



MYTHS ABOUT REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Much of what is said in the media and elsewhere about migration is simply not true.

2026

CUMBRIA IS 'FLOODED' WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS

Is it really? The figures may surprise you.

Cumbria's population is approximately 510,000. The 2026 figures show that there were around 700 asylum seekers in Cumbria; this means asylum seekers represent less than 0.14% of the total population of the county, or less than 15 in 10,000 people.
(North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership)

THEY'RE HERE ILLEGALLY

No. Everyone has a right to seek asylum.

The UK is a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, which gives anyone who has fled their home country for fear of persecution the right to claim asylum in another country, irrespective of the route they took to get there. There is no such thing as an 'illegal' asylum seeker. When seeking asylum, people must travel by whatever means they can. There are few safe and legal routes into the UK which is why people resort to the dangerous channel crossing in small boats.

The fact is that most people who arrive in the UK seeking asylum have valid claims. Recent Home Office data (for the year ending September 2025) shows that for some countries the grant rates are particularly high - at 96% for applicants from Sudan and 88% for those from Eritrea at initial decision, for example.

THEY'RE ONLY HERE FOR BENEFITS

Not true.

Home Office research has found that most asylum seekers have little knowledge of UK immigration or asylum procedures, entitlements to benefits, or the availability of work in the UK. Many live in poverty when they arrive and have health challenges which are exacerbated by fear and uncertainty over Government policy towards refugees.

THEY SHOULD STAY IN THE FIRST SAFE COUNTRY THEY REACH

No.

Neither the Refugee Convention nor EU law requires a person to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. The UK receives a lot fewer asylum seekers per head of population than other European countries, and far fewer than countries neighbouring those from which people leave to seek sanctuary. The increase in the number of refugees globally requires international co-operation.

THEY TAKE OUR HOMES

Not true.

People seeking asylum are not entitled to housing benefit or social housing. They are housed under a separate system and can't choose where they live. The Home Office allocates asylum seekers mostly to hostel accommodation and empty hard-to-let property. Conditions can be dire, which has a serious impact on people's mental health. Once granted asylum, only the most vulnerable 5% of new refugees will receive council housing support. This leaves the vast majority of new refugees without a roof over their heads and an increasing number end up destitute and sleeping rough.

FACT: WHAT THEY RECEIVE

Asylum support is significantly lower than mainstream welfare benefits. The asylum seeker allowance is £49 per week - that's just £7 per day - to cover food, clothing and communication.

THEY DON'T WANT TO WORK

The law won't let them!

Many people seeking asylum are skilled and want to work but the law prevents this until their asylum claim has been granted, which can take many months, or years. After this, most refugees join the workforce and contribute to the economy.

Asylum seekers who have waited for a year for a decision on their claim can apply for permission to work but only in jobs on the Government's Immigration Salary List (ISL). The ISL's specific jobs, required salary levels and additional complex employer checks mean that the majority of people seeking asylum are effectively banned from working.

In France, Australia, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Canada, Greece and many more countries, people seeking asylum have the right to work after six months.

People who have fled to the UK from the Ukrainian war have been given the right to work (as well as Universal Credit and other benefits). If asylum seekers were allowed to work, they could support themselves, pay tax, use their talents and experience, and integrate better into their community.

(Refugee Action: Facts about Asylum)

SO, WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY...

Asylum Seeker

Someone who is fleeing persecution in their homeland, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and exercised their legal right to apply for asylum.

Refugee

Someone whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution in their home country.

Migrant

While there's no definition of 'migrant' in law, it is generally used to mean someone who settles in another country, whether permanently or temporarily.





MYTHS ABOUT REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS

THEY ALL WANT TO COME TO BRITAIN

No, they just want to be safe.

People fleeing danger in their own country simply want safety. In fact, it is the poorest countries in the world, often those bordering war and crisis zones, which accept the largest number of refugees (85% of refugees live in developing regions, and 73% of refugees live in countries neighbouring their country of origin).

Most asylum seekers do not choose their destination country. When fleeing war or persecution, it isn't the first thing on their mind. Those with some choice may come to the UK because they have friends or family here or because they can speak English. A Home Office report concluded that there was absolutely no evidence to suggest that asylum seekers had a detailed knowledge of the UK welfare benefits system.

(Sovereign Borders; International Asylum Comparison Report, September 2020, Home Office Analysis and Insight)

WE GET MORE THAN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

No we don't.

In 2024, there were around 15 asylum applications for every 10,000 people living in the UK. Across the EU27 there were 22 asylum applications for every 10,000 people. The UK was therefore below the average among EU countries for asylum applications per head of population, ranking 14th among EU27 countries plus the UK on this measure.

(House of Commons Library Asylum Statistics)

FACT: MIGRANT WORKERS CONTRIBUTE MORE TO THE ECONOMY THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

According to the Office for National Statistics, migrants contribute approximately £83 billion to the UK's economic output annually. They contribute more in tax than they receive in benefits and public services. Foreign-born nationals are also disproportionately likely to start businesses in the UK.

MIGRANT WORKERS ARE DRAINING PUBLIC SERVICES

No - quite the opposite!

Migrants are more likely to be young, healthy and well qualified. Far from acting as a drain on public services, new migrants help to deliver vital services in areas such as social care, education, construction, and particularly in the health service. Without migrants our public services would not be able to function - for example, 21% of all NHS workers come from overseas, rising to 30% for nurses.

ASYLUM SEEKERS MEAN HIGHER COUNCIL TAX

Absolutely not.

People seeking asylum are the responsibility of central government, not local councils. No money from Council Tax is spent on housing asylum seekers. There's no evidence that areas with higher asylum seeking or migrant populations have higher council taxes.

THEY'RE TAKING OUR JOBS

Not true!

Migrant workers move to areas where there are vacancies, and they fill vacancies where there are skills shortages. Hospitality and manufacturing are important sectors in Cumbria and we have a long history of recruiting workers from abroad. Throughout the UK, workers from overseas keep the NHS and care sectors going. Migrants are needed to ensure that there are sufficient skilled workers to fill available jobs and pay the taxes that will fund pensions in the future.

MIGRANTS BRING CRIME TO THE UK

There is no evidence of this.

Misleading information, especially from social media, puts out a false message that migrants are more likely to commit crime than other people, especially violent crime including sexual assault. Government statistics show that there is no truth to this, and studies show that neither asylum seekers nor other migrants could be linked with significant changes in violent crime, or that they are over-represented in prison compared with UK-born prisoners.

FACT: THE ASYLUM PROCESS IS BROKEN

The asylum system is estimated to be costing the British tax payer around £4 billion pounds a year. This is the price of forcing people to live in limbo, often for years, not allowing them to work and imposing unnecessary detentions - and because of the Home Office's complex asylum claim process. The backlog and delays and associated costs are not the fault of the people seeking asylum.



This leaflet was produced by **Penrith and Eden Refugee Network (PERN)**, a Cumbria-wide charity working for justice, inclusion and welcome for refugees and asylum seekers in our community. For more information, please visit our website (pern.org.uk) or follow us on social media (@penrithandedenrefugeenetwork)