

Asylum facts and information

The number of people seeking protection in the UK is at its lowest level in 20 years

Asylum applications have fallen dramatically from a peak of over 84,000 in 2002 and have averaged less than 25,000 a year during the last five years from 2005-2009. Asylum applications for 2010 and 2011 were both under 20,000 – the lowest levels since 1989. In 2012, they increased slightly to 21,785, but still easily within the UK’s capacity to deal with swiftly and efficiently.

In 2012, the UK ranked 11 out of the EU15 in terms of asylum applicants per head of population. The numbers seeking to escape conflict and persecution in the UK is small compared to those who are assisted in neighbouring developing countries. For example, in the first couple of months of 2013, 40,000 Syrians refugees were fleeing the country each week – roughly equal to the amount of asylum seekers the UK received over two years. Jordan is currently supporting more than 320,000 Syrian refugees.

Perceptions of asylum seekers in the UK are extremely inaccurate

A poll in March 2011 found that 72% of respondents thought there were more than 100,000 asylum applications in the UK in 2009. The actual figure was 24,485.¹ Given the above, it is not surprising that many British people express the view that there are ‘too many’ asylum seekers in the UK and that Britain takes ‘more than its fair share’.

Sustained inaccurate and inflammatory reporting on asylum issues has imbedded negative attitudes towards asylum seekers in the public consciousness. A media search carried out between January 2001 and January 2006 found that seven UK tabloids published 713 articles which referred to ‘bogus asylum seekers’ and the words ‘crime’ and ‘asylum’ appeared together 945 times.²

More than one in four decisions to refuse an asylum seeker protection in the UK is overturned on appeal

The vast majority of those seeking protection in the UK do have a genuine fear for their safety. In 2012, 36% of those seeking asylum were given some form of protection in the UK. However, a further 27% of those who appealed against a refusal in 2012 were also granted status in the UK. For some nationalities the overturn rates on appeal were much higher (e.g. Somalia: 53%, Eritrea: 47%, Sri Lanka 37%, Zimbabwe: 34% and Iran 30%).

¹ Including those granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave. Research by Opinium for the Refugee Council, March 2011, 2017 people interviewed across a representative sample of all GB adults.

² UNHCR, *Refugees*, Issue number 142, pages 16-17, 2006.

It is important to stress that success at appeal is largely dependant on obtaining good quality legal representation, which is in increasingly short supply.

Many asylum seekers are still waiting several months for a decision on their cases despite the fact that applications are at their lowest level for more than 20 years. At the end of 2012, there were over 4,400 cases which had been waiting over 6 months for an initial decision.

Asylum support is not generous and leaves many people unable to meet essential living needs

The vast majority of asylum seekers receive well below 70% of Income Support. For example, a single adult who is 25 years old or more will get £36.62, which is the equivalent of just 52% of Income Support.

Consequently most asylum seekers have to live on just over £5 a day (accommodation and fuel bills are paid for separately for those who have nowhere to live). It is extremely hard to meet essential living needs of food, clothes and toiletries and pursue an asylum application on this amount, but asylum seekers are not allowed to work to support themselves unless they have been waiting for more than one year for a decision to be made on their initial application.

Refused asylum seekers at the end of the process are often left without any statutory support at all.

Refugees have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to the UK

Refugees have successfully settled in the UK for centuries, including the Huguenots from France, Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, Asians escaping Idi Amin's Uganda or more recently the Bosnians and Kosovans who fled the Balkans.

Most refugees play productive roles in society outside of the public gaze, but some have made high profile contributions to the UK in various fields. Some examples are:

Sir Montague Burton (founder of the Burton clothing empire), Lord Lew Grade (television impresario), Lord Paul Hamlyn (publisher and philanthropist), Michael Marks (co-founder of Marks and Spencer), Sir Ludwig Guttmann (neurologist and founder of the Paralympics and Stoke Mandeville Hospital) Lucian Freud (artist), Gilberto Gil (musician), Andrew Sachs (actor), Josef Conrad (novelist), Rodolf Nureyev (dancer), Yasmin Alibhai Brown (journalist and author), Omid Djalili (comedian and actor), Nadine Gordimer (novelist) and Albie Sachs (Judge and anti-apartheid activist).