



Briefing note Number: July 2009

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Myth Buster

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www.plymouth.gov.uk

1.

Who are
asylum
seekers and
refugees?

Asylum seekers: are people who leave their country due to genuine fear of torture or persecution. Everyone has a right to claim asylum in another country and to have that claim considered fairly¹.

An Unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC): is an asylum applicant who is less than 18 years old and has no adult relative or guardian to look after them at the time of application.

A refugee: is an asylum applicant whose claim for asylum has been accepted by the government, has been given a right to remain in the UK, and may work and claim benefits.

- ✓ If an asylum application is rejected on the final appeal, the asylum seeker is required to leave the country and is liable to forcible removal.
- ✓ All asylum seekers have a legal right to remain in the UK until the government has fully considered their application and they have exhausted all their rights of appeal.

2.

Aren't they
here for
economic
reasons?

No...

The Home office says in 2008, The top 10 nationalities for asylum seekers in the UK were:

- ✓ Afghanistan, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia, Sri Lanka, China, Pakistan, and Nigeria.
- ✓ All these countries are well known as being troubled by war, human rights abuse, or oppressive regimes and practices.

3.

Why don't
Asylum Seekers
ever work?

By law asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the UK, until they have been granted refugee status. Some asylum seekers may be allowed to work if they satisfy certain conditions.

Most asylum seekers are highly qualified professionals back in their home countries (including as doctors, lawyers, engineers, nurses, teachers) and they would like to work.

The British Medical Association (BMA) maintains a voluntary database of asylum seeking and refugee doctors, and as at 4th June 2008...

- ✓ A total of 1199 such doctors were registered on the database.
- ✓ 172 of the doctors are now working with the NHS.
- ✓ 234 of them had passed the UK exams that make them qualified enough to work in the UK.
- ✓ 15 of the doctors live in the South West.
- ✓ 52% of them are from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran.
- ✓ The BMA estimates that there could be as many as 3000 refugee doctors, and this is a potentially valuable skill to the UK.
- ✓ A home office research indicates that most asylum seekers would prefer to work than be supported for free by the government.

¹ United Nations Convention on Refugees

4.

What support do they get from the council?

- ✓ Asylum seekers get their support from central government
- ✓ Councils support UASC, but they get a government grant for it.
- ✓ The council may look after asylum seekers who have special care needs but this is in exceptional circumstances.
- ✓ Councils can provide grants to local charities working with asylum seekers and refugees, but not directly to the asylum seekers or refugees.

5.

What about jumping housing queues?

- ✓ Asylum seekers are not eligible for council housing so they do not go on the housing waiting list.
- ✓ Asylum seeker housing is supplied by government contractors and private land lords.
- ✓ They are permitted to live there only for the period that their application is being considered.
- ✓ Councils will only provide housing to those who have received permission to remain as refugees, but not to asylum seekers.

6.

Do they get free TVs mobile phones and computers?

- No...
- ✓ Asylum seeker houses are furnished with basics like cookers and washing machines but not TVs.
 - ✓ These basic items do not belong to them, and will be used by the next asylum seeking family allocated to that house.
 - ✓ Mobile or home phones and computers are the responsibility of the asylum seeker and there is no entitlement to them.
 - ✓ Many asylum seekers may spend part of their weekly allowance on a mobile phone or computer, because that could be the only means of getting in touch with their family back home.

7.

Do they get more benefits than other people?

No...at roughly £6 per day, Asylum seekers get 30% less than the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

The following table compares JSA and Income support with asylum seekers weekly allowance.

| Asylum seeker Allowance | Weekly amount 2009 | Job Seekers Allowance/Income Support 2009 | Weekly amount payable from |
|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Single adult 25 or over | 42.16, but 35.13 for new asylum seekers from 5 th October 09 | Aged 25 or over | 64.30 |
| All Single adults 18 - 24 | 35.13 | Aged 16-24 | 50.95 |
| Lone parent 18 or over | 42.16 | Lone Parent 18 or over | 64.30 |
| Couple at least one of whom is 18 or over | 69.57 | Couple 18 or over | 100.95 |
| Child 16-18 (but special rules apply if an unaccompanied child) | 38.18 | Aged 16-24 | 50.95 |

8.

