

National Campaign Proposal

For Member Consultation

April 2008



Let Them 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 (www.un.org/Overview/rights.html)

Context

People seeking asylum in Britain are being denied their rights. In 2002, the Government made it illegal for people seeking asylum to work, pushing them into a state of enforced unemployment and dependency on UKBA (UK Borders Agency) financial support. As the provision for people seeking asylum currently stands at 70% of income support, this imposed dependency leads to the impoverishment and frustration of each individual affected.

A small concession was made by the Home Office in 2005, which allows those who have had to wait over a year for an initial decision on their claim, to apply for the right to work. However, this is a small token, as even those who get an initial decision in less than 12 months, may still wait a number of years during the appeals process for the final resolution of their case. Despite this inconsistency, the Home Office has refused to extend this initial gesture and has remained resistant to allowing people seeking asylum the right to work.

Over the last few years, refugee organisations have placed increasing pressure on the Government to address this inequity. This has culminated in the right to work being a key demand of the Still Human Still Here campaign, and also in the recent development of a new campaign led by the Refugee Council and the TUC. Their partnership has made the right to paid employment for people seeking asylum their exclusive focus; as their rallying cry demands that the Government 'Let them Work!'. As momentum gathers, this could be a pertinent time for STAR to generate further support for this change.

Issues of Concern

STAR is concerned that the denial of the right to work is a policy that places people seeking asylum in a state of frustrating limbo. The inability to work denies new arrivals the chance to meet people, make friends and establish and rebuild their lives within the UK. The opportunity to work can help people to re-gain a sense of control over their life and may help repair the emotional and mental damage, which too regularly is the result of the experience of exile. Therefore, being deprived of a working life acts as a cruel extension of the traumatic upheaval felt by people seeking asylum.

The Home Office are opposed to allowing people seeking asylum the right to work as they believe it will make the UK a more attractive place to claim asylum, and will therefore increase the number of applications made to the UK. However, this incorrectly confuses those who come to the UK fleeing persecution, with those who come as economic migrants, and fails to acknowledge the range of positive effects the change in policy could have.

Allowing people seeking asylum the right to work would have numerous economic advantages, which the Home Office currently refuses to acknowledge. People seeking asylum in Britain tend to be well educated and highly skilled, often coming from professions in law, medicine or journalism. In fact, 23% of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK have a degree or higher education qualification before they come to Britain (Department for Work and Pensions, 2002). People seeking asylum therefore have a lot to contribute to our economy, and if we would only let them, would be able to support themselves rather than have to be supported by the taxpayer.

STAR believes:

- That people seeking asylum do not enter the UK for economic purposes, but to escape persecution. Therefore, denying people the right to work once they arrive is cruel and unnecessary.
- That the right to work for people seeking asylum would have far reaching benefits for the taxpayer, the emotional wellbeing of people seeking asylum, and wider society.

STAR would be calling for:

- All asylum seekers to be entitled to work from the day of their arrival, during the asylum process, and if refused, until they are able to return safely to their home country.

Campaign Challenges

There have been a number of increasingly negative statements from Government and the Opposition about non-British workers across the last year, which indicates a growing hostility to migrant's economic rights. From Gordon Brown's call of 'British jobs for British workers!' to the proposed introduction of a points system for economic migrants, and the Conservatives policy of a cap on semi skilled and skilled migration; a popular sentiment is being encouraged, which sees non-British labour as a threat to British workers economic security. Within such a fearful political and unstable economic climate, it will be difficult to persuade the public of the importance of the universal right to work for people seeking asylum.

Strategy Ideas

Using it's successful partnership approach to campaigning, the primary objective of STAR's role would be to raise awareness with students about the unfair enforced unemployment of people seeking asylum in the UK. Here are some ideas around how STAR might campaign effectively:

- *Raise awareness among students* about this problem for people seeking asylum
- *Convince students* that denying people seeking asylum the right to work is unfair and without basis
- *Motivate students* to take action in support of people seeking asylum in practical and campaigning ways

To be most persuasive, STAR can:

- Present a simple message. 'Let them work!' and it's single campaign ask, is clear, effective and accessible for those who know very little about refugee issues
- Emphasise the difference between economic migrants and asylum seekers to counteract likely hostility to the message. Remind people that people seeking asylum are fleeing persecution, **not** looking for economic advancement.
- Emphasise the economic advantages to the taxpayer, as well as framing the campaign firmly within the context of human rights.
- Point out to key decision makers that the right to work for people seeking asylum provides solution to many key governmental concerns, such as integration, community cohesion, etc.

Potential Partners

- The Refugee Council
- TUC
- Still Human Still Here Coalition

