

Dealing with Difficult Questions

...on the right to work



To help you argue your case to give asylum seekers the right to work we've put together suggested responses to some of the more challenging questions you might face.

“We're in recession and there aren't enough jobs to go round. Why should we give precious jobs to asylum seekers?”

- This is a human rights issue, not an economic concern. Asylum seekers should be granted the same entitlement to work and seek work as everybody else. Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that people should be allowed to work and be protected from unemployment. Current government policy actively denies people this right.
- Refugees come here for protection. They did not choose to live here and should not be considered as competition for UK workers. The UK's wider policy towards migrant workers is an entirely separate issue.
- The current policy of denying those seeking asylum the opportunity to support themselves means that people are forced to rely on unnecessary benefits. It would be far more sensible to allow these people to work and pay taxes.
- Allowing people the opportunity to find work while they are waiting on a decision about their claim does not in any way give them an advantage over UK citizens. They will be assessed on their ability to do a job like everyone else.
- There would be relatively few asylum seekers applying for work. In 2007, there were less than 25,000 asylum applications made in the UK.

“If we give them the right to work, we'll be swamped with 'bogus asylum seekers'.”

- There is absolutely no evidence to support the idea that people seek asylum in order to work. Asylum seekers are not migrant workers. They come to the UK because they need protection, not because they want to work. Research conducted by the Home Office (July 2002) found that 'there was little evidence that interviewees had targeted the UK because it was thought to offer better employment opportunities'.¹ Many people who are seeking refuge in the UK did not choose this country as their destination. Others come because they speak the language, have family here, or simply because they feel that the UK will offer them security.
- The *Let Them Work* campaign is asking for entitlement to work after six months. There is no reason why a person seeking employment would judge it in their interests to claim asylum and wait six months before being able to work.

¹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hors243.pdf>, p55 In addition, in Alice Bloch's follow up to her Department for Work and Pensions research in 2002, she highlights 'the absence of any evidence that access to welfare benefits or employment are significant 'pull' factors influencing the decisions of asylum seekers.'
(Bloch, A (2004) Making it Work. Asylum and Migration Working p 9 Paper 2. IPPR; London)

“They don’t need the right to work – the government is speeding up the system so 90% of asylum claims will be sorted within 6 months.”

- The Government is far from reaching its target – many asylum seekers wait for much longer than six months. Under the new fast track system, only 46% of new cases were completed within 6 months at the end of 2007.
- There is also a backlog of asylum applicants still awaiting a decision. Despite the introduction of the new system in March 2007, the Government is still processing applications submitted prior to this date under the old system. Many individuals are therefore still waiting after many years for a decision on their case with no permission to work.
- If someone is denied asylum (however quickly) then the system forces them into a state of destitution. Unable to return and no longer entitled to Government support, people are deprived of the opportunity to support themselves. The Let Them Work Campaign is calling for people who have been refused but cannot return to be granted the right to work so that people do not find themselves in this desperate position.

“Failed asylum seekers should just go home – we don’t want them to integrate because then they’ll never leave.”

- Most refused asylum seekers are unable to return home safely or are too afraid to do so. Furthermore, the UK is unable to forcibly return a person to ‘territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group’². Countries such as Zimbabwe and Iraq are too dangerous for any transportation to enter, while others such as Algeria and Iran will not allow people to enter without a passport. The Government should allow people to work until the situation improves.
- There are currently around 10,000 people who have been refused asylum on ‘Section 4’ support. This means the Government has recognised that they cannot return home, despite being willing to do so when it is safe. There is no reason why they should be denied the opportunity to work and support themselves rather than be sustained on Government hand-outs. The UK tax-payer gains nothing from keeping people in a position of dependence.
- It is cruel to actively keep people excluded and isolated from society. It is vital that individuals are welcomed into a community through study and work for general mental well-being and for enabling them to retain skills which will facilitate integration once given refugee status or upon return to their own countries.

For more advice on how to answer difficult questions, or for more facts and figures:

Email: campaigns@star-network.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7729 8880 ext.207

² Article 33(1) of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees