



Reading Refugee Support Group

Position Statement June 2016

Definitions:

Refugee

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

Asylum Seeker

A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded.

RRSG Position Statement:

RRSG supports a robust defence of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; Refugees should not be returned to face persecution and Refugees should be protected without discrimination

RRSG is a front line service helping refugees and asylum seekers to become settled and happy in their new communities. We have little capacity for campaigning other than to raise awareness in general of the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

We will campaign to influence government policy and legislation when we are confident that such changes would support our main purpose of meeting the needs of refugees. We believe we have an obligation to report our experience of the impact of legislation on refugees and asylum seekers.

There are a variety of factors within the UK system of support for refugees and asylum seekers which hinder their successful integration and have harmful effects on their welfare and that of their families.

Right to Work

Asylum seekers are not permitted to work whilst their claim for asylum is being considered. This process can take many months. Joblessness heightens risks to mental health. It affects later effective integration into the workforce and community. Claiming benefits carries risk of stigma

Destitution

The weekly benefit of £36.90 is not sufficient to live on and meet basic needs (Ref. Joseph Rowntree Basic Income Calculator). Removal of all forms of support for those whose initial application for asylum is rejected results in absolute destitution with no money for shelter or food. Many appeals against this initial rejection are successful but this period of destitution can leave people traumatised. There is also a risk of involvement in criminal activity as legal means to access food and shelter have been removed.

When asylum seekers are granted refugee status, they must leave their accommodation within 28 days and begin to find work or claim benefits. They will generally have no savings to fall back on whilst the system responds to their new situation and will often experience a period of destitution at this point also.

Temporary leave to remain

When asylum seekers are accepted as refugees they are given 5 years leave to remain as resident in the UK. This temporary permission can be reviewed at any time, producing anxiety and affecting the ability to travel outside of the UK for fear they will not be allowed to return.

Detention

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees has spoken out against the arbitrary use of detention for those seeking asylum. Many are locked up in prison like conditions with no recourse to legal oversight and no indication of how long they will be locked up. Detention is intended as a resource for those awaiting deportation generally at the end of a prison sentence but its use in the UK includes detention of people later released back into the community. RRSg rejects the use of detention for those seeking asylum and support the use of community based measures.

Social Cohesion and Integration

RRSG believes that public agencies must ensure that services and activities are provided that actively promote social cohesion and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in all communities across Britain. Failure to actively pursue an integration agenda carries major risks of community conflict.