

Refugee Week

14th – 20th June 2021

With Refugee Week taking place in June, a few facts and figures about refugees feels timely. The following information has been provided by the Refugee Council, and much more can be found on their website: (<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>)

The truth about asylum

The same old myths and scare stories about refugees and people seeking asylum are peddled again and again. However, if you take a look at the facts and figures below – how often are these accurately reported in the news or on social media? Help spread the truth about refugees and asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers and refugees - who's who?

Refugee

The definition of a refugee according to The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is:

“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.”

In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that an individual who has applied for asylum meets the definition in the Refugee Convention they will ‘recognise’ that person as a refugee and issue them with refugee status documentation. Usually refugees in the UK are given five years’ leave to remain as a refugee. They must then must apply for further leave, although their status as a refugee is not limited to five years.

Asylum seekers (person seeking asylum)

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. Wherever possible, the preferred term is to describe someone as a person seeking asylum as it is felt that the term asylum seeker is dehumanising.

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. For some, it is not safe or practical to return until conditions in their country change

Migrant

Someone who has moved to another country for other reasons, such as to find work.

Some interesting facts and figures:

1. At the end of 2019 around 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced across the world. Of these, 29.6 million were refugees, whilst 45.7 million were internally displaced within their country of origin.
2. 85% of the world's refugees are living in countries neighbouring their country of origin, often in developing countries
3. In 2019, more than two thirds of the refugees across the world came from just five countries: Syria (6.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.2 million), Myanmar (1.1 million) and Somalia (0.9 million).
4. 40% of refugees across the world are children
5. Over 6.7 million people have fled conflict in Syria, and many more are displaced inside the country. Turkey is the biggest refugee hosting country in the world. At the end of 2019 Turkey was providing safety to 3.6 million Syrian refugees. By the end of June 2020 the UK had resettled 19,768 refugees from Syria under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). In addition, 239 refugees were resettled prior to this, and do not count towards the 20,000 target
6. The top ten refugee producing countries in 2019 all have poor human rights records or on-going conflict. People seeking asylum are fleeing from these conflicts and abuses, looking for safety
7. The UK is home to approx. 1% of the 29.6 million refugees, forcibly displaced across the world
8. About 1,200 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association's database. 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
9. Children in the UK asylum system contribute very positively to schools across the country. This in turn enables more successful integration of families into local communities
10. 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
11. The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. It is very difficult for people seeking asylum to provide the evidence required to be granted protection. The decision-making process is extremely tough and many people's claims are rejected. In the year ending December 2020, 41% of initial decisions resulted in a grant of asylum or other form of protection.

12. Initial Home Office decision-making remains poor. Many refugees had to rely on the courts rather than the Government to provide them with the protection they need. The proportion of asylum appeals allowed in the year ending December 2020 was 39%.
 13. There are particular problems with decisions on women's claims. Women who turn to the courts for help when their asylum claims are refused are more likely to have their protection needs recognised by the courts. Women tell us that it is in part because the asylum system can feel very hostile and it is difficult for them to give full details of the violence they have experienced
 14. Since 2005 most people recognised as refugees are only given permission to stay in the UK for five years. 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
 15. Asylum seekers and refugees do not get large handouts from the state. 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
 16. Asylum seekers do not come to the UK to claim benefits. Most know nothing about welfare benefits before they arrive and had no expectation that they would receive financial support
 17. Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger. Many families are not able to pay for the basics such as clothing, powdered milk and nappies
 18. 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
 19. It is recognised in the 1951 Convention that people feeling 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.
 20. 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.
 21. There is nothing in international law to say that refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach. A European regulation allows a country such as the UK to return an adult asylum seeker to the first European country they reached. This means that countries on the edge of Europe have responsibility for a lot more asylum seekers than others. Some of the countries through which people travel to get to Europe are unsafe for some. Many have not signed the Refugee Convention, meaning that people who remain there will not get international protection and be able to rebuild their lives.
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