

Fact-Checking Asylum

EVIDENCE OVER MISCONCEPTION

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1. "Asylum seekers are illegal immigrants."

✗ **This is incorrect.** Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right and is not illegal. This protection extends to all individuals seeking sanctuary, including those who may arrive via small boats or other irregular means.

Seeking asylum is a legal right established under international law, specifically the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which have been ratified by 147 countries, including the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and members of the European Union - <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention>.

Key Evidence:

- **The 1951 Refugee Convention, Article 31** – Non-penalization for irregular entry: This article explicitly states that refugees should not be punished for illegal entry if they are "coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened" and present themselves to authorities without delay.

"The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who... come directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened."

Reference: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/article-31-1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-non-penalization-detention-and-protection>

- **UNHCR Guidance:** The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) consistently clarifies that an asylum seeker is not an "illegal immigrant" until their claim has been assessed and finally rejected.

"Asylum-seekers are not 'illegal'. They have a right to seek asylum and to have their claim fairly assessed... Those seeking asylum have often had to use irregular means to escape and seek safety."

Reference: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-uk>

- **Context of "Small Boats":** According to the latest UK government statistics, the vast majority of people arriving via small boats apply for asylum. In the year ending June 2025, 99% of small boat arrivals (30,946 out of 31,247) claimed asylum. This underscores that crossing via small boats is a primary method for those seeking protection in the UK.

Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/summary-of-latest-statistics>

- **The Right to Seek Asylum:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 14, establishes that **"Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."**

This right is exercised after arrival in a country, not before, meaning it is often necessary to arrive without prior authorisation to initiate a claim.

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Reference: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

SUMMARY

Labelling asylum seekers as *"illegal"* is a misnomer that contradicts international law. Their mode of entry, while often irregular due to a lack of safe pathways, does not make their claim for protection illegal.

2. "They're just here to claim benefits."

✗ **This is a misconception.** Asylum seekers in the UK are not entitled to claim mainstream benefits such as Universal Credit. The support provided is extremely minimal and is designed to meet only basic living needs while their claim is processed.

Key Evidence:

- **No Access to Public Funds:** A fundamental rule of the UK immigration system is that people seeking asylum are explicitly prohibited from accessing most state benefits, known as having "**No Recourse to Public Funds**" (NRPF). This legal status prevents them from claiming Universal Credit, tax credits, housing benefit, or most other welfare payments

Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-funds--2/public-funds>

- **Asylum Support (£49.18 per week):** If an asylum seeker is destitute, they can apply for Section 95 support from the Home Office. This support is not a cash benefit but is provided in two ways:
 - **Accommodation:** Asylum seekers who are eligible for support are not given their own house or flat. Instead, they are provided with accommodation on a no-choice basis (<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/asylum-accommodation-in-the-uk/>)

This is typically:

- **Dispersed Accommodation:** Housing spread across the UK, often in less affluent areas where housing is cheaper. This is part of the government's "Dispersal Policy." <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-asylum-accommodation/living-in-dispersal-accommodation-english>
- **Shared Housing:** Asylum seekers frequently live in shared houses, hostels, or former hotels with other asylum-seeking families or individuals. They often have to share kitchens, bathrooms, and other facilities with strangers.
- **Contingency Accommodation:** Due to system pressures, many are housed in large-scale, often controversial, contingency sites such as former military barracks or barges (e.g., the Bibby Stockholm). These sites have been widely criticised by charities and inspectors for being isolated, inadequate, and sometimes unsafe.
- **The "No Choice" Policy:** An asylum seeker cannot choose where they live. They can be sent to accommodation anywhere in the UK, often far from established community networks, legal advice, or support from friends or family. This can lead to significant isolation and make accessing legal and charitable services difficult.
- **Conditionality:** The accommodation is provided on the condition that the resident complies with Home Office rules, such as signing in regularly. Support can be withdrawn if conditions are breached.
- **Cash Allowance:** A weekly cash allowance is not a wage or a benefit; it is a set amount intended to cover only the most essential living costs like food, clothing and toiletries for someone who is already receiving free accommodation. This is currently set at £49.18 per week for a single person - equating to just £7.02 per day. This rate has remained largely stagnant for years.

