

MYTH-BUSTING

Refugees and asylum seekers

What are the facts about Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK?

Here's the myth-busting truth

Myths around migration are common and it is difficult to navigate where misconceptions end and facts begin. If you are looking for clarity, you are in the right place.

Below you will find some of the most common myths around migration and corresponding facts based on validated data.



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‘Asylum seekers and refugees are just two terms referring to scroungers arriving in the UK, aren’t they?’

Well, no:

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn’t yet been legally recognised as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection.



‘Are all asylum seekers illegal immigrants?’

In fact, no:

Everyone can seek asylum, but you would not like to walk in those shoes.

- We can all migrate, move from one place to another. However, it is the reason beyond migration that makes a huge difference. We move from one place to another in search of a better life, for work, for education, for love, for a sense of adventure. And if we are lucky enough, we travel back to visit family and friends back home, from time to time.
- 89.3 million people worldwide are forced to migrate because home to them has become the most dangerous place on earth. Migration here is not a lifestyle choice, it is the only option between life and death. Asylum seekers and refugees, people who are forced to migrate, cannot go back to their country of origin. Most family members and friends are scattered around the world as they sought refuge from war, famine, and persecution.

Recent figures from the [UNHCR](#) present chilling evidence:



- **4.6 million asylum seekers**
 - **27.1 million refugees**
 - **53.2 million internally displaced people**
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 - **40% of refugees across the world are children.**
- The protection of the refugee must then be seen in the broader context of the protection of human rights.
 - Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.
 - They often have had to flee with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs and loved ones.
 - Refugees are defined and protected in international law. The [1951 Refugee Convention](#) is a key legal document and defines a refugee as:

“someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

[Learn more about refugees.](#)

‘Why are they all coming to the UK when we are all a small island, after all?’

Well, as a matter of fact, 85% of refugees are hosted in developing countries:

- 72% hosted in neighbouring countries:

The UK is home to approximately 1% of the 27.1 million refugees who were forcibly **people across the world**¹.

In 2022, the UK offered protection to 23,841 people (including dependants) in 2022 in the following forms²:

- 16,649 were granted refugee permission following an asylum application.
- 56 were granted temporary refugee permission.
- 1,042 were granted humanitarian protection.

¹ [TBRC](#)

² [Home Office 2023](#)

- 302 were granted alternative forms of leave (such as discretionary leave, UASC leave)
- 5,792 were resettled to the UK through resettlement schemes.
- Since their first arrivals in 2021, the Afghan schemes have resettled a total of 21,387 people while the UK Resettlement scheme has resettled 2,023 refugees.
- In the 7 years from 2016 to 2022 the UK has resettled a total of 47,802 individuals.

‘Asylum seekers come from safe countries, anyway, don’t they?’

Well, no... 69% originated from just five countries, none of which you can safely live in:

Syrian Arab Republic (27%)

Venezuela (18%)**

Afghanistan (11%)

Others (31%)

Myanmar (5%)



‘Isn’t it true that people who seek asylum in the UK are unqualified and come here to scrape up on our welfare state?’

Well, here are the facts:

- [About 1,200 medically qualified refugees](#) are recorded on the British Medical Association’s database.
- 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.
- 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.
- Asylum seeking women who are destitute are vulnerable to violence in the UK.

‘Why don’t they seek asylum in another country before coming to the UK?’

There is nothing in international law to say that refugees must claim asylum in the first country they reach. Under the UN Refugee Convention, of which the UK is a signatory, allows for choice in where individuals apply for asylum. They do not have to apply for asylum in the first “safe” place they reach. 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.



‘Isn’t it just too easy to seek asylum in the UK, and that’s why people are flooding in?’

Contrary to general misconception, the UK offered protection to 23,841 people (including dependants) in 2022 in the following forms:

- 16,649 were granted refugee permission following an asylum application.
- 56 were granted temporary refugee permission.
- 1,042 were granted humanitarian protection.
- 302 were granted alternative forms of leave (such as discretionary leave, UASC leave).
- 5,792 were resettled to the UK through resettlement schemes³.

‘Anyway, doesn’t the EU refugee charter end with Brexit on 1 January 2021?’

In fact, no. The convention the UK follows is a UN one. The United Nations Refugee Agency issues the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are still the key legal documents, which assert that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This is now considered a rule of customary international law.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) serves as the ‘guardian’ of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. According to the legislation, States are expected to cooperate with us in ensuring that the rights of refugees are respected and protected. More information and documents can be found [here](#).

‘Don’t all asylum seekers and refugees get large handouts from the state?’

No.

- People seeking asylum are often living on Home Office support equivalent to just over £6 per day.
- Most asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the UK

³ [Home Office 2023](#)

- Refugees can work, and often contribute significantly to the UK economy.



Why do they all come to Kent and live in 5-star hotels?’

This is an uninformed misconception: Destitute adults asylum applicants who have been accepted as eligible for support from UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) are housed in regions throughout the UK, **on a 'no choice' basis**.

⁴The Home Office has a [statutory duty to provide accommodation](#) for asylum seekers who do not have the means to obtain it themselves and/or cannot meet their essential living needs. It has contracts with private sector providers to source accommodation on its behalf.

Typically, someone seeking asylum in the UK would first stay in hostel-style ‘initial accommodation’ for a few weeks, before moving into [longer-term self-catered accommodation](#) such as shared flats or houses (known as ‘dispersal accommodation’).

The number of [asylum seekers requiring accommodation has increased in recent years](#). Reasons include the growing number of people claiming asylum and the increasing time taken to process applications.

[Initial accommodation options are currently at maximum capacity](#) and providers are struggling to procure more longer-term options.

The average stay in short-term sites has also increased, [from three weeks to around six months](#). As a contingency measure, accommodation providers have been block-booking hotels to house asylum seekers.

Kent acts as corporate parent for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and has the responsibility to act in the best interest of the child.

The responsibility for the support and accommodation of asylum children who apply for asylum are below the age of 18 who arrive in the UK without close adult family members falls to local authorities under the Children Act 1989.

‘Why are people crossing the channel?’

⁴ [UK Parliament House of Commons Library](#)

Because they are escaping from war and famine and they think that the UK is the best country to build their lives after all the atrocities they have gone through. Now the reasons for the UK to hold such space in people's hearts and minds may vary; some people speak English, some have family ties, some have travelled across the world and gone through the unspeakable and unspoken to reach a place where they think their children will thrive.

Why would one do any different?

Why are we questioning the legitimacy of people to seek safety in the country they think will afford the best for their family?

Would we raise the same questions of legitimacy towards the rich? Does it mean that the poor have less choice because they are poor? Does this mean that asylum seekers should have even less choice because they are not only poor, but also somewhat "different" from us?

[This briefing](#) from the Refugee Council uses published Home Office data to set out who the people who crossed the Channel in 2022 are, where they are from, and how many will be permitted to stay in the UK as refugees. It also looks at the reduction in safe routes and why refugees have no option but to take dangerous journeys to reach the UK. Finally, it looks at the potential impact of the Government's plans to prevent all people arriving across the Channel from applying to stay in the UK as refugees.

'I would never send my child off to a journey into the unknown. How can mothers do that? Certainly, they do not value life as we do.'

In our recent past, fear that German bombing would cause civilian deaths prompted the government to evacuate children, mothers with infants and the infirm from British towns and cities during the Second World War. [Evacuation](#) was voluntary, but the fear of bombing, the closure of many urban schools and the organised transportation of school groups helped persuade families to send their children away to live with strangers.

Unfortunately, nowadays mothers from all around the world have no other choice but sending their children off in a desperate attempt to save their lives.