

UK court slams unprofessional solicitors

Rogue immigration solicitors are exploiting vulnerable migrants by charging thousands of pounds for legal representation that falls 'far short' of basic professional standards, the UK High Court has ruled. According to a report in [The Independent](#), desperate immigrants are losing legitimate claims or given false hope about claims that are unwinable, after paying large sums of money to solicitors who fail to deliver a professional service. A ruling found solicitors were instructing paralegals and unqualified people to draft applications which fall 'well below acceptable standards' and which judges must reject as 'unarguable and totally without merit'. This has led to vulnerable individuals squandering thousands of pounds, often borrowed from family and friends due to dwindling access to legal aid, judges warned. Pierre Makhoul, assistant director at Bail for Immigration Detainees, said: 'There's a big problem with private solicitors charging a lot and then not delivering. It's not like you can start again, unless you've got a fresh claim and new issues, you've been shafted. You're a failed asylum seeker. It's a massive problem.' **In the High Court, three law firms – David Wyld Solicitors, Sabz Solicitors and Topstone Solicitors – were ruled to have failed to adhere to proper standards.** The judge said: 'The legal professionals acting in these proceedings have in their professional behaviour fallen far short of the standards required of those conducting proceedings on behalf of clients.'

Calls for immigration legal aid to be restored are growing, amid concerns about the quality of privately funded advice provided by some solicitor firms. According to a [Law Gazette](#) report, last week High Court Judge Justice Green said most practitioners in immigration and asylum did not have legal aid franchises. 'The clients are privately funded, and they are frequently vulnerable and desperate. We sought information as to fees demanded by the solicitors in the cases before us. The sums vary; but they invariably run into multiples of thousands of pounds. To raise funds to pay for legal assistance clients must often seek support from family and friends. The solicitors will not generally act unless they are placed in funds beforehand.' **The Law Society has warned that people of the so-called 'Windrush generation' may be denied justice because of legal aid cuts.** Almost all non-asylum immigration cases were taken out of scope by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. Chancery Lane urged the Ministry to restore and protect access to justice for everyone, regardless of their economic circumstances. Meanwhile, law firm Leigh Day is preparing a potential group action against the government on behalf of the 'Windrush generation' over the effects of the government's 'hostile environment' policy. The firm is awaiting details of a proposed government compensation scheme, as reported previously in *Legalbrief Today*.