

STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES Campaign Info



stillhumanstillhere
The campaign to end destitution of refused asylum seekers

The *Still Human Still Here* campaign is dedicated to highlighting the plight of tens of thousands of refused asylum seekers who are being forced into abject poverty in an attempt to drive them out of the country.

Who are refused asylum seekers?

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. Even if the Government does accept that a person has been persecuted they may still be refused asylum if they cannot prove that it will happen to them again.

What happens when a person is refused asylum?

Three weeks after a refusal you're thrown out of your accommodation and your financial support is stopped. You're left to fend for yourself and *not allowed to work*. You're expected to leave the UK immediately or be removed by force. There is some limited support available, called 'hard case' support (£35 in vouchers a week and space in a bed & breakfast or hostel), but this is currently only provided to around 3% of people refused asylum. The reason for this is that many people are not told about it, others are wrongly denied access, and it requires you to commit to leave voluntarily, which many are too afraid to do.

How does this impact on people?

Community organisations around the UK have a growing body of evidence that destitution among people refused asylum is widespread and is having a devastating

impact on already vulnerable individuals. Imagine: you may be homeless for long periods of time with no access to food. You are forced to depend on friends and charities to survive. You are also denied free health care, unless it is for an emergency or continued treatment. You are likely to suffer from deteriorating health, depression, and a permanent state of anxiety.

Why are people still here after being refused asylum?

People *can't* be removed

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



Photography: Claudia Janke/Refugee Action

STAR is calling on the Government to:

- End the threat and use of destitution as a tool of Government policy against refused asylum seekers.
- Continue financial support and accommodation to refused asylum seekers as provided during the asylum process and grant permission to work until such a time as they have left the UK or have been granted leave to remain.
- Continue to provide full access to health care and education throughout the same period.

“Everyone has the right to... food, clothing, housing and medical care”

- Article 25 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

obtaining travel documents or unreliable travel routes (e.g. no operational airport). For example, Amnesty International discovered that there were more than 100 Eritreans who could not return because their embassy would not issue them with travel documents – yet the Government will not grant them any leave to remain on this basis (*Down and Out in London*, 2006). In addition, the Government’s own policy of denying support makes the removal process far more difficult since it means that most people have no contact at all with government agencies.

People are afraid to go back

Most people refused asylum are terrified of returning to the same dangerous situations they escaped. When faced with either persecution or destitution, people feel they have no choice but to stay. In many cases this is a result of a flawed decision. Reports by organisations such as Amnesty International demonstrate that many people do not receive a fair hearing (*Get It Right*, 2004). This problem is strongly indicated by the high rates of successful appeals: in 2006, 47% of Somali nationals, 44% of Eritreans and 41% of Zimbabweans who were initially refused

had their decisions overturned. Asylum legislation has changed recently and far fewer people are granted temporary protection from unstable countries - in 2002 this type of protection was given in one in four asylum cases, in 2005 it was only one in ten. Many of those who would once have qualified for temporary protection today find themselves refused and destitute.

Amir (37, Iran) arrived in the UK in the mid 1990s. He was travelling to Canada to join relatives but was stopped by Immigration officials whilst passing through the UK, and so had to apply for asylum in the UK. He had been a professional footballer in Iran. In 2001 his asylum claim was refused and his financial support and accommodation was terminated.

Since then he has lived on the streets, sleeping rough, or in launderettes or pizza shops, sometimes eating from rubbish bins. He has twice attempted suicide and has had many health problems. He fears execution if he returns to Iran and is constantly worried about his family.

FIND OUT MORE

www.star-network.org.uk

TAKE ACTION

Ending destitution

STAR believes it is morally acceptable for the Government to control the UK’s borders. We believe it is morally acceptable for the Government to return people refused asylum if they do not have protection needs. But we believe that it is morally *unacceptable* for the Government to force people into poverty as the cheapest method of trying to make them leave the UK. The Government has an obligation to allow everyone in the UK to access the basic necessities of life, and people refused asylum are no exception. They are *still human*, and they are *still here*.



“Absolutely no one gains from the present state of affairs. Neither government, community, taxpayer nor refused asylum seeker. Reform would be for the greater good for all.”

Kate Adie OBE (Journalist)

The current system is not only inhumane, but entirely ineffective. When a person fears they may be killed upon return to their country they will not be persuaded to leave by the threat and use of destitution. And while people are locked into poverty in the UK, their skills are wasted, and they are often forced into the shadow economy. The overwhelming need created by this Government policy also places a

strain on the voluntary services and communities who struggle to alleviate the variety of its ill effects. It is not enough to decide a person’s asylum claim solely in principle, they need help to find a genuine resolution to their situation. What we propose is simple:

- Where individuals do not have protection needs, we believe that their return should be safe, sustainable and carried out with dignity.
- Where individuals cannot be returned safely, through no fault of their own, they should be allowed to work and be able to access basic support.

A temporary permission to work would allow people refused asylum to support themselves until they are able to return. This lets individuals participate in the community, and is far more cost effective.

STAR believes that everyone has the right to food, clothing, housing and medical care, regardless of their immigration status. It’s time to end the scandal of the enforced destitution of people refused asylum.

“I feel that I am waiting for nothing, stuck in limbo, in-between. I can’t work, I can’t go home, I can’t get any support. I feel as if I am wasting my life.”

36-year old man from Sudan (Refugee Action, 2006)