

How to... Win the argument



With any campaign around supporting asylum seekers you are likely to encounter a certain amount of negativity, indifference or even hostility. You need to be prepared to argue your point well without getting overly frustrated. To help you, we've put together some suggested responses to some typical comments.

“They are FAILED asylum seekers. They have illegally entered Britain and fraudulently claimed asylum. Why should we support them?”

- The government sometimes gets it wrong. There is significant evidence that many asylum seekers do not receive a full and fair hearing of their claim. Decision making in relation to some nationalities is particularly poor. For example, in 2006, 47% of Somali nationals, 44% of Eritreans and 41% of Zimbabweans who appealed had their refusals overturned (Home Office, Asylum Statistics, Fourth Quarter 2006). The Home Office accepts that the asylum determination process has not been 'fit for purpose' and has recently introduced a new process explicitly tasked with improving the quality of decision-making. Yet it still expects those who were refused under the old, discredited model to accept the outcome of their case.
- Even if a person is fairly refused asylum, it does not mean that their claim for asylum is “fraudulent” or “bogus”. A person may have fled a country in conflict and experienced violence, torture, rape, or loss of family members, but still be refused asylum because they don't meet the narrow and strict criteria given in the 1951 Refugee Convention. And remember that everyone has the right to claim asylum - there is no such thing as a ‘bogus’ claim.
- Many people seeking asylum cannot enter the UK through legal means, but their right to claim asylum is still protected if they simply had no other way to enter (they may have needed false documents to escape their country).

“If they've been refused then they should just be deported since they have no right to be here”

- It is a mistake to believe that any person refused asylum can simply be removed immediately. In practice it is extremely difficult to forcibly remove people to countries where there may be serious safety issues, uncooperative governments, difficulties in obtaining travel documents or unreliable travel routes (e.g. no operational airport).
- The vast majority just want to return home when it is safe to do so. Work by the Hotham Mission in Australia, for example, has shown that non-coercive programmes which offer voluntary repatriation can actually result in more people returning home than tough, punitive systems which simply drive people away from the authorities.