

The right to work is a fundamental right. It is a right that people have fought for through the centuries and across the world. It is a right that is being denied to one of the most vulnerable groups of people living in the UK today.



Student Action for Refugees Action Guide 2008-09

www.star-network.org.uk

Charity number: 1079042

Campaign Summary

The Let Them Work campaign is dedicated to highlighting the injustices experienced by thousands of asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers who are forced into poverty and isolation by being denied the right to work.

STAR is calling for the government to let people seeking asylum work.

Campaign Supporters:

STAR, Refugee Council,
TUC & Brighter Futures



STAR believes that all asylum seekers should have the right to work. People seeking asylum want to take responsibility for looking after their families and escape from destitution when they cannot access government support. Yet long periods of unemployment during their asylum claim means that when allowed to stay, they often end up in jobs far beneath their qualifications and skills. In addition, if they have their claim refused, they end up returning home with fewer skills than when they left, and find it hard to start again. Restricting the right to work denies asylum seekers the chance to establish and rebuild their lives within the UK. It places them in a frustrating state of limbo, in which the denial of a working life compounds the traumatic upheaval and uncertainty of the asylum system.

Our society loses out too. The UK taxpayer pays for a policy that prevents people from contributing to our economy.

It is inhumane to treat people in this way, and it makes no economic sense.



What is our aim?

STAR aims to

- Inform students of the impact of denying people seeking asylum the right to work
- Motivate and inspire students to participate in a national Action Day to raise awareness of the impacts of government policy on the right to work
- Make a clear and recognisable contribution to the Let Them Work campaign, to help end the government policy that denies asylum seekers the right to work.

Who is our target?

Students across the UK are our target.

STAR believes that students are powerful agents of change on campus, in our community and across the country. Student activism has contributed an important voice of dissent on many issues, from climate change to Fairtrade, and has achieved positive change as a result.

We now want to raise all our voices to shout about the right to work for asylum seekers!

We need to raise awareness amongst the student body of Britain that asylum seekers cannot work under current government policy. We need to persuade them that this policy is impoverishing people seeking asylum, harming their emotional and mental health, and is actively preventing their skill development. We must also demonstrate to students that denying refused asylum seekers the right to work is one of the root causes of their destitution. By spreading this message and exposing this inhumane policy across British universities, we can activate the support and energy of students behind this campaign. This will help us to generate a powerful show of collective strength on Action Day, which will tell the government and our society that students want to **Let Asylum Seekers Work!**

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment”

- Article 23 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

What are the key messages?

- Asylum seekers come to Britain in search of sanctuary and protection from persecution. They are not economic migrants who come to Britain in pursuit of a job.
- The government refuses asylum seekers the right to work, and expects them to live on financial assistance which stands at 70% of income support. This forces asylum seekers into dependence on government assistance; they are not 'scroungers' who come to Britain with a desire to live off benefits
- Over 280,000 refused asylum seekers are living in the UK. They are denied permission to work, and deprived of government support, which forces them into destitution. This policy is an attempt to starve asylum seekers into returning to their home countries. This is both inhumane and ineffective.

What are we going to do?

Supporters of the campaign will work together on some actions and independently on others. Each organisation fighting to Let Asylum Seekers Work brings a different perspective to the campaign and each has knowledge and influence amongst a different target group. This means that collectively, the supporters combine a range of expertise and are able to effectively use a number of campaigning styles and tactics to try to achieve policy change on the right to work. The different ways that supporters will campaign on this issue include:

1 Developing an ongoing and constructive dialogue with Home Office ministers.

Those organisations, such as the Refugee Council, who have developed an authority and expertise in talking to the government about their asylum policy, will use their privilege of direct access to MPs to advise them on the problems of denying asylum seekers the right to work. Through this direct form of lobbying they will try to persuade the government to introduce concessions on the right to work, to create a more humane and economically sensible policy.

2 Highlighting the impact of denying asylum seekers the right to work to our key audiences, in order to build a movement of informed campaigners.

Information about a campaign is often best passed on through a face-to-face discussion with a friend, family member or even a stranger. Clued-up and articulate campaigners are essential to making sure that the facts are communicated to people that want to find out more. Astounding people with your knowledge and understanding of an issue will help you to make your case and convince people that asylum seekers should be allowed to work.

3 Building a groundswell of opinion in support of the right to work through grassroots campaigning actions.

Taking action, for example performing a protest stunt on campus, helps to draw attention to an issue. Lots of people will come

to ask what is happening, and this provides a perfect opportunity to tell people about the current government policy that denies asylum seekers the right to work. Public actions also provide a great chance to get interest from the media.

4 Generating increased media coverage on the right to work for asylum seekers, at a university, local and national level.

If you are lucky enough to appear in your university, local or national media, you will have ensured that information about the Let Them Work campaign has reached thousands more people. Raising awareness of the problem amongst the general public is the first step to generating a public outcry, which can lead to policy change.