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

- **Permission to Work is Extremely Restricted:** Asylum seekers are generally banned from working. They can only apply for permission to work if their claim has been outstanding for more than 12 months through no fault of their own, and even then, they are restricted to jobs on the official Shortage Occupation List (e.g., certain engineers or scientists). This policy is intentionally designed to prevent people from being drawn to the UK for economic reasons (<https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum/help-you-can-get>)

- **Charity Reliance:** Research from organisations like the British Red Cross highlights that this low level of support forces many asylum seekers into severe poverty and reliance on charitable food banks and hardship grants to meet their basic needs, contradicting the idea that they are a burden on the benefit system. (<https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/exploring-destitution-in-the-asylum-system-and-models-of-prevention>)

SUMMARY

The UK system is specifically designed so that asylum seekers cannot access the mainstream benefits system. The limited support provided is a necessity for those who would otherwise be destitute, not an incentive.

3. “The UK takes in more asylum seekers than anyone else.”

✗ **This is factually incorrect.** In both absolute numbers and particularly when considered per capita, the UK receives far fewer asylum applications than many other developed nations and hosts a smaller number of refugees than countries bordering conflict zones.

Key Evidence:

- **Global Rankings (Absolute Numbers):** According to the latest data, the UK is not the largest recipient of asylum applications in Europe. In 2023, the UK received 67,337 asylum applications (relating to 84,425 people). This places it 5th among EU+ countries (EU member states plus Norway and Switzerland). The top recipients were: Germany (351,505 applications), France (167,865 applications), Spain (162,435 applications) and Italy (136,580 applications).

This data shows that the UK received less than one-fifth the number of applications Germany did.

References:

- a) European Union Agency for Asylum: <https://euaa.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>
- b) UK Parliamentary Brief: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01403/>

- **Hosting Refugees Relative to Size and Wealth (Per Capita):** A more meaningful measure is the number of refugees and asylum seekers a country hosts relative to its population and GDP. The UK does not feature in the top 10 countries for hosting refugees per capita. The top hosts are overwhelmingly low and middle-income countries neighbouring conflict zones. For example:
 - Lebanon, with a population of just 5.3 million, hosts an estimated 1.5 million refugees from Syria alone. This means approximately 1 in 4 people in Lebanon is a refugee (<https://www.unhcr.org/lb/about-us/unhcr-lebanon-glance>)
 - Other major hosts per capita include Jordan, Turkey (which hosts over 3.6 million refugees), and Colombia (which hosts over 2.5 million Venezuelan refugees) (<https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>)

SUMMARY

The data from leading international organisations and official government statistics consistently shows that the UK is not the top recipient of asylum seekers. The notion that the UK bears the greatest burden is a myth, and the real responsibility continues to fall disproportionately on much poorer countries closer to world conflicts.

4. "Most asylum claims are fake."

✗ **This is a misleading and inaccurate characterisation.** The UK's asylum system is a complex legal process designed to assess the legitimacy of claims. The high grant rates at initial decision and successful appeal rates demonstrate that a significant majority of those who apply are, in fact, recognised as needing protection.

Key Evidence:

- **Initial Grant Rates:** The latest official statistics from the Home Office for the year ending March 2024 show that a substantial majority of asylum applications are granted at the initial decision stage. The grant rate for initial decisions was 76%. This means three out of four cases were found to have a valid claim upon their first review by a Home Office caseworker, directly contradicting the notion that most claims are illegitimate (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>).
- **Successful Appeals:** A significant number of initial refusals are overturned by an independent judiciary, further validating the genuineness of the claims. The latest tribunal statistics for January to March 2025 show that the asylum appeal success rate remains high. In the fiscal year 2024/25, 47% of asylum appeals were allowed (successful). This increase from previous years indicates that independent judges are consistently finding the Home Office's initial refusal to be incorrect upon review of the evidence (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025>).
- **Overall Protection Rate for Key Nationalities:** When considering the main nationalities seeking asylum, grant rates remain exceptionally high. The latest data continues to show that for nationals from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria and Eritrea, initial grant rates are at or near 100%. This powerfully demonstrates that individuals from these conflict zones are overwhelmingly found to be genuine refugees. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025>)
- **Rigour of the Process:** The suggestion that claims are "fake" ignores the detailed, evidence-based nature of the asylum process. Applicants must provide a full testimony and corroborating evidence to support their claim of persecution, which is then critically assessed against the strict criteria of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The high success rate at both initial decision and appeal indicates that most applicants meet this stringent legal definition.

SUMMARY

Characterising asylum claims as "mostly fake" is categorically contradicted by the government's own data. The fact that 76% of initial decisions and 47% of appeals result in a grant of protection proves that the UK system itself identifies a large majority of applicants as legitimate refugees fleeing persecution, not as fraudulent claimants.