Doesn't the UK have more than its fair share of them?

Most asylum seeker countries are so far beyond the UK borders, that the UK is not the first destination for asylum.

- ✓ In many cases, the routes to the UK are too complicated, dangerous and expensive.
- ✓ Most asylum seekers will flee to their neighbouring countries first.
- ✓ According to United Nations figures, the UK is home to less than 2% of the world's asylum seekers and refugees.
- ✓ The majority of asylum seekers and refugees are supported by countries that are much poorer than the UK.
- ✓ "Africa hosts a staggering three million refugees and nearly a third of these are hosted by just three countries in East Africa; Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania"².

9.

How many live in Plymouth?

- ✓ On average, there are around 450 asylum seekers living in Plymouth at any one time. This is 0.2% of Plymouth's total population, and a really tiny proportion of the world's Asylum Seekers and refugees.

10.

Why does the council spend money translating things for them?

Local authorities (including the Council, the Police and the NHS) will pay for the cost of interpretation and translation in order to...

- ✓ **Improve people's ability to participate and understand how our local society works:** This could include letting people know about our rubbish collection process in a language that they understand, which means our streets and homes can continue to be kept clean.
- ✓ **Ensure fair access to information:** Some important official documents may be made available in alternative languages. However, this is not done as a matter of routine on all council documents, but is normally done following people's request and in accordance to their needs.
- ✓ **Get fair outcomes in the courts:** Convicting the right people for the right crime is paramount to the British justice system. This means avoiding acquitting people simply because the courts could not understand their language, or even convicting innocent people simply because they could not defend themselves in English.
- ✓ **Give accurate diagnosis and treatment to people:** Your doctor will decide what is wrong with you by both listening to your description of what you feel as well as looking at the results of any tests carried out on you. If Doctors and patients fail to understand each other, the wrong treatments could be given to people and could lead to loss of life. Where a patient is given the wrong treatment and they have an infectious disease like Tuberculosis, this could endanger even more lives.

² www.humanrightsfirst.org

11.

Don't they increase crime levels?

No.. According to the association of chief police officers...

- ✓ There is no evidence that Asylum Seekers commit more crime than anyone else.
- ✓ Asylum Seekers are more likely to be victims of crime, even murder, because of who they are.

12.

Surely they are well off?

No.. Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. There are many asylum seekers who are here alone, while their children and family members are still living in difficult conditions back home. It is not unusual for them to share their modest allowance with family at home. This makes it very difficult for them to meet their own costs of living so they may depend on charitable had outs.

A study by Oxfam and the Refugee Council revealed that....

- ✓ 85% of asylum seekers experience hunger
- ✓ 95% cannot afford to buy clothes or shoes
- ✓ 80% are not able to maintain good health

13.

Where else can I get support or information on asylum seekers in Plymouth?

As a council we work closely and in partnership with local voluntary organisations that help asylum seekers.

If you are an asylum seeker and need help or are a member of the public who would like to know more or volunteer your services to our asylum seeker and refugee community you can contact our partners at the following addresses:

Students and Refugees Together (START)

Unit 4, HQ Building,
237 Union Street,
Plymouth
PL1 3HQ
TEL: 01752) 255 200

Refugee First

Floor 1, Anglia House,
Derrys Cross,
Plymouth,
PL1 2SH
01752 242 156

Refugee Action

4th Floor, Prideaux Court
Palace Street,
Plymouth
PL1 2AY
01752 235 030

For further information please contact the social inclusion unit on 01752 304321 inclusion@plymouth.gov.uk, or www.plymouth.gov.uk/socialinclusion

