



still human still here

The campaign to end destitution of refused asylum seekers

Action Week, 20-26 February 2012

5 Minute Briefing

Definitions

Refugee: someone who is in need of protection and would be at risk of persecution if they returned home. Under international law the word “refugee” has a very precise meaning: someone 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...” (United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951)

There is no such thing as a ‘bogus asylum seeker’! Article 14 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that seeking asylum is a human right.

Asylum seeker: someone who has asked to be recognised as a refugee and is waiting for the government to make a decision. They have made themselves known to the authorities and are part of an on-going legal process.

Refused asylum seeker: someone who has had their claim for asylum turned down because the Home Office has decided that they do not need protection in the UK

Economic migrant: a person who leaves their home country to work in another country. They can normally return home when they choose to.

Key facts

- ★ **How many asylum seekers come to the UK?**
In 2010, the UK received **17,790** asylum applications, the **lowest number since 1989!** Of these 3,119 were granted some form of protection.
- ★ **Which countries look after the most refugees?**
80% of the world’s refugees are living in developing countries. The UK is home to less than **2%** of the world’s refugees. Europe looks after just 14% of the world’s refugees.
- ★ **Do asylum seekers have permission to work in the UK?**
Almost all asylum seekers do not have permission to work in the UK. They can apply for permission one year after they have applied for asylum, but only those who are still waiting for an initial decision on their asylum case and only in jobs where there are skills shortages, like chemical engineers, orchestral musicians or ballerinas!
- ★ **What financial support can asylum seekers access in the UK?**
Most asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute and who are not allowed to work to support themselves get just over **£5 a day** to pay for food, travel, clothing, toiletries and all other expenses excluding housing and fuel bills. This is **not enough to meet their essential living costs** and forces most to live in extreme poverty.

Tricky Questions:

- ★ **If asylum seekers are refused, why don’t they go home?**

Many refused asylum seekers temporarily cannot return home through no fault of their own. This may be because there is no safe travel route back to their country, their Government refuses to provide them with documents or they are too ill to travel. Just because an applicant has been refused asylum it also doesn't mean that it's safe for them to return. Many Zimbabwean asylum seekers have been denied protection in the UK even though the Courts ruled that it is too dangerous for them to be sent back. This leaves them in limbo, without status, but unable to return home.

★ **Why do refugees always come to Britain? Aren't we full up?**

They don't, and no we're not! Britain hosts just 2% of the world's refugees. 75% go to countries bordering their own and **80% are hosted by developing countries** in the global south. There is currently less pressure on the UK asylum system than there has been for more than 15 years due to the fall in asylum applications to 17,790 in 2010 – that's not even enough people to fill one quarter of Old Trafford football ground, let alone swamp the UK! In 2010 the UK received 0.37 asylum applicants per 1,000 people in its population. That's below the European average.

★ **Why let asylum seekers work when there aren't enough jobs for British people?**

Firstly, when government spending is being cut, it doesn't make sense to force people who could work to live on benefits for months on end. Some asylum applications can take a long time and it is sensible to allow people to support themselves, develop their skills and contribute to the economy while they wait! Employment helps people to start rebuilding their lives and offers self-respect, dignity and helps integration. No wonder the Trade Union Congress supports the right to work, and 128 MPs have signed up to the principle to date! Under the current system asylum seekers who do have permission to work can only take jobs where there are skills shortages in Britain.

★ **If we make the support system fairer, won't more asylum seekers come here?**

The evidence certainly suggests not. A 2010 study found that over two thirds of refugees did not choose to come to the UK. The majority had to leave their home countries very quickly – within a few days or weeks – because their lives were in danger, leaving them little time to plan or pick their destination. Those that did choose the UK came mostly because of family, language, colonial connections, and a sense that the UK is democratic and tolerant country. They had little knowledge of the asylum process and the benefits available!

★ **Given the current cuts, can we really afford to give asylum seekers more?**

Still Human has calculated that £45 (70% of Income Support) is the *bare minimum* that asylum seekers need to meet their essential living needs. And that's all we're asking for. Having to provide emergency health care, shelter and other support to those who are destitute or living in extreme poverty is a far larger drain on the British economy than just giving people the basics they need to survive! Plus, protecting the most vulnerable doesn't just make economic sense. A 2011 study conducted by the Refugee Council, found that 82% of Brits feel that protecting the most vulnerable is a core British value.

Top tips: for winning an argument on asylum

- ★ Stay calm!
- ★ Learn the facts – and use them
- ★ Define your terms
- ★ Don't try to answer what you don't know
- ★ Talk about individual people rather than abstract terms
- ★ Use positive messages
- ★ Make a couple of key points, and keep repeating them
- ★ Put yourself in their shoes - different arguments appeal to different people