



## 3.5 Winning an argument on asylum

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If you're on a stall or talking to people after an event you'll often get involved in a more or less pilot discussion about asylum. So how do you persuade someone? What approach should you take when debating?

Here are some general things to keep in mind:

- ★ **Stay calm ☺** - it's easy to get overly passionate (!) when talking about things important to you, but you won't convince anyone by shouting and will most likely put them off.
- ★ **Learn your facts and use them** – even if you're not sure how to respond to a question you can state the facts you know and at least provide some basic information.
- ★ **Don't always answer the question as it's given to you!** The question may take the discussion in a completely negative direction that you want to avoid (e.g. 'Why are refugees all criminals?'....)
- ★ **Find a way to make your key points** – don't wait for people to ask the right question to make your main argument as they probably won't!
- ★ **Use your own terminology, not theirs** – much of the usual discussions about asylum are talked about in negative terms (e.g. being a 'burden'), so avoid these and talk about asylum in a positive way.
- ★ **Don't try and answer what you don't know** - There's no shame in saying you're not sure about a particular fact and it's better than pretending to know and tangling yourself up in incomprehensible babble...
- ★ **Try to understand what perspective they have, as different arguments appeal to different people** – keep in mind that not everyone has the same point of view as you, so what you find convincing won't always be convincing to others.
- ★ **Talk about the individual people involved rather than abstract terms** – try to make discussions about real people (mothers, fathers, sons), not just statistics.
- ★ **Distinguish clearly between asylum and immigration** – emphasise that asylum seekers and refugees are here asking for protection and are part of a different process than migrant workers.

### Example responses

Here are some typical questions you might get and key points you might respond with:

## **1. “Why do all asylum-seekers come to the UK?”**

- They don't.
- More than 80% of refugees stay in their region of origin. E.g. 200,000 Sudanese went to Chad, only 1,300 claimed asylum in UK in 2004.
- Only 3% of the world's refugees in UK.
- In 2007 Sweden had the most asylum applications.

## **2. “They're all bogus and only here for the generous benefits”**

- A single asylum seeker gets £35 a week.
- Research shows that many asylum seekers do not know they are coming to the UK. Others come for reasons of family, language, colonial connections, and a sense that UK is democratic and tolerant country. There is little knowledge of asylum process and benefits available, particularly in relation to other EU countries.