



Tell it like it is

The truth  
about  
Refugees  
and Asylum

SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES

Photo © PA Photos Limited

# Separating the facts from the fiction

## The truth about refugees and asylum

There is a huge amount of misinformation about asylum seekers and refugees. The truth is in short supply. That's why we've produced this guide of simple facts and figures. Keep it with you, so that you can speak up for the rights of refugees.

Photo © Bill Knight



# Who's who?

## Refugee:

*"A person 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; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."*

## The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

**Asylum Seeker:** A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded.

**Refused asylum seeker:** A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision. Some refused asylum seekers voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned and for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change.

**Economic migrant:** Someone who has moved to another country to work. Refugees are not economic migrants.

# Asylum seekers are looking for a place of safety

There is no such thing as an 'illegal' or 'bogus' asylum seeker. Under international law, anyone has the right to apply for asylum in any country that has signed the 1951 Convention and to remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim.

There is nothing in international law to say that refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach.

It is recognised in the 1951 Convention that people fleeing persecution may have to use irregular means in order to escape and claim asylum in another country – **there is no legal way to travel to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking asylum.**

[\(United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees\)](#)

The major source countries of refugees at the end of 2014 (Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo) all have poor human rights records or ongoing conflict. Asylum seekers are fleeing from these conflicts and abuses, **looking for safety.** [\(UNHCR \(The UN Refugee Agency\) Global Trends 2014\)](#)

According to UNHCR in 2014 over 34,000 children applied for asylum having arrived in the country of refuge alone, with no parent or guardian. This is the highest number since the UN started to collect this data in 2006. 1,945 of these applications were made in the UK. The UK figure for 2015 rose to 3,043. Many of them come to the UK from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Albania, Iran, and Syria.

**Many refugees and asylum seekers hope to return home at some point in the future** if the situation in their country has improved.

The 1951 Refugee Convention guarantees everybody the right to apply for asylum. **It has saved millions of lives.** No country has ever withdrawn from it.

# Britain's asylum system is very tough

The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. It is very difficult to get asylum. The process is extremely tough and the majority of people's claims are turned down. On average about 62% of women's asylum claims are rejected each year. (Home Office statistics from 2010-2014)

A high number of initial decisions made by the Home Office on asylum cases are wrong. In 2015, the courts overturned 35% of negative decisions that were appealed. (National Statistics on asylum 4th Quarter 2015)

There is a particular problem with decisions on women's claims. The success rate at appeal for women has consistently been higher than that for men over a number of years. In 2014 33% of appeals by women succeeded.

There were 32,414 asylum applications to the UK in 2015. (National Statistics on asylum 4th Quarter 2015)

Since 2005 most people recognised as refugees are **only given permission to stay in the UK for five years** and can have their case reviewed at any time. This makes it difficult for them to make decisions about their future, to find work and make definite plans for their life in the UK.

The Home Office still detains some children seeking asylum with their families each year, despite evidence that it causes them harm. (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Intercollegiate Briefing Paper: Significant Harm – the effects of administrative detention on children, young people and their families 2009)

# Poor countries – not the UK – look after most of the world's refugees

The UK is home to less than 1% of the world's refugees.

(UNHCR Global Trends 2014)

UNHCR have registered well over 4 million refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria, including over 1 million during 2014. **Only 2,609 of these people applied for asylum in the UK in 2015.**

(UNHCR Global Trends 2014 & Home Office asylum statistics)

The vast majority of the world's refugees live in developing countries, often in camps. Africa, Asia, and the Middle East between them host almost three quarters of the world's refugees. **Europe looks after 22%.**

(UNHCR Global Trends 2014)

The likelihood that a refugee will be recognised as being in need of asylum depends on the country where they apply. In the UK in 2015, 34% of the people who applied for asylum were granted it, which was close to the average for EU states. In some countries, such as Netherlands and Sweden, 50% of applications succeed.

(Eurostat July 2014)

# Asylum seekers do not get large handouts from the state

Asylum seekers do not come to the UK to claim benefits. In fact, most know nothing about welfare benefits before they arrive and had no expectation that they would receive financial support. (Refugee Council, [Chance or Choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK, 2010](#))

Many asylum seekers **live in poverty and many families are not able to pay for the basics such as clothing, powdered milk and nappies.**

([The Children's Society Briefing highlighting the gap between asylum support and mainstream benefits 2012](#))

Almost all asylum seekers are **not allowed to work** and are forced to rely on state support – **this can be as little as £5 a day to live on.**

**Asylum seekers are not entitled to council housing.** The accommodation allocated to them is not paid for by the local council.

Some asylum seekers, and those who have been refused asylum, are not entitled to any form of financial support and are forced into homelessness. This includes heavily pregnant women.

Asylum seeking women who are destitute are vulnerable to violence in the UK. More than a fifth of the women accessing our therapeutic services had experienced sexual violence in this country.

