



TELL IT LIKE IT IS
THE TRUTH
ABOUT
ASYLUM



SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM FICTION

THE TRUTH ABOUT ASYLUM

There is a huge amount of misinformation about asylum seekers and refugees. The truth is in short supply. That's why we've produced this guide of simple facts and figures. Keep it with you, so that you can speak up for the rights of refugees.

WHO'S WHO?

REFUGEE:

"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

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 concluded.

Refused asylum seeker: A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection 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. Refugees are not economic migrants.

IF YOU WERE TRAPPED BETWEEN TWO WARRING FACTIONS

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 any country that has signed the 1951 Convention and to remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim.

There is nothing in international law to say that refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach.

It is recognised in the 1951 Convention that people fleeing persecution may have to use irregular means in order to escape and claim asylum in another country – **there is no legal way to travel to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking asylum.** ([United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#))

The top ten refugee producing countries in 2008 all have poor human rights records or ongoing conflict. Asylum seekers are fleeing from these conflicts and abuses, **looking for safety.**

([UNHCR, 2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons, 2009](#))

Many refugees and asylum seekers hope to return home at some point in the **future**, if 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.

IF YOU'D SEEN YOUR NEIGHBOURS TORTURED AND RAPED

BRITAIN'S ASYLUM SYSTEM IS VERY TOUGH

The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. It is **very difficult to get asylum**. The decision-making process is extremely tough and **many people's claims are rejected**.

Initial Home Office decision-making remains poor. In 2009, the courts overturned Home Office decisions in **28% of asylum appeals**.

(Home Office asylum statistics fourth quarter 2009)

There were 24,250 asylum applications to the UK in 2009. **This is the lowest level since 1993**.

(Home Office quarterly statistical summary, asylum statistics 2009)

Since 2005 most people recognised as refugees are **only given permission to stay in the UK for five years** and can have their case reviewed at any time. This makes it difficult for them to make decisions about their future, to find work and make definite plans for their life in the UK.

The Home Office detains around 1,000 children seeking asylum with their families each year.

(Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Intercollegiate Briefing Paper: Significant Harm – the effects of administrative detention on children, young people and their families, 2009)

IF YOU WERE BEING HUNTED BECAUSE OF YOUR BELIEFS

POOR COUNTRIES – NOT THE UK – LOOK AFTER MOST OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES

The UK is home to less than 2% of the world's refugees – out of 16 million worldwide.

(UNHCR 2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons, 2009)

Over 520,000 refugees have fled the conflict in Sudan to neighbouring countries, **yet only 265 Sudanese people applied for asylum in the UK in 2008.**

(UNHCR 2008 Global Trends & Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2008, 2009)

About 80% of the world's refugees are living in developing countries, often in camps. Africa and Asia between them host more than three quarters of the world's refugees. **Europe looks after just 14%.**

(UNHCR 2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons, 2008)

The likelihood that a refugee will be recognised as having protection needs and granted status depends on the country where they apply for asylum. In Europe, the proportion of people granted asylum varies widely, from 3% in Slovenia to 77% in Finland. (2008 figures for initial decisions from UNHCR June 2009).

(2008 figures for initial decisions from UNHCR, June 2009)

IF YOU WERE IN CONSTANT FEAR OF BEING PERSECUTED

ASYLUM SEEKERS DO NOT GET LARGE HANDOUTS FROM THE STATE

Asylum seekers do not come to the UK to claim benefits. In fact, most know nothing about welfare benefits before they arrive and had no expectation that they would receive financial support.

(Refugee Council, *Chance or Choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK*, 2009)

Most asylum seekers are **living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger**.

(Independent Asylum Commission citizens' inquiry in *The Independent*, 22 October 2007)

Almost all asylum seekers are **not allowed to work** and are forced to rely on state support – **this can be as little as £5 a day to live on**.

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.

IF YOUR HOME AND POSSESSIONS WERE DESTROYED

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES ARE LAW-ABIDING PEOPLE

The vast majority of people seeking asylum are law abiding people.
(Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Guide to meeting the policing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, 2001)

Many destitute refused asylum seekers fear approaching the police to report incidents of sexual harassment and assaults, avoiding contact for fear of being picked up, put in detention and deported.
(Refugee Action report on destitute refused asylum seekers, 2006)

In international and national law, distinctions are made between refugees, asylum seekers, legal and illegal economic migrants, minority citizens, travellers and others. **These distinctions are all too easily lost by the media**, and most particularly in the tabloid press.
(Memorandum from UNHCR to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007)

Immigration officers have the power to detain asylum seekers, even if they have not committed any crime.

IF YOU WERE IN FEAR FOR YOUR FAMILY'S LIVES

REFUGEES MAKE A HUGE CONTRIBUTION TO THE UK

Immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse compared to people born in the UK.

(Institute for Public Policy Research, Paying their way: the fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK, 2005)

An estimated 30,000 jobs have been created in Leicester by Ugandan Asian refugees since 1972.

(The Observer, They fled with nothing but built a new empire, 11 August 2002)

About 1,200 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association's database.

(BMA/Refugee Council refugee doctor database – 4 June 2008)

It is estimated that it costs around **£25,000 to support a refugee doctor** to practise in the UK. **Training a new doctor is estimated to cost between £200,000 and £250,000.**

(Reaping the rewards: re-training refugee healthcare professionals for the NHS, October 2009 NHS Employers)

Children seeking asylum contribute very **positively** to schools across the country. This in turn enables more **successful integration** of families into local communities.

(Office for Standards in Education, The education of asylum seeker pupils, 2003)

IF ALL YOU WANT IS PEACE AND ALL YOU FIND IS VIOLENCE

SUPPORT OUR WORK

We want to see a world in which men, women and children who are forced to flee from their homes can find the protection they need, rebuild their lives in safety and dignity, and achieve their full potential.

You can help support the Refugee Council's work:

DONATE

Make an online donation at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/donate
or call 020 7346 1205

CAMPAIGN

We need your help to challenge policies which have a devastating impact on asylum seekers' lives.

Sign up at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigning/

VOLUNTEER

Visit our website or email volunteering@refugeecouncil.org.uk to find out about volunteering opportunities.



**WOULDN'T YOU
BE SEEKING ASYLUM?**



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