5. "Asylum seekers are a burden."

✗ **This is a narrow and often inaccurate perspective.** While initial support requires public investment, a substantial body of evidence shows that refugees are highly resilient and, once granted the right to work and integrate, become significant net contributors to the economy, public finances, and the social and cultural fabric of their new communities.

Key Evidence:

- **Economic and Fiscal Contribution:** A landmark 2023 study by the OECD and the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics analysed the long-term fiscal impact of refugee flows in Europe. It concluded that refugees make a positive net contribution to public finances within 5 to 10 years of arrival. Their taxes and contributions outweigh the initial costs of reception and integration, debunking the myth of them being a permanent drain on the system (<https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/migration.html>).
- **Entrepreneurship and Job Creation:** Refugees often display high levels of entrepreneurship. Research from the [Tent Partnership for Refugees](#), [TERN](#) and other organisations shows that refugees are more likely to start businesses than the native-born population. These businesses create jobs, stimulate local economies, and bring innovation.
- **Filling Critical Labour Shortages:** Once granted permission to work (after being granted status), refugees fill essential roles in key sectors facing chronic staff shortages. In the UK, they are over-represented in vital industries such as healthcare, social care, logistics, and hospitality. For example, 1 in every 5 staff working in adult social care staff in England are a non-British nationality, a group that includes many refugees, highlighting their critical role in sustaining this essential service (<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/data-and-charts/social-care-workforce-nutshell>) .
- **The Desire to Work and Integrate:** The notion of a "burden" contradicts the overwhelming desire of refugees to be self-reliant and contribute. Joint guidelines from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for British businesses state that refugees bring a strong motivation to rebuild their lives, noting that "**refugees are eager to work**" and possess a diverse range of skills and qualifications. The insight highlights that employing refugees helps fill labour shortages and provides businesses with loyal, dedicated, and resilient employees (https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11381/files/documents/iom-unhcr-guidelines_for_british_businesses-screen_0.pdf)
- **Cultural and Social Enrichment:** Beyond economics, refugees contribute to the cultural diversity and social vitality of the UK. They enrich communities through food, art, music, and literature. Furthermore, many who have experienced hardship are driven to give back through volunteering and community work, strengthening social cohesion.

SUMMARY

Framing asylum seekers solely as a "burden" ignores the overwhelming evidence of their long-term economic contribution and social value. With the right policies to overcome initial barriers, they are an investment in the nation's future workforce, public services, and cultural diversity.

6. "They should just apply from abroad."

✗ This suggestion misunderstands the fundamental design of the international protection system.

For the vast majority of refugees, there are no safe or legal routes to apply from outside the UK. International refugee law explicitly recognises that those fleeing persecution may need to enter a country through irregular means in order to lodge a claim for asylum.

Key Evidence:

- **No Application "Embassy" Route:** It is a common misconception that one can simply apply for asylum at a British embassy or consulate abroad. This is not possible. The UK government does not accept asylum applications from within third countries. Asylum is a claim made upon arrival in a territory, not a visa that can be applied for in advance (<https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum/eligibility>).
- **Extremely Limited Resettlement Schemes:** The primary "safe and legal" routes are government-run resettlement schemes, such as the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) or the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). However, these schemes have very limited capacity and specific eligibility criteria. For example, in the year ending June 2025, only 2,147 refugees were granted protection through resettlement schemes. This number is a tiny fraction of the millions of displaced people globally and is entirely controlled by a government quota, not by individual application. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/summary-of-latest-statistics>)
- **The Right to Arrive and Claim:** The 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which the UK helped draft and is bound by, acknowledges that refugees may be forced to flee without documentation and enter a country irregularly. Article 31 specifically prohibits states from penalising refugees for their "illegal entry or presence" provided they "come directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened" and present themselves to authorities without delay. This legal principle is the reason why arriving by a small boat and then claiming asylum is not illegal.
- **Lack of Safe Alternatives:** For someone fleeing immediate danger from a state actor or non-state armed group, obtaining a passport and a UK visa is often impossible. Their government may refuse to issue documentation, or the process may take too long, leaving them with no safe alternative but to flee via whatever means available. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) states that the absence of a legal pathway does not negate a person's right to seek safety (<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-refugee>).

SUMMARY

The option to "apply from abroad" is a myth for all but a very small, hand-picked number of people via resettlement programmes. The international protection framework, which the UK is part of, is designed precisely because refugees are often forced to escape first and formalise their status later, upon reaching a safe country.

