



INCREASE SUPPORT LEVELS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS



Edinburgh students campaign against extreme poverty of asylum seekers

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We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

www.amnesty.org.uk/youth

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

Overview:

Those fleeing conflict and persecution* should not be left in poverty in the UK

Most asylum seekers who arrive in the UK have only £5 a day to live on. When a UK citizen has a low income or no income at all, the government provides them with money to meet their basic living needs. This is called Income Support. Asylum seekers receive far less. They have to survive on just 52% of the normal full amount of Income Support while they are waiting for the Government to make a decision on their asylum application.

Most asylum seekers are not allowed work so the £5 they receive from the government has to cover all the day to day essentials including food, clothing, toiletries and travel. While they might be able to survive on this amount for a few days, in the long term it will have a serious impact on their physical and mental health.

We are asking MPs to support our call to increase asylum support levels to at least 70% of Income Support – this would be £7 a day for a single adult over 25. Although this is only a small increase, it would allow asylum seekers to meet their most basic essential living needs while they are waiting for a decision on their application.

Background

Every day across the world people make the difficult decision to leave their country. War, human rights abuses, environmental disaster and poverty are just some of the reasons why someone might feel that they have to leave their family and community. When they reach another country, they can seek asylum to stay there as a refugee*. Whilst they are waiting for

a decision from the government in the new country they are called asylum seekers*. If the new country they are in agrees that they are genuinely fleeing from danger and can therefore stay, they are then considered to be refugees.

Over the years the amount of money asylum seekers in the UK receive whilst waiting for their asylum claim to be processed has reduced drastically. They used to receive 90% of full Income Support. In 1999, this was changed to 70% and in recent years it has been reduced to below 65% for most asylum seekers and as low as 52% for single adult asylum seekers who are over 25 years old.

Today the vast majority of asylum seekers receive just £5.23 a day to pay for food, toiletries, clothes, travel and other expenses (housing and fuel bills are paid for separately for those who have nowhere to live).

‘Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution’

- Article 14 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

How does living below the poverty line affect people's health and wellbeing?

While individuals can live on £5.23 for a few days or even weeks, they cannot do so for the longer term without it having a serious impact on their physical and mental health. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists:

'The psychological health of refugees and asylum seekers currently worsens on contact with the UK asylum system'.

The British Red Cross are often approached by asylum seekers who, despite receiving income support, cannot afford to meet their basic needs. One pregnant asylum seeker in Wales for instance had to seek help from the Red Cross so that she could afford to travel to hospital for antenatal care.

How can people survive on so little for so long?

At the end of March 2012, there were nearly 3,000 asylum seekers in the UK who had been waiting for more than 6 months for an initial decision on their application. People who do not have enough to live on and are not allowed to work to support themselves will probably try to find other ways to survive, such as working illegally, begging and prostitution. This is not good for the individuals affected or wider society.

How does £5.23 a day compare to other countries?

The UK pays a much lower rate of support than other countries. In 2012 the German Constitutional Court decided that asylum seekers in Germany should receive at least £66 a week while they wait for a decision. Before this, asylum seekers in Germany still received a higher rate of support than in the UK – the equivalent of £44 a week for a single adult, compared to £36.62 a week in the UK.

What does Amnesty want?

Amnesty believes that asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute* should be provided with enough to meet their basic living needs while they are waiting for decisions on their cases.

At a minimum this should be no less than 70 per cent of Income Support – the equivalent of around £7 a day for a single adult over 25.

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

TAKE ACTION 1: Write to your local MP

In your letter:

- Say that £5 is not enough to meet the essential needs of people who have come to the UK to escape conflict and persecution.
- Explain that asylum seekers are not allowed to work to support themselves and many have to survive on just over £5 a day for several months.
- Explain that the poverty they face forces people to resort to things such as illegal work, prostitution and begging.
- Ask them to support a change of current asylum policy which would raise the support asylum seekers receive to at least 70 per cent of Income Support (£7 a day for single adult over 25).
- Ask them to write to their Party Leader (for MPs from all parties except for the Conservative party) or the Home Secretary (for MPs from the Conservative Party) saying they support this proposal and urging them to change the policy.

You can find your MP by going to:

<http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>

TAKE ACTION 2: Creative Action

Could you survive on £5 a day? Take a picture of the essential things you would buy with your £5. Then take another picture to show what you could buy for £7. How much difference would the extra money make to your life? What could you buy to improve your health and well-being?

Please send one copy of your pictures to your MP along with your letter (explaining what the photos are).

Please send a second copy of your photos to:

Anne Montague
Youth Coordinator - Amnesty International UK
17-25 New Inn Yard
London EC2A 3EA
Or email them to: student@amnesty.org.uk

* GLOSSARY

Asylum seeker: someone who has reached another country and has submitted a claim for refugee status.

Refugee: an asylum seeker who has been granted refugee status because the host government agrees that they are genuinely fleeing from danger in their own country.

Persecution: hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs; oppression:

Destitution: being so poor that you do not have the basic things you need to live, such as food, clothes, or money.

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

Mythbusters

Too many asylum seekers come to the UK and we take more than our fair share.

How many asylum applications do you think the UK receive in a year?

- a) 100,000
- b) half a million
- c) less than 20,000

According to a poll carried out in March 2011, 72% of respondents thought there were more than 100,000 asylum applications a year in the UK and about 20% thought we received over half a million. It's actually less than 20,000 a year. The UK has the capacity to deal with this number of applications efficiently and humanely.

In 2011 France received twice as many asylum applications as the UK. And in 2011, Liberia supported about 135,000 Ivorians who fled the violence in Cote d'Ivoire. The numbers of asylum seekers coming to Europe to escape conflict and persecution is small compared to those who flee to neighbouring developing countries.

Asylum seekers are not genuine

In 2011, more than 70% of asylum seekers fleeing the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq were refused any form of protection by the Home Office. But few would argue that they did not have a genuine fear when they fled their countries.

Approximately half of those applying for protection in the UK are granted it. In 2011, 33% of asylum seekers were given some form of protection in the UK at the initial decision and a further 26% of those who appealed against a refusal were also granted refugee status. The vast majority of those who are refused do have a genuine fear for their safety, but the Home Office may have concluded that their fear is exaggerated or that the situation in their country has improved, or that they could relocate to another area of their country and be safe.

Asylum seekers are exploiting the system

You can see from the above that some people hold very negative and unfair views about asylum seekers. These views are sometimes the result of inaccurate and exaggerated media reporting such as publishing lots of articles referring to 'bogus asylum seekers'. But in reality life in the UK is not easy for asylum seekers:

- Asylum seekers do not get generous benefits. The great majority have to meet their food, clothing and other essential living needs on just over £5 a day.
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work to support themselves.
- Asylum seekers are not entitled to council housing and are spread out to areas of the UK where there is more availability of housing. They have no choice in this matter.
- Refugees have successfully settled and made a significant contribution to the UK for many centuries. This was true for the Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, Asians escaping Idi Amin's Uganda or more recently the Bosnians and Kosovans who fled the Balkans in the 1990s.