

The Basics

- People fleeing their homes to seek safety elsewhere are called 'asylum seekers'. If their host country approves their claim, they become 'refugees'.
- Most refugees return to their home countries once the danger there has passed.
- The UN Refugee Convention was signed globally in 1967. It rules that:
- Refugees should not be returned to face persecution.
- Refugees should be protected without discrimination.
- The UNHCR is the designated body protecting and supporting refugees.

Numbers

- Currently, there are around 18.1 million refugees worldwide.
- They are fleeing war and human rights abuses, and mainly come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Eritrea.

The poorest countries take the most refugees

- About 80% of the world's refugees live in developing countries, often in camps. 38 Million are 'internally displaced' – that means they move to a safer region of their own country.
- Africa, Asia, and the Middle East between them host more than three quarters of the world's refugees.
- Europe looks after just 15%.

Britain's asylum system is very tough

- ...Which is why only a small proportion of asylum seekers want to come here. When they do, it's often because they have family or friends already living here, or they can already speak English.
- The majority of asylum claims in the UK are turned down. Only 39% were accepted in 2014, compared to countries like Finland and Sweden, which accepted 67% and 77% of claims respectively.
- Since 2005, most people recognised as refugees are only given permission to stay in the UK for five years, and can have their case reviewed at any time. This makes it difficult for them to make decisions about their future, to find work and make definite plans for their life in the UK.
- Unless they have skills recognised on the official UK skills shortage list, asylum seekers are not allowed to look for work. The benefits rate for asylum seekers is £36.90 per person per week – almost half the weekly rate of Job Seekers Allowance.
- Asylum seekers can be held in detention centres for months whilst waiting for a decision to be made on their claim.
- Housing is provided by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), funded by the government, not local authorities
- The National Asylum Support Service bulk rent houses privately. Some local authorities also offer their hard to let housing to the National Asylum Support Service.
- They tend to rent houses for asylum seekers where rents are cheapest, which often means in poor areas, where unemployment and poverty is already high.
- Asylum seekers cannot choose where they live, so can be sent many miles from community and family support.
- Some asylum seekers, and those who have been refused asylum, are not entitled to any form of support and are forced into destitution and homelessness. They are not entitled to access health care, either.

Refugees in Reading

- In Reading, we have high rents and high pressure on housing, so the National Asylum Support Service does not place people here, but sends them elsewhere.
- Once granted leave to remain, refugees can come to Reading to live and work, but do not have any priority for council housing.
- People like to live near to friends and family. As Reading is a diverse community with high employment, it attracts both refugees and migrants.

Sources: British Red Cross, UNHCR