5 Engaging and recruiting supporters amongst the voices on the issue of work, who exert influence on the government.

When it comes to tackling the government on their policy of refusing asylum seekers the right to work, the more voices we can mobilise, the better! In particular, if we can prove to the government that it is not just a minority of activists that want change but also that powerful economic forces think asylum seekers should work, this will have a strong impact on the government. Throughout this year the Refugee Council will be trying to recruit key economic influences – trade unions and businesses- to our supporter base, to make the campaign stronger and more effective.

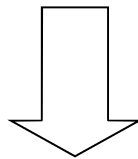
What you can do!

The focus of the campaign this year is to spread the message that asylum seekers cannot work and inform people of the impact that this has on their daily lives. Spreading awareness and recognition of these issues amongst our communities helps to build a foundation from which momentum can be generated for the campaign.

The government have remained quite resilient on this issue over the last few years, and with a possible recession looming over Britain's politicians, effecting policy change is unlikely to be achieved for a while. To give the campaign the best chance for success, it is important that supporters work hard at raising the profile of the issues, as we are going to need a large number of supporters to make the kind of impact that we want.

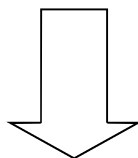
This is where STAR can make a real and lasting contribution to this campaign. STAR members are great at getting out on the streets and spreading the word on asylum issues. You can get talking to students on campus, challenge the ideas that asylum seekers are 'stealing our jobs' or are 'scrounging from the state' and explain that asylum seekers are prevented from working, and forced into a state of dependency on government support.

Spreading this message effectively, can be seen as comprising of two stages, which follow a progression throughout your academic year.



Term 1: Raise Awareness and Generate Support.

Raise awareness amongst your peers about why asylum seekers cannot work. Spread the message across campus, and build relationships with allies. The main purpose of this term is to generate support so that when it comes to taking action in the second term you do it with more people than you started with.

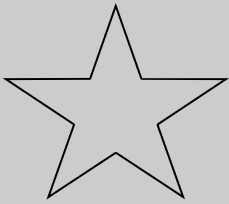


Term 2: Demonstrate support

The STAR national support office will be asking you to demonstrate support for the Let Them Work campaign by participating in the national Action Day in March and motivating others to do the same.

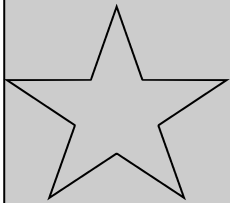
Campaign Actions

Within this campaign timeline there are two exciting dates that you should note in your diary!



15-16 November 2008: STAR Conference.

This weekend long event is designed to help you find out more about asylum issues and give you a chance to meet, discuss and share your experiences with your fellow STAR's. The conference will include a speaker session on the issues of the Let Them Work campaign and a workshop in which you can all share your creative ideas for action, so make sure you sign up! These sessions prepare you with everything you need to get clued up on the issues of the campaign, so that you are ready and confident to go out and argue your case! More information will be coming to you on this in October. To find out more about booking a place, contact James Fisher at the national support office.



March 2009: Action Day!

All STAR groups are encouraged to come together and take action on one day in March 2009. Uniting students across Britain on a single day acts as a powerful message to those preventing asylum seekers from working and helps to build profile and increase media interest in the Let Them Work campaign. Check out the rest of this guide for ideas for actions.

Here are some ideas to think about for campaigning locally over the coming year...

Term 1: Raising Awareness and Gaining Support

1

Holding a Stall

Holding a stall is an easy and effective way to communicate a message to large numbers of people. To make sure you reach as many people as possible make the stall bright and eye catching, you could even paint your own Let Them Work banner. Think carefully about where you set up: try to find a location where lots of people will be walking past, which has space for people to stop and chat.

Have a sign up sheet so that you can create a mailing list of interested people, to let them know what campaign actions you are doing locally and how they can get involved. When explaining the campaign to people keep the message simple and make sure you know your stuff! Also, it is good to provide materials for people who want to find out more. Our campaign info sheet should give them everything they need to know!

If you can, try to set up this stall, and maintain a regular presence at work related events at campus. E.g. If your careers service holds a careers fair, why not set up a stall there? You can host a 'careers unfair!' stall, and adapt your message to fit with the themes of the event. Don't forget to tell people when your next action is, or when you will be holding your next STAR meeting- this way you add interested people to your campaigning ranks!

2

Media Campaigning

A good way of getting your voice heard and motivating and inspiring students to get involved in your campaign, is through using the media. As the emphasis of the first term is about raising awareness amongst students, it is best to focus on your university media sources, but STAR will be giving you support and guidance on engaging with local and national media in the lead up to action day. In fact, workshops led by the Refugee Council on how to use the media for campaigning will be available to all STAR students.

Why not ask your student newspaper if they are willing to let you feature a regular monthly article on the right to work for asylum seekers? You could write a debate piece, or react to other statements or articles on the issue within the mainstream press. Please contact the national support office if you would like any help in deciding what to include.

