Myth Buster

ASYLUM SEEKERS & REFUGEES

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1. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ASYLUM SEEKER AND A REFUGEE?

Asylum seeker:
An asylum seeker is someone who claims to be 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.

An example of persecution is the verbal and physical abuse suffered by a young Pakistani of the Ahmadi religion. He was forced to leave school at the age of 12 because the pupils and the teachers discriminated against him. His family business was burnt down; he and members of his family received death threats. Members of his family were murdered. The authorities would not investigate any of the crimes or apprehend the perpetrators. He was forced to go into hiding, and eventually, to save his life, he fled Pakistan and asked for asylum in the UK. The Home Office has a lot of evidence of persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan.

Refugee:
Refugees are people whose application for asylum has been successful and who the Home Office allows to stay in another country, having proved that they would face persecution back home.

The 1951 United Nations Convention describes a refugee as ‘a person who has proved a well-founded fear of being persecuted in their home country for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a political social group, or political opinion.’ Their asylum application has therefore been successful and they are allowed to remain in another ‘safe’ country.
Failed asylum seeker:
A failed asylum seeker is someone whose application for asylum has been assessed against strict criteria by the Home Office and has been turned down. If there is no safe passage of return for unsuccessful asylum seekers, some may have to stay for the time being. In this period they only receive subsistence level support in the form of vouchers for food and accommodation on a ‘no choice’ basis which could be anywhere in the UK.

‘Bogus’ or ‘Illegal’ asylum seeker
There is no such thing as ‘bogus’ or ‘illegal’ asylum seekers. People are legally entitled to make an application for asylum. The Home Office decides whether to accept or turn down the application.

2. How are ‘migrant workers’ different to asylum seekers and refugees?
Migrant workers are people who have chosen to move temporarily to another country in order to work. People from Europe are entitled to do this under the rules of the European Commission. People from non-European countries such as Canada and the United States of America must apply to the Home Office for permission to work in the UK.

People claim asylum because they have a well-founded fear of being persecuted in their home country. Many of the asylum seekers and refugees in Wrexham have been tortured or have suffered severe trauma in their country of origin, for example:

‘I was held in detention without any charges brought against me and without ever attending a Court Hearing. I was held for 3 months in a small dirty room with nothing not even a bed, just a blanket on the floor. There was no toilet just a bucket that was emptied every few days. I lived in semi darkness for 3 months and the only time I left this room was when I was blindfolded with my hands tied behind my back and let to another room. There they would suspend me from the ceiling by my
arms. A cylinder, like a gas cylinder would be tied across my feet and I was left in this agonizing position for several hours while I was hit with truncheons. Out of the 3 months in detention this torture happened daily for one month until I was unable to walk or use my arms because of the muscle damage I sustained. I still suffer from those injuries today. I don’t know why I was locked up or why I was tortured.’

This person demonstrated to the Home Office that they had been persecuted and will be persecuted if returned home. Therefore refugee status was granted. This person could be living in Wrexham.

An asylum seeker has to demonstrate to the Home Office that they have a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to their home country. They may also be able to successfully claim asylum if they can prove that returning them to their home would breach one of their absolute rights as defined by the Human Rights Act 1998. A caseworker or an immigration officer trained to act under the 1951 Asylum and Refugee Convention decides the claim, and each claim is assessed on its own merits, taking country information into account. It is not enough to just say that you have been persecuted; asylum seekers have to provide evidence in order to be granted refugee status.

Applications for asylum have more than halved over the last two years.

Asylum seekers mainly come from countries where there is war or conflict or where there is a history of poor human rights. Examples of where Wrexham asylum seekers come from include Turkey, Algeria, Eritrea, Iraq, Romania.
6. WHY ARE THEY IN WREXHAM?

Wrexham is one of four ‘dispersal’ areas in Wales. The other areas are Cardiff, Swansea and Newport. A dispersal area is a designated area where the local authority has agreed with the Home Office that it will provide support for asylum seekers and refugees. The number of asylum seekers coming to Wrexham will be in proportion to the size of the County Borough – we do not take as many people as, for example, Cardiff.

The UK is home to less than 2% of the world’s refugees and is 10th in the league table of European countries for the number of applications per head of population – two thirds of the world’s refugees are living in the developing world, often in camps.

7. HOW MANY ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES ARE THERE IN WREXHAM?

There are between 40 and 70 people in Wrexham who are seeking asylum at any one time. There have been about 100 people granted refugee status in total over the last 5 years.

Asylum seekers cannot choose where to live – this is decided by the Home Office. All the costs of accommodating asylum seekers are met by central government. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are not eligible to claim benefits. They do receive National Health Service benefits and some educational services. They are supported directly by central government, at a level that is about 70% of income support rates.

Refugees have to pay for their own accommodation. They are allowed to work and to apply for the same benefits as all UK citizens.

8. WHO PAYS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES? WHAT BENEFITS ARE THEY ENTITLED TO?
9. DO ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES WORK AND PAY TAXES?

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work or to receive benefits and so do not pay taxes. Refugees have the same rights and responsibilities as other residents – they can work and must pay taxes.

10. DO ASYLUM SEEKERS (AND REFUGEES) ALL LIVE IN COUNCIL HOUSES?

Asylum seekers are not being housed from the housing waiting list in Wrexham. They are housed in private sector accommodation that has been arranged and paid for by central government.

Refugees are entitled to apply to the Council for accommodation. Their application is treated in exactly the same way as one made by anyone else in the community.

11. WILL THERE BE LOTS OF REFUGEES LIVING IN ONE AREA OF WREXHAM?

The number of refugees will be very small [see question 6]. Refugees have the same rights as other UK citizens and are free to choose where they want to live.

Where a refugee makes a successful application to the Council for accommodation we will work with other agencies and voluntary and community groups to assist in integrating individuals with local communities.
12. Will many asylum seekers stay in Wrexham permanently in Wrexham, as asylum seekers might stay permanently in Wrexham, as this will depend on whether their application for asylum is successful. Those people who are allowed to stay in the country - as refugees – may choose to live in other areas. If refugees choose to stay in Wrexham they will be treated like any other resident.

13. How will having asylum seekers and refugees in Wrexham affect local services like schools, doctors, dentists?

Schools
Some asylum seekers have children who will have places in Wrexham schools. Support is provided to help them integrate successfully. The normal arrangements for applying for a school place will be applied. Help to learn English as an additional language has always been available in our schools and asylum seeker children will use this service.

Health services
Asylum seekers and refugees are entitled to access all necessary health care. Arrangements have been made with Wrexham Local Health Board to allocate each person a GP as well as providing information about other health services.
14. WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ASYLUM SEEKER AND REFUGEE ISSUES?

Contact:
Welsh Refugee Council on 029 2048 9800 www.welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk
Refugee Council (London) on www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
Welsh Local Authorities Consortium for Refugees and Asylum Seekers on 01633 855095
Amnesty International at www.amnesty.org.uk
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture at www.torturecare.org.uk
Wrexham Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Group on 01978 357826
United Nations High Commission for Refugees on 020 7759 8090 www.unhcr.org.uk
The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK [ICAR] on 020 7848 2103 www.icar.org

15. WHERE CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT MY RIGHTS?

Wrexham & District Citizens Advice Bureau on 01978 364639
Welfare Rights WCBC on 01978 298254
Allington Hughes Community Legal Services Franchise on 01978 891000
Department of Work and Pensions on 01978 316500
Consumer Direct on www.consumerdirect.gov.uk
Shelter on 0808 800444