7. "They're all young men."

✗ **This is a demographic oversimplification.** While a significant number of asylum arrivals are single men, a substantial proportion are women, children and families. The journey to seek asylum is extremely perilous, and the demographic profile of those who undertake it is often shaped by this danger, not by choice.

Key Evidence:

- **Presence of Women and Children:** Official UK government statistics for the year ending June 2025 show that a significant number of asylum applicants are not single men. Of the 67,175 main applicants for asylum that year, 30% were women and a further 20% were dependent children (applicants under 18). This demonstrates that a full half of all asylum applicants are not adult men (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/how-many-people-claim-asylum-in-the-uk>) .
- **The "Dangerous Journey" Factor:** The reason more single men may be visible in initial arrival statistics is directly linked to the extreme danger of irregular migration routes. Organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) document the severe risks of journeys across the Channel or through other irregular means, including violence, exploitation, and death. Families often make the difficult decision to send the fittest, strongest member (often a son or brother) ahead to undertake the dangerous journey, with the aim of securing a safe legal pathway for the rest of the family to follow later through family reunion rules.
- **Family Reunion as a Goal:** Once a person is granted refugee status in the UK, they have the right to apply to be reunited with their immediate family members (spouse and minor children). The latest data confirms that the initial arrival of a family member is frequently followed by the safe passage of their vulnerable relatives. While other family visa categories saw decreases, Refugee Family Reunion visas granted surged to almost 21,000 in the year ending June 2025 - the highest level since records began in 2005. This 31% increase (from 16,000) is a direct result of more individuals being granted refugee status in recent years and it demonstrates conclusively that many initial asylum seekers are acting as pioneers to safely reunite with their wives and children. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/summary-of-latest-statistics>)
- **Vulnerabilities Upon Arrival:** Many women and children who do make the journey are identified by authorities as having specific vulnerabilities. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) highlights that women and girl refugees are at particular risk of gender-based violence, trafficking, and exploitation, both during their journey and upon arrival, making their need for protection especially acute (<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/safeguard-human-rights/protection/gender-based-violence>)

SUMMARY

Characterising all asylum seekers as "young men" ignores the significant number of women and children seeking safety. The demographic imbalance is often a tragic reflection of the deadly dangers of the journey, with many men travelling first as pioneers to eventually secure safe passage for their vulnerable family members through legal channels.

The record number of Refugee Family Reunion visas proves this is a common and intended outcome of the protection system.

8. “They get housing ahead of locals.”

✗ **This is incorrect.** Asylum seekers are housed under a separate, parallel system that does not interact with or grant them priority on local authority housing waiting lists. The type of accommodation provided is temporary and basic, intended only to prevent destitution while a claim is processed.

Key Evidence:

- **Separate Legal System:** Asylum seekers who are destitute are provided with accommodation by the Home Office under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, not by local councils. This is an entirely separate system from the council housing or homelessness provisions used by UK citizens and permanent residents. The two systems do not compete for the same housing stock
- **'No Choice' Dispersal Policy:** Asylum seekers cannot choose their location and are often placed in initial accommodation (like hostels) and then dispersed to temporary housing (often private rented properties) in specific regions around the UK on a no-choice basis. This is part of a government contract designed to use properties that are not part of the general social housing supply.
- **No Access to Council Housing Lists:** Crucially, asylum seekers are legally barred from applying for council housing or joining the housing register. Their immigration status comes with the condition of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF), which explicitly excludes access to local authority homelessness assistance and social housing. They only become eligible to apply after they are officially granted refugee status (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-funds--2/public-funds>).
- **Temporary and Often Inadequate Accommodation:** The accommodation provided is not permanent housing. Reports from the Refugee Council and other charities consistently document that this housing is often temporary, overcrowded, and in a poor state of repair, located in the most disadvantaged areas. The aim is to provide shelter, not a permanent home (<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/stay-informed/explainers/the-truth-about-asylum/>).
- **Data on Housing Stock:** Analysis by Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford confirms that asylum accommodation makes up a tiny fraction of the UK's housing stock and is procured separately, meaning it does not reduce the availability of housing for locals on waiting lists (<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-and-housing-in-the-uk/>)

SUMMARY

The claim that asylum seekers jump the queue for council houses is a myth. They are housed under a different legal framework in temporary accommodation and are legally prohibited from accessing the social housing system until they are granted refugee status. The two systems operate in parallel and do not compete for the same resources.

9. "They must stay in the first safe country."