([Refugee Council, The experiences of refugee women in the UK, 2012](#))

# Asylum seekers and refugees are law-abiding people

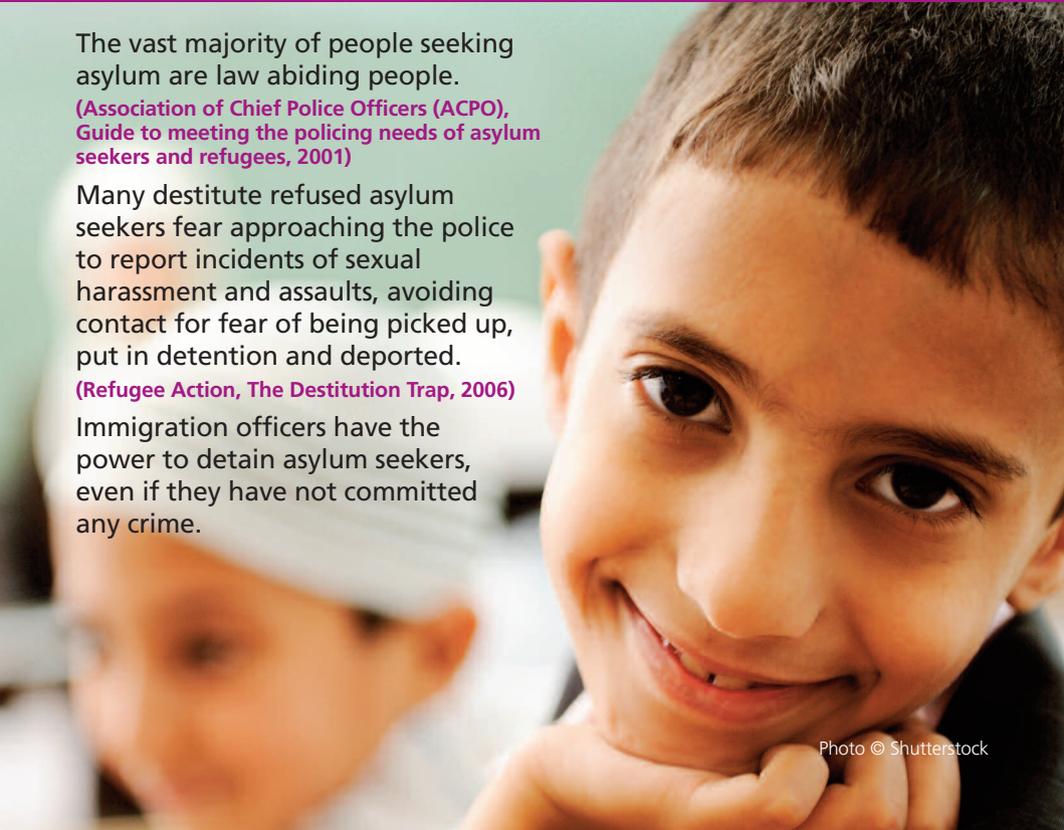
The vast majority of people seeking asylum are law abiding people.

**(Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Guide to meeting the policing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, 2001)**

Many destitute refused asylum seekers fear approaching the police to report incidents of sexual harassment and assaults, avoiding contact for fear of being picked up, put in detention and deported.

**(Refugee Action, The Destitution Trap, 2006)**

Immigration officers have the power to detain asylum seekers, even if they have not committed any crime.



# Refugees make a huge contribution to the uk

An estimated 30,000 jobs have been created in Leicester by Ugandan Asian refugees since 1972. ([The Observer, They fled with nothing but built a new empire, 11 August 2002](#))

About 1,200 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association's database. ([BMA/Refugee Council refugee doctor database – March 2010](#))

It is estimated that it costs around £25,000 to support a refugee doctor to practise in the UK. Training a new doctor is estimated to cost over £250,000. ([Reaping the rewards: re-training refugee healthcare professionals for the NHS, October 2009 NHS Employers, BMA Jan 2013](#))

Children seeking asylum contribute very positively to schools across the country. This in turn enables more successful integration of families into local communities.

([Office for Standards in Education, The Education of asylum seeker pupils, 2003](#))

# Refugees need your help – Today

We want to see a world in which men, women and children who are forced to flee from their homes can find the protection they need, rebuild their lives in safety and dignity, and achieve their full potential.

Please help support refugees today:

**Donate**  
**Campaign**  
**Volunteer**

Through [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)  
Email: [supporter@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:supporter@refugeecouncil.org.uk)  
Phone: 020 7346 1205

**Thank you**

Photo © Shutterstock

# Thank you



**Volunteers with the Refugee Council in Leeds, helped asylum seeking and refugee women, particularly those who were pregnant. (Photo 2012)**

Photo © Bill Knight



Freepost Plus RSYE-AYUL-CEUL  
Refugee Council  
PO Box 68614  
LONDON  
E15 9DQ

Please post today.  
You do not need  
a stamp, but  
using one will  
save us money.



D16TILLI

Registered Charity no. 1014576

(Please fold here and moisten on reverse)



[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)



**SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES**

# Thank you

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

 @refugeecouncil

 Refugee Council

 020 7346 1205

Refugee Council, PO Box 68614, London, E15 9DQ

Charity number: 1014576

All information correct at time of publication,  
April 2016