



CHANGING
ATTITUDES WITH
INFORMATION

ASYLUM IN SCOTLAND

NO SUCH THING AS
AN 'ILLEGAL ASYLUM
SEEKER'

THE FACTS ASYLUM
SEEKERS ARE
LOOKING FOR A
PLACE OF SAFETY
POOR COUNTRIES -
NOT THE UK - LOOK
AFTER MOST OF THE
WORLD'S REFUGEES

scottish
refugee
council

Scottish Refugee Council is the leading Scottish Charity providing the first port of call for hundreds of people who've fled horrific situations around the world. We provide advice, support and a listening ear - every step of the way.

We are passionate campaigners for refugees and believe in a Scotland where people seeking sanctuary from persecution can live in safety and dignity. We work to see a legal and policy framework that is fit for purpose - providing refugees with the protection and support that they need and deserve.

CHANGING ATTITUDES WITH INFORMATION

This guide provides up-to-date information about the asylum system and aims to encourage an informed debate on asylum. It sets out facts about the asylum seekers and refugees living in Scotland and highlights the benefits they can bring.

Attitudes to immigration are difficult to disentangle from broader issues such as race relations, globalisation and the European Union.

Polls consistently show a majority of the British population would like to reduce overall migration numbers. But these views are influenced by misunderstandings and misinformation.

For example, when thinking about migrants, when asked almost twice as many people in the UK think of asylum seekers (62%) as think of international students (29%). Yet asylum seekers represent only 4% of overall migration to the UK and students are 37%. (*Source: Scottish Refugee Council (2013).*)

This booklet aims to give you the real facts about asylum - showing the real situation for asylum seekers and refugees. In addition, we aim to show the human face behind the statistics.

ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE **LOOKING FOR** **A PLACE OF SAFETY**

For centuries refugees have sought refuge in Scotland. In living memory Scotland has provided sanctuary for Jews escaping the Nazi Holocaust, Europeans escaping wars in Europe, and more recently people displaced by conflicts, persecution and the denial of human rights from Yugoslavia to Darfur and Rwanda.

The vast majority of asylum seekers are escaping war, torture or persecution and need a place of sanctuary where they can be protected.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations' 1951 UN Refugee Convention provides the underpinning of international refugee law, and the rights to asylum.

Under the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution in a safe country. On applying for asylum, a person's claim is assessed against the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

The UN Convention is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states towards them. It was initially created to protect European refugees in the aftermath of World War II.

The Refugee Convention has saved millions of lives. Today it provides protection for those fleeing from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo and Syria.

In 2012 the top ten refugee-producing countries were Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Eritrea, Libya and Nigeria, all places with well documented records of significant human rights abuses. *(Source: Home Office Statistical Report for 2012/13.)*

NO SUCH THING AS AN 'ILLEGAL ASYLUM SEEKER'

Despite the frequent reporting in the media of 'illegal asylum seekers', there is no such thing.

Everyone has the right to request asylum, and while their case is reviewed, they have rights to reside in the UK and cannot be described as 'illegal'.

POOR COUNTRIES LOOK AFTER MOST OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES - NOT SCOTLAND

Two-thirds of the world's 10.5 million refugees (2010) are living in developing countries such as Tanzania and Pakistan. Many are living in large refugee camps. (Source: UNHCR.)

In 2012, 24,800 Syrians made asylum claims in industrialised countries compared to 1,100,000 registered in countries neighbouring Syria. (Source: UNHCR.)

In 2012 Scotland hosted around 2,000 asylum seekers - a tiny proportion of the world's refugee population, and around 10% of the total number of asylum seekers making claims in the UK. (Source: UK Government, 2013.)

Asylum seekers make up less than 0.5% of the population of Glasgow (where the vast majority of asylum seekers in Scotland live).

If all the refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland gathered at Hampden stadium it would be less than 40% full.

