

→ Mythbuster -- 01 of 12

→ Why do all asylum seekers come to the UK?

→ They do not. The UK received 71,365 applications for asylum in 2001 this may seem like a lot, but not when compared with the number of asylum seekers (over 900,000) and refugees (over 12 million) worldwide. Most people seek asylum in neighbouring countries. Some of the poorest countries in the world support the largest numbers of refugees.

Most don't choose their country of asylum: where they end up depends mostly on how quickly they fled and by what means. Those who can, important factors are existing communities, colonial bonds and knowledge of language. A small group are influenced by economics, and most have little previous knowledge of regulations about work/ welfare support in the UK.

→ Mythbuster -- 02 of 12

→ Is the UK a 'soft touch' compared with the rest of Europe?

→ No. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UK ranks only 8th out of fifteen European Union countries in terms of asylum applicants per 1000 inhabitants

In fact, asylum seekers find it increasingly difficult to reach the UK's shores. The UK government imposes visa restrictions on countries which produce large numbers of asylum seekers, who are unable to claim asylum from their own country. Transport companies are now also fined for bringing people into the UK without the right documents.

Life in the UK has become increasingly harsh for asylum seekers. The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 removed asylum seekers from the welfare benefits system

→ Mythbuster -- 03 of 12

→ Why don't asylum seekers stay in France or other European countries?

→ Many asylum seekers do seek asylum in other European countries. If we compare the European Union countries, the UK ranks 8th in terms of applicants per 1000 inhabitants, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Some democratic European countries may not be as safe for asylum seekers as we think. Different countries have different interpretations of the United Nations Convention Relating to Refugees, which means that one may offer protection where another refuses an application. France, for example, may not necessarily grant refugee status to Algerian asylum seekers, escaping violence from militant groups, as France does not offer protection to those fleeing persecution from any group acting independently of the government.

→ Mythbuster -- 04 of 12

→ Is the asylum process as fair as people say it is?

→ Some asylum seekers are interviewed as soon as they arrive in the UK. They have no opportunity to get legal advice. They may also be in a state of shock or trauma due to recent experiences.

Asylum seekers who are not interviewed immediately are given a 19-page Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) to complete within ten working days of receipt. The SEF is very complicated and can only be completed in English. It is often difficult for asylum seekers to find interpreters to help them complete the form. If they fail to return the SEF, the Home Office will not even look at the merits of their asylum claim, and refuse their application outright. At the end of 2000, around 35% of asylum applications were refused in this way. This means that an asylum seeker may be returned to their country of origin to face persecution, even death, without having their cases properly considered.

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