The Argus*, 8 Sep 2026, <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/26532794.far-right-activists-identify-rnli-volunteers-online/>.

¹⁴ For example, “Why does the RNLI launch to small boats in the English Channel?”, RNLI, no date, https://rnli.org/about-us/our-work-in-the-channel?utm_source=Emergency&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Emergency&utm_content=262006450-IG-Emergency-1009-Act1-Channel-body1.

¹⁵ For example: “Statement from RNLI Chief Executive Peter Sparkes”, RNLI, 8 Sep 2026, <https://rnli.org/news-and-media/2026/september/08/statement-from-rnli-chief-executive-peter-sparkes>.

it has upon others, and be reassured that the RNLI and our crews strive only to prevent people like you and me from drowning at sea. Stand by them, not against them and their families. I am extremely proud of and grateful for their vital lifesaving work that meant 389 lives were saved last year; lives saved to be lives lived."

Abbreviations and acronyms

RNLI = Royal National Lifeboat Institution

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