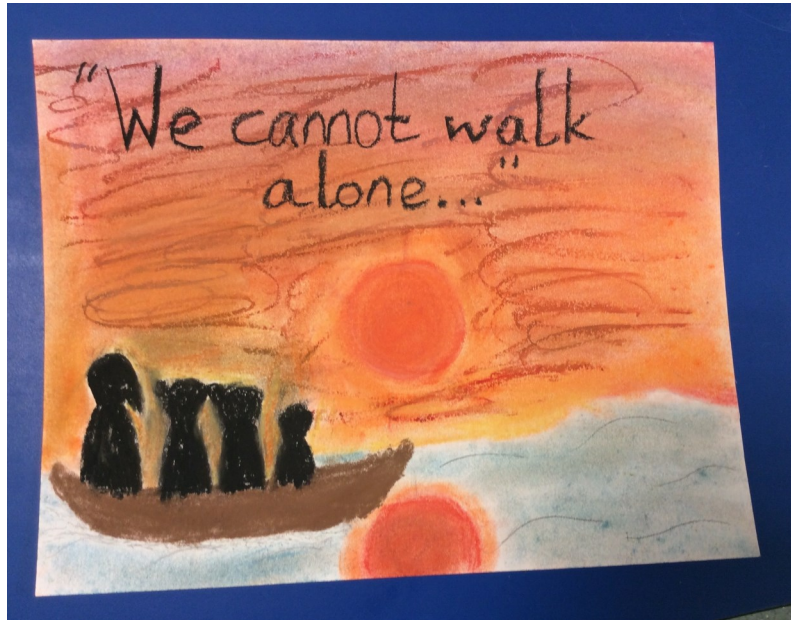


FACT NOT FICTION

MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK



REFUGEES *ALWAYS* WELCOME HERE!

The MRSN **Fact Not Fiction** publication has been helping to raise awareness about refugees and people seeking asylum for many years, as well as helping to dispel myths. It is with great pleasure that we can share this updated issue. We have included new artwork thanks to children from across Liverpool Schools and Schools of Sanctuary.

Our work to update Fact Not Fiction has been supported by our friends and colleagues at EMTAS and Asylum Link. Thanks also to a grant from the Our Liverpool programme, which has contributed to its ongoing development.

In our work, we often hear people asking about “who is an asylum seeker?” or “who is a refugee?”.

Asylum (noun) - haven, sanctuary, refuge, shelter, retreat, safety

In 1951, the Geneva Convention put guidelines in place for governments dealing with asylum seekers and potential refugees. Under this convention, a refugee is a person with *“a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion..”* (Article 1A(2)).

All signatory states have an obligation to provide asylum for those who fit the above description, and to allow them to resettle and create new lives.

WHO IS AN ASYLUM SEEKER?

In the UK, an asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum with the Home Office and who is awaiting a decision on the application.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

If a person seeking asylum receives a positive decision, they are granted Refugee status, with full rights to access employment, housing, education, healthcare and welfare benefits.



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Why do people flee their own countries?

The majority of asylum seekers feel that their safety or that of their families is at risk in their home countries.

This can be due to oppressive regimes, civil war, international conflicts, or many other factors that lead to persecution against individuals or groups within a community. Often people are

unable to ask their own governments for protection or there may be no government to ask or so much corruption it is simply too dangerous to stay. Some of the people we have worked with over recent years come from: Sudan; Eritrea; Iran; Syria, DR Congo, Iraq; Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and most recently from Ukraine.

Why choose the UK?

For those who have a say in their destination the main factors in choosing a country are:

- Belief that the UK is a safe, tolerant and democratic place
- Presence of friends or family
- Historical links between their country of origin and the UK
- Ability to speak English

People make decisions in order to seek sanctuary and secure a future for themselves and their families. Previous Home Office research concluded that people seeking asylum have little prior knowledge of the UK immigration system or the health, housing or benefits systems - dispelling the myth that people only come here to access these services, get jobs or welfare benefits.

Most people arriving expect to have to support themselves and work, only to discover that working is not allowed.

Getting here

Due to the dangerous situations that force people to flee, people seeking asylum may not be able to provide a passport when they arrive here, or others sometimes may use false documents to escape their home countries.



This fact is recognised in the Geneva Convention (Article 31): *"States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees."*

This destroys the myth of the illegal asylum seeker. All people have a right to request asylum in a country other than their own.

The more fortunate may have enough money to choose where they go and how to travel while the less fortunate may be packed into the back of a lorry with their families or take a boat across the Mediterranean, unaware of their destination.

Waiting on a budget of £5.84 per day, could you manage?

It could take months or years for a decision on the asylum claim to be made. Whilst waiting for a decision, the Home Office offers subsistence support and accommodation if people require it.. Most people need this support as they are not allowed to work. Any savings they bring with them must be used before any financial support is given. Families who arrive together will get housed

together. For single applicants, the accommodation is usually hostel style or shared housing, managed by regional contractors across the UK.

Each person gets less than £6 per day for all living expenses. This amount has actually decreased over the last 14 years. And the myth that mobiles are provided is still a myth!