In Europe, in 2012 the UK ranked 11th in the European Union in terms of asylum applicants per head of population. In terms of absolute numbers of applications,

France, Germany and Sweden all received more than the UK. France and Germany both received almost three times more than the UK. *(Source: UK Government, 2013.)*

AN ASYLUM SYSTEM FIT FOR PURPOSE?

The number of asylum seekers making applications in the UK has been decreasing in recent years. This reduction is due more to measures which prevent people from getting to the UK to apply for asylum rather than an actual reduction in the number of refugees in the world.

The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and it can be very difficult to be recognised individually as a refugee. During 2012 only 32% of applications were granted asylum at the initial decision. *(Glasgow Caledonian University, 2012.)*

But, UK Government decision-making can be very poor. One in four of the asylum seekers who appeal against a negative initial decision are successful and are granted asylum. *(Glasgow Caledonian University, 2012.)*

In 2012 Amnesty International examined 50 cases from Syria, Sri Lanka, Iran and Zimbabwe where the UK Government rejected claims for asylum but the courts later decided they should have been granted asylum. In 42 of the cases - all randomly selected - the Judge said the main reason for overturning the Government's decision was that the case worker had wrongly decided the applicants' claims were not credible. *(Amnesty International (2013).)*

WHAT SUPPORT DO ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES GET?

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are forced to depend on state support.

And they don't receive generous benefit payments. There is a significant gap between the welfare support provided to asylum seekers and the support that people in the UK receive.

Asylum seekers currently (2013) receive only 65% of the income support levels for under 25s, and 51% of levels for over 25s and lone parents.

In 2013 this stands at just £71 for over 25s and lone parents, well below the 60% of male median earnings (£119 in 2009) seen as preventing poverty.

In addition, they do not have access to many other benefits that others have. For example, if they have a disabled child they do not receive additional assistance.

Despite voucher-based systems of support being abandoned by many as stigmatising and unfair, the UK Government continues to support many asylum seekers with the 'Azure card'. These cards can only be used to buy certain items in specific shops and do not include any cash for bus fares or phone calls.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF ASYLUM SEEKERS WANT TO WORK AND TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES

Most people seeking asylum come from countries with no social security system - so not working has never been considered an option.

Refugees struggle to get their qualifications and experience recognised in the UK, and often fail to find work relevant to their skills.

Many do voluntary work while their asylum claim is being processed, both to benefit their community and to maintain their skills. Over half of recently surveyed refugees in Scotland contribute to society by doing voluntary work. Over half of all respondents in a 2012 study of refugee integration attended community events, attended community meetings and volunteered locally. *(Mulvey, Gareth (2012) "In Search of Normality", Glasgow: Scottish Refugee Council.)*

Asylum seekers have limited ability to choose where they live - they are generally allocated housing by the authorities.

Their accommodation is not paid for by the local council, but by the UK Government.

ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE ONE OF THE MOST DEPRIVED GROUPS IN THE UK

People whose asylum claim has been rejected and who are unable to return to their country of origin can face homelessness and complete destitution.

They have no legitimate means of support and must rely on the charity of others.

Between 2009 and 2012 1,849 destitute asylum seekers in Scotland were supported by the Refugee Survival Trust and the Scottish Refugee Council.

On average destitute asylum seekers have been destitute for 1.5 years. (*Glasgow Caledonian University, 2012.*)

DEVOLVED OR RESERVED?

Only the UK Parliament at Westminster can pass immigration and asylum legislation. However, several areas of law-making and a number of policies and services which impact on asylum seekers and refugees are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. These include education, employment, health, housing, legal aid, children's services and social work services.

WHO'S WHO?

■ Asylum Seeker

In the UK, an asylum seeker is someone who has made a formal application for asylum and is waiting for a decision on their claim. The UK Home Office must decide whether or not that person qualifies for protection under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or human rights legislation.

■ Refugee

A refugee is someone whose application for asylum individually has been successful. They have been recognised as needing protection under the 1951 UN Convention because the UK Government believes they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country for reasons of races, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

■ Refused asylum seeker

A person whose claim for asylum has been refused by the UK Government and is either appealing or is awaiting return to their country of origin.

