

Migration and Asylum



BACKGROUND

The past year has seen more people lose their lives as they try to cross the Channel to seek sanctuary in the UK. Those who arrive in the UK face a long wait for a decision on their claim, are housed in unsuitable and unsafe accommodation while they wait and are isolated from the communities they could be a part of. 2023 also saw a piece of legislation – the Illegal Migration Act being passed by Parliament. This Act has effectively removed the right to seek asylum to the point where it is impossible for most people arriving here to claim asylum and seek safety. This Act, and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, have created an environment where people seeking asylum are subject to hostility, fear, and long periods of uncertainty. They now also face the threat of being removed to Rwanda before their asylum claim can be heard in the UK.

For those that do have their claims processed through the asylum system, they face lengthy waits in unsuitable accommodation. This includes hotels, barracks, and now barges – including the Bibbi Stockholm. Many charities have raised concerns about the severe impact on people's mental and physical health of living in these conditions. People living in asylum accommodation are given a small allowance, but it is not enough to cover the essentials. Our regional centres across England and Wales support hundreds of asylum seekers staying in temporary accommodation, and in almost all these cases, we see asylum seekers having to rely on the support of charities and foodbanks to meet their basic needs.

People who are in the asylum system and waiting for a decision on their claim do not have the right to work for the first six months they are in the UK. Even after that point, they are restricted to a few occupations on the 'Shortage Occupation List' which are unsuitable for many. This prevents them from being able to earn money to support themselves, have the benefits work can bring for mental and physical health and integration, and prevents the UK from benefiting from their skills and experience. The challenges don't stop when people are given the right to remain in the UK. Many face the risk of homelessness as they are forced to move on from asylum accommodation in a very short period.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We want to see an asylum system based on principles of compassion, humanity and dignity. It is vital that the right to seek asylum in the UK is reinstated. For this to happen, the National and Borders Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 need to be repealed. It is also essential that more safe routes are available for people to come to the UK.

We want to see people in the asylum system well cared for and given opportunities to support themselves through work. We want to see those getting refugee status well-placed to integrate and thrive within their communities. An important first step in this is increasing the period they have to find accommodation after their asylum claim is approved to at least 56 days.

CASE STUDY

We have seen numerous cases in which the lack of the right to work leaves asylum seekers in poverty and in some cases destitution. The case of Mohammed, an asylum seeker from Syria whom one of our centres in the North East supported, provides one of many examples. Mohammad arrived in the UK with his family after being forced to flee war in Syria, where he had experienced the trauma of war and the devastating loss of his family and his community. Mohammed has a strong desire to work full-time, but because of the current rules, he is unable to. This left him and his family reliant on our centre for help with food, financial support for transportation, clothes and a sense of belonging. His decision for asylum took almost two years, and during this time Mohammed and his family experienced financial poverty and severe isolation. Granting asylum seekers like Mohammed the right to work would help people integrate, contribute to their community and it would be a first step in creating an asylum system built on compassion and fairness.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CANDIDATES

1. Every year, people tragically die as they attempt to cross borders to reach safety. If elected, will you champion the right to safe and legal routes for people needing to flee their homes, rather than leave vulnerable people prey to people smugglers?
2. If elected, will you ensure the country is a welcoming one to refugees and migrants, including ending the unjust deportation of people who haven't even had their asylum applications heard?

MORE INFORMATION

- People seeking asylum currently receive £49.18 per week while their asylum case is pending. For those in accommodation that provides meals, the amount is £8.86. In our experience, this amount is well below what is needed for asylum seekers to live above the poverty line¹.
- People seeking asylum are not allowed to work until they have been waiting for a decision on their claim for at least six months.
- Over 70% of people who claimed asylum in the year ending June 2023 were granted refugee status, humanitarian protection, or alternative forms of leave².
- For the majority of people who want to seek sanctuary in the UK there are no safe routes³.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2023/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to#outcomes-of-asylum-applications>

³ <https://www.rescue.org/uk/article/what-are-safe-routes-uk-four-common-myths-explained>