✗ **This is a common misunderstanding of international law.** The 1951 Refugee Convention contains no such rule. While the EU's Dublin Regulation established a system for determining which member state was responsible for an asylum claim, this was a regional administrative mechanism - not a rule of international law - and the UK is no longer part of it. Individuals often have valid and compelling reasons for seeking safety in a specific country.

Key Evidence:

- **No Provision in the 1951 Convention:** The cornerstone of international refugee law, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, does not contain any article or clause requiring a refugee to claim asylum in the first safe country they enter. The principle of non-refoulement (Article 33) prohibits returning a refugee to persecution, but it does not dictate where they must seek asylum.
- **The Defunct Dublin Regulation (for the UK):** The EU's Dublin III Regulation was a mechanism for determining which EU member state was responsible for examining an asylum application, often based on first entry. It was designed to prevent multiple claims across different states, not to contain refugees in the first EU country they reached. The UK's departure from the EU means it is no longer part of this system, and attempts to negotiate similar bilateral deals have largely failed.
(<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9031/>)
- **UK Government Acknowledgement:** The UK government itself explicitly acknowledges this legal reality. Its official guidance for asylum seekers states: **"You should claim asylum in the first safe country you arrive in."** The use of *"should"* rather than *"must"* is a critical legal distinction, confirming it is guidance or policy preference, not a legal obligation.
- **Valid Reasons for Choosing a Country (Family, Language, Community):** International guidance recognises that asylum seekers may have legitimate reasons for moving on to another country. The UNHCR notes that factors such as family links, language skills, historical ties (e.g., from colonialism), and the presence of an established diaspora community are all valid reasons for seeking to reach a particular country. These connections are crucial for successful integration and well-being.
- **The Practical Impossibility:** Enforcing a *"first safe country"* rule would place an impossible burden on countries bordering conflict zones (like Turkey, Lebanon, Colombia etc), which already host the vast majority of the world's refugees. The international protection system is based on shared responsibility, not containment.

SUMMARY

The belief that asylum seekers are legally required to claim asylum in the first safe country is a myth. International law affords them the right to seek asylum in a country of their choosing, and many have sound, humane reasons for wanting to build a new life in the UK, such as reuniting with family or speaking the language.

10. “We need to protect our women and children from asylum seekers.”

✗ This claim is a harmful stereotype that preys on fear rather than fact. There is no credible evidence to suggest that people seeking asylum pose a greater threat to public safety than the general population. In reality, they are often fleeing precisely the kind of violence and persecution they are wrongly accused of representing, and they seek the same safety for their own families.

Key Evidence:

- **No Elevated Crime Risk:** A comprehensive analysis of Home Office data and academic studies, concluded that there is no evidence of a causal link between immigration and increased crime rates. The fact-checking investigation found that claims of migrants being disproportionately responsible for crime are “*disputed or debunked*,” noting that such narratives often rely on misrepresented statistics or isolated incidents that are wrongly generalized to an entire population (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/aug/05/disputed-or-debunked-claims-about-migration-and-crime-uk>).
- **Vulnerability, Not Threat:** Asylum seekers are themselves highly vulnerable. UK government statistics for the year ending June 2025 show that 30% of main applicants were women and 20% were dependent children. Many are survivors of gender-based violence, torture, and trafficking, seeking protection from these very crimes.
- **Rigorous Security Checks:** Every individual who seeks asylum in the UK undergoes mandatory and thorough security checks by the Home Office against multiple police, security, and immigration databases. Those with a criminal history or who are deemed a threat to national security are identified and dealt with through the criminal justice system and are not granted protection.
- **Seeking Safety for Their Own Families:** This narrative ignores the primary motivation of asylum seekers: to find safety. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) emphasises that refugees are families, children, and individuals fleeing for their lives. The idea of travelling thousands of dangerous miles to then commit crime in a place of hoped-for sanctuary is illogical and contradicted by the data on their backgrounds and intentions.
- **Harmful Impact of Stereotyping:** Charities such as the British Red Cross and Refugee Council warn that such generalised and unfounded accusations fuel prejudice, hate crimes and social division, making it harder for survivors of trauma to integrate and recover in their new communities.

SUMMARY

The claim that asylum seekers are a threat to women and children is a baseless and damaging myth. It is refuted by crime statistics, the known vulnerabilities of the asylum-seeking population, and the rigorous security screening they undergo. This rhetoric risks harming people who have already experienced profound trauma and are seeking the same safety and security we all desire for our families
