

Tell it like it is

The truth about asylum



A lot of rubbish is talked about asylum

The same old myths and scare stories are peddled again and again. The truth is in short supply. Well, here at the Refugee Council we believe it's time to put that right, time to tell it like it is. That's why we've produced this guide packed with facts and figures you can rely on.

Who's who?

Asylum seeker: A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been decided.

Refugee: Someone whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution back home.

'Failed' asylum seeker: A person whose asylum application has failed and who has no other protection claim awaiting a decision. Some refused asylum seekers voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned and for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change.

'Illegal' immigrant: Someone whose entry into or presence in a country contravenes immigration laws.

Economic migrant: Someone who has moved to another country to work.

Asylum seekers are looking for a place of safety

- There is no such thing as an 'illegal' or 'bogus' asylum seeker. Under international law, anyone has the right to apply for asylum in the UK and to remain here until the authorities have assessed their claim.
- Asylum seekers are not economic migrants. The top ten refugee producing countries in 2006 all have poor human rights records or ongoing conflict. (Source: UNHCR, *Refugees by numbers*, 2006)
- Many refugees and asylum seekers hope to return home at some point in the future, provided the situation in their country has improved.
- The 1951 Refugee Convention guarantees everybody the right to apply for asylum. It has saved millions of lives. No country has ever withdrawn from it.
- Most asylum seekers do not choose their destination country. Many of those with some choice come to the UK because they have friends or family already here. (Source: Home Office, *Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers*, July 2002)

Britain's asylum system is very tough

- The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. It is very difficult to get asylum.
- Asylum applications to the UK have fallen by almost three quarters over the last five years. (Source: UNHCR, *Asylum levels and trends in industrialised countries 2006*, 23 March 2007)
- Asylum seekers represented just 0.025% of total entries to the UK in 2005. (Source: Home Office, *Control of immigration: statistics 2005*, 22 August 2006)
- The Home Office detains around 2,000 asylum-seeking children with their families each year. (Source: Save the Children, *No place for a child*, 2005)
- In 2006, the Home Office refused 88% of applications from Iraqis at initial decision-making stage. (Source: Home Office, *Asylum statistics: 4th quarter 2006*, 2007)
- Since 2005 people recognised as refugees are only given permission to stay in the UK for five years.
- Home Office decision-making remains poor. 23% of asylum appeals decided in 2006 resulted in Home Office decisions being overturned. (Source: Home Office, *Asylum statistics: 4th quarter 2006*, 2007)

Poor countries - not the UK - look after most of the world's refugees

- The UK is home to less than 3% of the world's refugees – around 290,000 out of 8.4 million worldwide. (Source: UNHCR, *2005 Global refugee trends*, 9 June 2006)
- Three quarters of the world's refugees are living in developing countries, often in camps. Africa and Asia between them host two thirds of the world's refugees. Europe looks after just 18%. (Source: UNHCR, *Refugees by numbers*, 2006)
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- Conflict in Sudan has forced up to seven million people from their homes. Over 550,000 have fled the country to neighbouring countries. Only 675 Sudanese people applied for asylum in the UK in 2006.
(Sources: US Department of State, *Country reports on human rights practices 2006*, March 2007 and Home Office, *Asylum statistics: 4th quarter 2006*, 2007)
- In 2006, the UK was 16th in the league table of industrialised countries for the number of asylum applications per head of population.
(Source: UNHCR, *Asylum levels and trends in industrialised countries 2006*, 23 March 2007)

Asylum seekers and refugees do not get large handouts from the state

- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work unless they have waited over 12 months for an initial decision on their case. They are forced to rely on state support, which is set at just 70% of income support.
- Asylum seekers do not come to the UK to claim benefits. In fact, most know very little about the UK asylum or benefits systems before they arrive.
(Source: Home Office, *Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers*, July 2002)
- Asylum seekers want to work and support themselves. Many do voluntary work while their asylum application is being processed.
- Asylum seekers do not jump the queue for council housing and they cannot choose where they live. The accommodation allocated to them is not paid for by the local council. It is nearly always 'hard to let' properties, where other people do not want to live.
- Asylum seekers do not get special perks such as mobile phones and help to buy cars. They are also denied access to many of the benefits others rely upon, such as disability living allowance.
- Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger.
(Source: Refugee Council and Oxfam, *Poverty and asylum in the UK*, July 2002)

Asylum seekers and refugees are law-abiding citizens

- The vast majority of people seeking asylum are law abiding citizens
(Source: Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), *Guide to meeting the policing needs of asylum seekers and refugees*)

Asylum seekers and refugees are law-abiding citizens

- Asylum seekers are no more likely to commit crimes than anyone else.
(Source: Immigration Minister Beverley Hughes, Hansard column 821W, 19 March 2003)
- Asylum seekers often feel unable to report incidents of racial harassment or violence.
(Source: ACPO, *Guide to Meeting the Policing Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees*)
- 83% of female refugees and asylum seekers say they do not go out at night because they fear abuse and harassment.
(Source: Refugee Action, *Is it safe here?*, December 2002)
- Ill informed adverse media coverage has contributed to heightened local tensions and resentment of asylum seekers.
(Source: ACPO in The Guardian, *We've been here before*, 8 June 2002)
- Immigration officers have the power to detain asylum seekers, even if they have not committed any crime.

Refugees make a huge contribution to the UK

- An estimated 30,000 jobs have been created in Leicester by Ugandan Asian refugees since 1972.
(Source: The Observer, *They fled with nothing but built a new empire*, 11 August 2002)
- More than 1,100 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association's database. It only costs £10,000 to prepare a refugee doctor to practise in the UK. It costs £250,000 to train a doctor from scratch.
(Source: BMA in BBC News, *NHS fails to use refugee doctors*, 16 June 2004)
- Many refugees have academic or teaching qualifications. There are more than 1,500 refugee teachers in England.
(Source: *Report of the Refugee Teachers Task Force*, 23 November 2006)
- Asylum-seeking children contribute very positively to schools across the country. This in turn enables more successful integration of families into local communities.
(Source: Office for Standards in Education, *The education of asylum seeker pupils*, October 2003)
- Immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse compared to their UK-born counterparts.
(Source: Institute for Public Policy Research, *Paying their way: the fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK*, April 2005)

SUPPORT OUR WORK

The Refugee Council is the largest charity working with asylum seekers and refugees across the UK. We offer practical support and campaign for people's rights to rebuild their lives in safety. None of this would be possible without your help:

DONATE: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/donate, 020 7346 1203, rc.fundraising@refugeecouncil.org.uk

CAMPAIGN: campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk to get involved

VOLUNTEER: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/volunteering, volunteering@refugeecouncil.org.uk

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