■ Economic migrant

A person who has moved to another country voluntarily to improve their quality of life through work.

■ Illegal migrant

A person who has arrived in this country, intentionally not made themselves known to the authorities and has no legal basis for being here. Or someone whose legal status in the UK has expired.

THE HUMAN FACE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

People seek asylum in Scotland for various reasons. But their need for protection, support, integration, and a platform to voice their views and concerns are constant.

Take one example. A businessman fled Syria at the end of 2011, and was granted refugee status by the UK Government in 2012. This is his story.

“In 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring, I helped to organise political demonstrations in Damascus. We were calling for democracy, for greater freedom from the Asad regime. There were good things about the regime – the country’s government was secular, and there was tolerance between different religions and different communities. At the same time, there was no democracy. People could not express themselves freely.”

“Our demonstrations were peaceful. We were determined to be peaceful. And we did not want to give anyone an excuse to label us as violent. We made sure that our hands were empty. We told people not to even carry a pen.”

“In April 2011 nine of my friends were killed in front of me at a demonstration. Later, one of my friends was arrested and tortured. Under torture he named me as an organiser of the protests.”

“I went into hiding in my mother’s house, which is in a Christian area of Damascus. This area has been spared much of the violence. I am a Muslim, and this was a safe place for me to hide – I would not be looked for there.”

“My family – my wife and two children under two years old – were held by the police for two days in an effort to make me give myself up. It was terrible to have to stay hidden knowing they were being detained.”

“I had studied in the UK, and I still had a valid visa. My brother helped me flee. I bribed officials and flew to the UK at the beginning of 2012.”

“I applied for asylum on arrival at Heathrow. After an initial screening I was sent to Glasgow. I was later granted refugee status and leave to remain in the UK.”

“In Scotland I was referred to Scottish Refugee Council who supported me. I was helped to access housing. I was helped to bring my family to the UK as they remained at risk in Syria. My wife and two young boys are now with me. Scottish Refugee Council has been a great help to me.”

“Now I am building a new life in Scotland while I wait to see what happens in Syria. Now I think the country is broken, and it will take years to return to peace and security. We wanted more freedom but not an end to the religious and ethnic tolerance that we enjoyed in the past.”

THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

Every day the Scottish Refugee Council assists asylum seekers and refugees. Their words illustrate the impact this work can have.

“When I arrived in Scotland I didn’t have a place to sleep and didn’t know anybody here. I went to Scottish Refugee Council on my very first day in Glasgow. A woman in the office got us a flat and arranged for a taxi to take us to Red Road. I don’t remember the woman’s name but I’ll never forget her face. I had to gather together lots of paperwork and evidence for my family’s claim for asylum. I would phone Scottish Refugee Council and they helped me get the evidence I needed for my lawyer. Whenever I needed help I knew I just had to ask and I would get it quickly, right when I needed it. ... I don’t have enough words to say how much Scottish Refugee Council helped me. They gave me consideration. They gave me love.”

“Scottish Refugee Council’s theatre project helped me heal and helped me find my voice. Now I could talk forever!”

“I feel so lucky to have found Scottish Refugee Council. The people there really got me through. The refugee integration team helped me with all the basics, the fundamental things you need to know about living here. ... Any time I needed help I knew I was welcome.”

Get involved!

Join us and help refugees and asylum seekers get the support they need and deserve.



FundRaising
Standards Board

Donate

Text RFGE31 and the amount you want to give to 70070. Or online at www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/donate and on our facebook page.

Fundraise

For ideas and help see our website or contact the funding team.

Campaign

Join us in working to improve how refugees are treated by government and by the public.

Volunteer

Help us provide frontline services, or the backroom work that keeps them running. Or help us raise the funds they need. Just a few hours a week will make a big difference.

Become a member

Join us as an individual or an organisation at www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/membership.

Find out more:

Web www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

twitter www.twitter.com/scotrefcouncil

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