

# REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE UK

Myths and facts



**"Sometimes** people say racist things on the bus or in the street - in school as well. But we had no choice; coming here or staying there and **dying...**

**I just wish that one day people will understand and will see that they were wrong"**

Quotation by Elona 18, Kosovan asylum seeker

**MYTH**

**"Only a handful of asylum-seekers are genuine - the rest are 'bogus' or 'cheats'"**

**FACT:** There is only a 25% increase of full refugee status since 2001 in the UK, according to Home Office statistics. The reason most asylum seekers' applications get rejected is because they do not meet criteria set under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its interpretation by the UK.

**MYTH**

**"Britain takes more than its fair share of refugees"**

**FACT:** The UK received fewer applications than most other western Eastern European countries, which are Austria, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Belgium. The UK has a duty under international law to receive all asylum claims made on its territory.

## **MYTH**

**"Refugees should be deported back to where they came from"**

**FACT:** Central to International refugee Law, the principle is that no one should be sent back to a country where they would risk persecution or torture.

Most refugees actively want to return to their homes and countries - if and when it is safe for them to do so. Most South Africans and Chileans who fled to Britain in the 1970s returned back as soon as they were able.

## **MYTH**

**"Asylum seekers receive massive state handouts"**

**FACT:** A single adult receives only £37.77 per week, 30% below the basic level of income support received by UK citizens. Most asylum

seekers wish to work, but they are unable to until their application to remain in this country is accepted.

**MYTH**  
**"Asylum seekers are taking our housing and swamping our public services"**

**FACT:** Under International Refugee Law and International European and UK Human Rights Law, asylum seekers have a right to basic healthcare and education. Home Office research has also shown that in 1999-2000, migrants - including refugees - contributed £31.2 billion in taxes, and consumed only £28.8 billion in benefits and services.

## MYTH

**"Refugees come to the UK to abuse its generous benefits system because they know it is a soft touch"**

**FACT:** Home Office research shows that asylum seekers choose to come to the UK because of colonial, family, language or other links, and refugees come to the UK because they are fleeing violence or persecution. Most of these people are unaware of the benefit system.

## MYTH

**"Asylum seekers choose to use smugglers and traffickers to enter the country illegally"**

**FACT:** The UK and the UN are imposing even tighter border controls to stop asylum seekers from coming through, and for this reason these vulnerable people are placed in the hands of traffickers and illegal migration as the only way of fleeing to the UK seen in the case of the 58 Chinese immigrants who were discovered dead in a lorry at Dover in June 2000, and this is particular to women asylum seekers.

## **MYTH**

### **"Asylum seekers should be locked up"**

**FACT:** Detention of asylum seekers goes against human rights principles; they should never be held in mainstream prisons and vulnerable groups including children should never be locked up. However, there are a large number of asylum seekers held in mainstream prison (nearly 800 at the end of 2002). Those held in prisons have simply applied for asylum.

## **MYTH**

### **"Letting asylum seekers in means letting terrorists in"**

**FACT:** The 1951 Refugees Convention excludes those who have committed a serious crime or pose a serious threat - including terrorism - from claiming asylum. The

majority of people who seek refuge in the UK are themselves fleeing violent attacks, and being victims of regimes.

**MYTH**  
"Nearly all asylum seekers are troublemaking young men"

**FACT:** A significant proportion of asylum seekers to the UK are women, children and older people. The Association of Chief Police Officers released a report in 2001, which revealed that asylum seekers are far more likely to be the victims than the perpetrators of crime.

## Translations

Haddii aanad fahmayn dokomantigan, waxaa kuu diyaar ah kaalmo lacag la'aaan ah oo aad ka heli kartid Waaxda Turjumida. Telfoonku waa: 020 8583 2290

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