**Refugee Council UK**

**The facts about asylum**

**Source** [**http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/basics/facts**](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/basics/facts)

**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](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2010/18jan2010.htm), 2009)
* Most asylum seekers are **living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger**.  
  ([Independent Asylum Commission citizens’ inquiry in The Independent](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylumseekers-are-left-to-starve-in-britain-397576.html), 22 October 2007)
* 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 do not jump the queue for council housing and they cannot choose where they live.** The accommodation allocated to them is not paid for by the local council. It is nearly always ‘hard to let’ properties, where other people do not want to live.

**Asylum seekers and refugees are law-abiding citizens**

* 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 report on destitute refused asylum seekers](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/campaigns/documents/RA_DestReport_Final_LR.pdf), 2006).
* In international and national law, distinctions are made between refugees, asylum seekers, legal and illegal economic migrants, minority citizens, travellers and others. **These distinctions are all too easily lost by the media, and most particularly in the tabloid press**. ([Memorandum from UNHCR to the Joint Committee on Human Rights](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200607/jtselect/jtrights/81/81we83.htm), 2007)
* **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**

* Immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse compared to their UK born counterparts. (Institute for Public Policy Research, [Paying their way: the fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK](http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=280), 2005)
* 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](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/aug/11/race.world), 11 August 2002)
* About 1,200 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association’s database ([BMA/Refugee Council refugee doctor database](http://www.bma.org.uk/images/Refugeedoctorsstats0608_tcm41-173034.pdf), 4 June 2008)
* 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 between £200,000 and £250,000.** ([Reaping the rewards: re-training refugee healthcare professionals for the NHS](http://www.nhsemployers.org/Aboutus/Publications/Pages/ReapingTheRewards.aspx), October 2009 NHS Employers)
* Asylum-seeking children 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Inclusion/Asylum-seeker-children/The-education-of-asylum-seeker-pupils/%28language%29/eng-GB), October 2003)

**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](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html))
* The top ten refugee producing countries in 2008 all have poor human rights records or ongoing conflict. Asylum seekers are fleeing from these conflicts and abuses, **looking for safety.**   
  (UNHCR, [2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons](http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html), 2009)
* **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 decision-making process is extremely tough and **many people’s claims are rejected.**
* **Initial Home Office decision-making remains poor. In 2009, the courts overturned Home Office decisions in 28% of asylum appeals.**([Home Office asylum statistics fourth quarter 2009](http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/immiq409.pdf))
* 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 detains around 1,000 children seeking asylum with their families each year**. ([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](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/press/pressreleases2009/immigrationdetention.aspx))

**Poor countries - not the UK - look after most of the world's refugees**

* The UK is home to less than 2% of the world’s refugees – out of 16 million worldwide.  
  (UNHCR [2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons](http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html), 2009)
* Over 520,000 refugees have fled the conflict in Sudan to neighbouring countries, **yet only 265 Sudanese people applied for asylum in the UK in 2008**. (UNHCR [2008 Global Trends](http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html) and Home Office [Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary 2008](http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/immiq408supp.xls))
* About 80% of the world’s refugees are living in developing countries, often in camps. Africa and Asia between them host more than three quarters of the world’s refugees. **Europe looks after just 14%.**   
  (UNHCR [2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/NR/exeres/2007%20Global%20Trends:%20Refugees,%20Asylum%20seekers,%20Returnees,%20Internally%20Displaced%20and%20Stateless%20Persons), 2008)
* The likelihood that a refugee will be recognised as having protection needs and granted status depends on the country where they apply for asylum. In Europe, the proportion of people granted asylum varies widely, from 3% in Slovenia to 77% in Finland. (2008 figures for initial decisions from UNHCR June 2009).