



RAIS Lancaster

Refugee Advocacy, Information and Support

Registered Charity No. 1193811

Changing the conversation

There are many public conversations at the moment about asylum seekers and refugees in the media and in government and within communities around the UK. If you get caught up in a conversation like this, then here are some answers you can give to questions you might be asked which we hope will help to make the conversation more positive.

Who is an asylum seeker?

An asylum seeker is a person who is forced to leave their home country because there is war or because they are persecuted, or their lives are in danger. An asylum seeker is a mum, a dad, a brother, a sister, a child, a member of your faith community and lives in your street. Her children sit beside yours in the classroom. They come from many countries around the world, and they bring many skills and gifts with them.

But asylum seekers are illegal, aren't they?

No. Asylum seekers are not illegal migrants. They have right to be here under the UN Refugee Convention.

They should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, shouldn't they?

No. They have a choice. Under the Convention you can claim asylum in the country of your choice.

Why do they choose to come here then?

Because they have relatives or friends here because they speak English or because the UK has a reputation of being good country to live in. Everyone has their own reason, so if you want to know, why not ask them why they came?

There are too many of them aren't there? The UK is full?

The UK population is currently 68,741,719. In 2020, the UK received applications for asylum for 37,550 people (including dependants). This is around three times **fewer than** the number of applications received each by Germany (124,380), France (103,370) and Spain (108,225). Lancaster and Morecambe has population of 126,000 and there are about 700 asylum seekers and refugees here.

What about all the people coming across the channel in boats?

There are fewer people coming overall than in 2021. The people who come in boats are more visible whereas they used to come on lorries and trains and not be so easily seen. Approximately 45,000 people came in boats in 2022. Wembley stadium holds 90,000; that means that all of them would take up half that space.

They are living in hotels and costing us a fortune, aren't they?

Yes, there are about 37,000 asylum seekers in hotels, out of a total of 130,000 in the UK. This is partly because of the channel crossings (45,000 last year), but many of the remaining 85,000 have been waiting for months and years because the Home Office does not progress their cases. (Some asylum seekers have been here up to five years waiting for a decision.) That is why they have had to use hotels.

What about the hotels? How do we get people out of them?

The Home Office could speed up processing their cases and could give them permission to work in the meantime. The hotels would empty and the jobs we need would be filled. The Home Office could process their cases by fast tracking those who come from countries they cannot go back to, such as Yemen, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria and Iran.

Will sending people to Rwanda stop the people smugglers? And if not, what will?

No. The Rwanda policy will not solve the people smuggler problem. If the UK government was to set up a safe route with asylum visas issued in France or another safe country, process their applications and let them come on a ferry, that would be a safe route and cost much less than deporting people to Rwanda. It would also put the people smugglers out of business.

But there are safe routes aren't there?

Not for asylum seekers, only for resettled refugees who are given leave to remain and refugee status before they come. Of these there are a few thousand from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine (1,685 in January 2022 + 190,000 from Ukraine during 2022.)

Are Albanians illegal migrants?

Some may be, and some may be genuine asylum seekers, and like everyone else they have a right to have their case heard

Some people might tell you they are frightened of asylum seekers. Tell them there is nothing to be frightened of. They are human beings like us, people like us and they are far more scared than we are.

Remember, Asylum is a Right not a Crime.

We, who have the privilege of working with asylum seekers and refugees learn from their courage, their resilience, their patience, their resourcefulness. We welcome and celebrate their presence among us!