



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 recognised as 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 Refugee Convention and to remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim.

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 2015 (Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, South Sudan, 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 2015\)](#)

According to the UNHCR in 2015 **over 98,400 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. **3,043 of these applications were made in the UK, equivalent to 3%.**

[\(UNHCR \(The UN Refugee Agency\) Global Trends 2015\)](#)

**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

There were **30,603** asylum applications to the UK in 2016.

[\(National Statistics on asylum 4th Quarter 2016\)](#)

A high number of initial decisions made by the Home Office on asylum cases are wrong. In 2016, the courts overturned **41%** of negative decisions that were appealed.

[\(National Statistics on asylum 4th Quarter 2016\)](#)

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. [\(Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Intercollegiate Briefing Paper: Significant Harm – the effects of administrative detention on children, young people and their families 2009\)](#)



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

Britain is host to **less than 1%** of the world's refugees.

[\(UNHCR Global Trends 2015\)](#)

Britain has received **just 3%** of all asylum claims made in the EU so far in 2016. [\(Eurostat 2016\)](#)

UNHCR calculates that by the end of 2015 there were close to **5 million Syrian refugees**. Only **2,539** of these claimed asylum in the UK.

[\(UNHCR Global Trends 2015\)](#)

Poor countries shelter the vast majority of the world's refugees: **86%** live in developing countries.

[\(UNHCR Global Trends 2015\)](#)

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 2016, 29% of the people who applied for asylum were granted it**, which was close to average for EU states. In some countries, such as **Germany and Belgium, more than 40%** of applications succeed. [\(Eurostat\)](#)

# 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](#))

# Still Needed, Still Here



For 65 years the Refugee Council has supported people who have fled unimaginable horrors.

We help some of Britain's most vulnerable people including survivors of torture, trafficking and children traumatised by desperate journeys.

We provide a warm meal, a shower and vital advice to people sleeping rough with nowhere else to turn.

We help refugees find jobs, access training and find somewhere to live.

We help refugee doctors and nurses retrain to use their skills in the NHS.

We advocate for a fairer, more effective and humane asylum system so that refugees can begin to rebuild their lives in safety.

**And we couldn't do it without people like you.**

*"I want to thank you for the moral support you offered me throughout and particularly with writing job applications (the most difficult thing for me)."*

[\(Refugee Council client now employed by an international charity\)](#)

# Refugee Council client becomes a doctor

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

The British Medical Association estimates it costs approximately **£294,164** to train a doctor in the UK. A refugee doctor can be re-trained for **£29,000**, a fraction of that cost.

(Building Bridges Programme: Impact Report, 2015-16)\*

\*With the annual funding of £290,510 we support over 150 Refugee Health professionals towards employment, enabling 10-12 refugee doctors to start working in the NHS each year.

*"Without help...I would not have the knowledge or means to navigate this maze. I can't thank you enough for all the encouragement, support and guidance when it felt that all my efforts were in vain. Nothing can stop me now on the way to becoming a successful GP."*

(Doctor & Refugee Council client)



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# 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

# Please complete and return this form to support the work of the Refugee Council:

## Contact details:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*We would like to keep supporters in touch with our work, including by email. You can be assured that your contact details will not be passed on to any third parties. You can view our privacy policy at [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/privacy\\_policy](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/privacy_policy)*

- Please do not send a thank you
- I would like to receive email updates from the Refugee Council (*please enter email address*)

I would like to opt out of all further communications from the Refugee Council

## I would like to make a donation to the Refugee Council of:

£10  £20  £50  £100  Other Amount: £ \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque/CAF voucher/postal order (*circle one*) payable to the **Refugee Council**

Please debit my Visa/MasterCard/Maestro/American Express/CAF card (*circle one*)

Card Number:   (*Maestro only*):

3 digit security number:  (*MasterCard, Visa & Maestro, 3 digit code. Amex, 4 digit code*)

Issue number (*Maestro only*):  Expiry date:  /

Start date (*Maestro only*):  /

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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



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# Thank you

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

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Charity number: 1014576

All information correct at time of publication, November 2016.  
Reprint of leaflet April 2017.