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Claiming Asylum

Arriving in the UK can be very confusing for people seeking sanctuary. New arrivals will be unfamiliar with the asylum process - interviews to attend, forms to complete, fingerprints to be taken and all in a foreign language. Sometimes people are imprisoned simply because they do not understand the system or are unaware of what to do, or how or when. It is important for people to claim asylum as soon as they enter the country at a port, airport or in Croydon.

Once an application has been made for initial support needs, people are invited for an initial interview with the Home Office and then an in-depth interview to assess their application for asylum. Legal support is provided by phone or in person. Regular reporting to the Home Office is required and applicants remain "liable to detention" throughout the process. People can access healthcare and children are expected to go to school. Adults are not allowed to work, but can volunteer or learn English.



Liverpool has for many years been a centre providing both initial emergency and longer-term dispersal accommodation for people seeking asylum. Once people gain refugee status they often stay in Liverpool.

In 2012, many of the city's refugee and asylum support charities came together to set up the **Liverpool City of Sanctuary** group to help share the message that Refugees are Welcome Here - in fact, our message extends to anyone living, working or visiting Liverpool! The following year we gained cross-party support for our City of Sanctuary by Liverpool City Council too.



Extract from

Warsan Shire's poem - Home

..No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.

Your neighbours running faster than you, the boy you went to school with who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory is holding a gun bigger than his body.

You only leave home when home won't let you stay. No one would leave home unless home chased you, fire under feet, hot blood in your belly.

It's not something you ever thought about doing, and so when you did - you carried the anthem under your breath, waiting until the airport toilet to tear up the passport and swallow, each mouthful of paper making it clear that you would not be going back.

You have to understand, no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.

Who would choose to spend days and nights in the stomach of a truck unless the miles travelled meant something more than journey...

In 2022 Merseyside Refugee Support Network celebrates its 20th Birthday!

We are also celebrating 10 years of Liverpool City of Sanctuary ♥

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Decisions

Every asylum claim is reviewed for its own merit in line with the current asylum law and evidence presented.

About 48% of claims result in a form of leave to remain, however, this rate varies each year and depends on the nationality and specific circumstances for each applicant. The Covid pandemic also resulted in fewer applications and decisions in 2020/21. Changes to immigration policy also impact on the volume of applications/decisions.

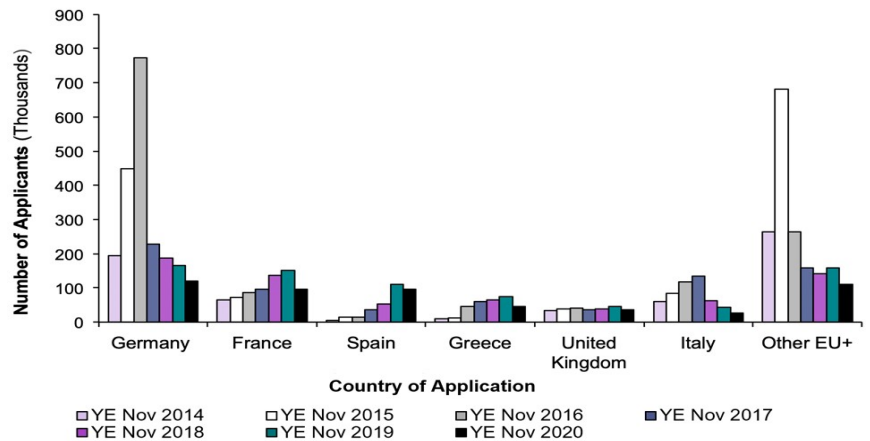
For those who are unsuccessful, each case is assessed to see if there is a right of appeal, whether further evidence can be provided or a legal challenge made. This can cause great distress and uncertainty.

Emergency housing and subsistence must be applied for.

For those who have no right of appeal or whose options have run out, they face deportation.

The number of asylum applicants to the top five countries in the EU+ and the UK for the years ending November 2014-2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2020/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>



It is often assumed that the UK receives more asylum seekers than many EU countries, but the graph shows this is a myth. Most sanctuary seekers go to other parts of their own country or to neighbouring countries. Globally, only a third of refugees come to Europe, a small proportion of whom come to the UK. So let's keep to the principles of the Geneva Convention and welcome folk to a place of sanctuary.

Refugee Status, what happens next?

Once a positive decision has been made, refugees, and others granted leave to remain, have 28 days to move out of the asylum accommodation and find work or apply for statutory benefits. The process is stressful and can be confusing. Many of the local refugee agencies such as MRSN work with refugees to support the "move-on" transition. Most of our work relies on charitable grants to offer this service.

At MRSN we support refugees and advocate on their behalf to link with housing options services, help with applications for welfare and child benefits, help to open bank accounts, help with employability and job search skills, help understanding rights, entitlements and obligations as well as offering wellbeing and social support needed to help folk manage the change. There is no easy solution to the process and as with anyone's application for benefits, there is a delay in any payment until all claims are assessed to be eligible.



Merseyside Refugee Support Network was established in 2001 and registered as a charity in 2002 (1093033). It is the longest established local refugee support charity in Merseyside. In addition to our direct support work with refugees, a core element of our work is to *network* and share information with other refugee & asylum support groups in the region, along with partners across the public and private sector. You can join our e-newsgroup via info@mrsnliverpool.org.uk - See our website www.mrsnliverpool.org.uk

MRSN are based with colleagues at **Asylum Link Merseyside**:

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