Alternatively, if you know any asylum seekers who cannot work, perhaps they might be interested in writing about their experiences, or be willing to feature in an interview in your paper or student radio. If you manage to be included in a feature on the radio, a listening event is a great way to raise awareness. This is where you bring people together for a public listening of the interview, and then host a discussion session afterwards. This can be a very effective way in reaching and informing people.

3

Let Them Work-shops

An important aim of raising awareness on campus is to try to build support and gather a crowd of people to join you in taking action in March. A good way to build these ranks is to identify your potential allies at university. Maybe there is an Amnesty or People and Planet group on campus who you could work with, or you could ask your arts or drama society if they would like to contribute something creative to the campaign or action day. Once you have found a society that is interested in what you are doing you could run a workshop with them on the issues of Let Them Work, to motivate them and inspire them to get involved! Contact the NSO if you would like advice and ideas when developing your workshop.

4

Speaker Events

Inviting people with an expertise on asylum, and particularly the right to work, is always a good way of giving people the opportunity to learn more about the issues. You might want to consider the audience that you want to attract. If you primarily want to inform your campaigners then you can keep it quite simple. But if you want to persuade people who are unsympathetic then they may be unwilling to attend something that doesn't appeal to them. Sometimes it's better to aim for a debate so that people feel they have something to engage with. If you need any help with contacting speakers or structuring the event then get in contact with the staff at the NSO. The Refugee Council have been organising regional groups of 'Talk Teams' of asylum seekers, refugees and activists who are willing to talk about the issues of the Let Them Work campaign.

Term 2: Demonstrating Support

1 Skills exchange workshop

One of the main impacts of denying asylum seekers the right to work is that it prevents them from building and developing their skills, and frustratingly wastes their talent. In order to talk about this issue you could organise a skills exchange day, consisting of a series of workshops in which people could share their skills and passions. This could include anything from creative writing to bike maintenance or clothes making. Perhaps you know some refugees or asylum seekers who have a particular interest, passion or skill, who might be willing to run one of these workshops. You could then intersperse these sessions with speakers who could discuss the de-skilling effect of refusing asylum seekers the right to work, and the other impacts it has on their daily lives. Remember, try to run these workshops somewhere really visible on campus in order to increase your impact and spread the message far and wide!

2 Work out!

Public demonstrations and eye-catching stunts are a great way to get people's attention and generate media interest for your event. Why not include some street theatre on action day, in which people set up work for the day outside in the middle of campus. You could set up an office scene, complete with people on computers at their desks, cleaners sweeping round their feet, and a receptionist who can show the interested public around and let them know what it's all about. Making a scene will get a lot of people to stop and talk about the issues, and will give you the chance to persuade them that asylum seekers should be allowed to work.

3 Live like a destitute asylum seeker

This is what it says. If you did not do this whilst campaigning as part of Still Human Still Here, it is a great way to draw attention to what it is like for refused asylum seekers who do not have the right to work. The key action is usually living on a £5 food parcel for one week, but you could also deny yourselves the comfort of your own bed for the week as well and stay on floors at friends houses. Keep a written or photo diary of your experiences and try to get it in your student paper.

4 Pledge for change

As part of your action day activities you could get people to write personal messages or draw pictures about why they think asylum seekers should have the right to work. Ask them to make a pledge of one way in which they will pass on the message of the campaign, and then make sure to take their contact details. Make their messages and pictures into a big mural that you can display on campus, and a week or so after the event email them a reminder of how they promised to spread the message. This is a good way to keep people thinking about the right to work for asylum seekers, and ensuring that the campaign goes further through the power of word-of-mouth.

Don't forget, these are just a few ideas of what you can do. To get some real inspiration from other creative student campaigners, get signed up for conference, where we will be brainstorming mad and exciting concepts and stunts to make a big impact on action day!

Let us know what you are doing!

Whatever you decide to do on Action Day, please let us know how it went, as we would love to hear all about it! If you can, please find some way of recording the results of all your hard work, whether through photos, a short video diary, or by collecting a cutting from any media coverage you may have had. Send it through to us, and we can put it on the website to show off your achievements to your fellow STAR's and all the other partners of the Let Them Work campaign.

Campaign Resources

The STAR national support office can provide you with An initial two resources to stock up your stall, or to hand out on Action Day, and more will be making their way to you throughout the year!

Let Them Work colour leaflet

This explains the basics of the campaign and is a good material to refer to when thinking about the key messages that you want to pass on to people when you are arguing your case.

Let Them Work Campaign info sheet

This explains in more detail the main impacts of denying asylum seekers the right to work. Pass this on to anyone who wants to know more about the campaign, and encourage them to visit the star website (the web address is included in the information sheet).

STAR website

The STAR website should be your main port of call when thinking about your campaigning over the next year. The Let Them Work pages will be jam-packed with useful case studies, more policy information, downloadable resources and news on the progress of the campaign. You could also use the STAR forum to share ideas with other groups across the country and find ways to collaborate on action day!



To find out more about the support offered in this guide contact us at

www.star-network.org.uk

Tel: 0208 980 7036

Charity number: 1079042