



Asylum seekers



“ Being compelled to leave your own homeland due to unbearable circumstances beyond your control, to find yourself in a country with a totally different language, culture and rules is a really daunting experience. Every little thing has become an obstacle in your life ”

status of their application. The UK also has many people whose requests have been rejected and are now called “failed asylum seekers” - many agencies believe that ‘refused asylum seeker’ is a much better phrase.

The majority of the world’s refugees are women and children, but it does not offer explicit protection to them. Nor does it recognise how our understanding of human rights has developed; offering no protection to people persecuted for their sexual orientation. This has meant that many people have relied on developing domestic case law across the world and protection afforded can be inconsistent globally.

often experienced by these groups.

According the Scottish Refugee Service *“recent research indicates there are hundreds of destitute asylum seekers in Scotland. 1 in 4 people seeking asylum in Scotland will experience a period of destitution. If someone is destitute, they have absolutely nothing. To survive, they rely on friends, family or charity.”* Asylum seekers come from countries in which they often experienced trauma and then are at risk of ending up destitute and homeless in Scotland.

The 1951 UN convention says “refugee” status must be given to “Any person who is outside their country of origin and un-

able or unwilling to return there or to avail themselves of its protection, on account of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group, or political opinion.”



And in the Scotland...

Asylum seekers are entitled to very little support from the United Kingdom They must seek support from the Home Office. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the UK while their application is pending.

The Scottish Government has taken a different view. Whilst immigration matters are a reserved power, the

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Who are they?

The term asylum seeker is often confused with terms such as “refugee” and “immigrant”. It is crucial for people to understand how these terms differ. An “asylum seeker” means a person who is claiming asylum because they can no longer safely return to their country of origin. The government has not yet made a decision regarding their claim under the 1951 convention. In the UK, a “refugee” is defined as someone whose application for asylum has been accepted by the government - they are no longer an “asylum seeker”.

The UK has thousands of asylum seekers waiting to hear about the

An asylum seeker in the UK who is trying to get refugee status is doing so because of a well-founded fear of returning to their country of origin. The 1951 Refugee Convention was created after the Second World War in response to the upheaval and persecution experienced by millions of people. Whilst it is a noble document it is perhaps a creation of its time and context – largely European in view. There are also significant omissions.

In 2011, the top 10 countries where asylum seekers originated were: Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka , Afghanistan, Eritrea, China, Libya, Nigeria, Sudan, and Bangladesh.

Why do we care?

The Catholic Worker community is extremely concerned with the plight of asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers in Scotland. Poverty, homelessness, depression and inadequate healthcare are

Scottish Government is of the belief that integration begins on arrival and has chosen to protect and promote the rights of refused asylum seekers. For example, unlike Westminster, the Scottish Government has made clear that:

"Anyone who has made a formal application for asylum, whether pending or



unsuccessful, is entitled to treatment on the same basis as a UK national who is ordinarily resident in Scotland while they remain in the country. If their application to remain in the UK is successful, they will be granted refugee status and will continue to be exempt from NHS charges on the same basis as a person ordinarily resident in Scotland."

Nevertheless, if their application is refused people must leave the UK. Refused asylum seekers are told they must return home, but many cannot go home due to fear of persecution, war torn conditions, poverty or famine. For others, this return can be practically impossible e.g. Somalia etc. Some refused asylum seekers are so afraid of returning to their home countries, they "disappear" in the United Kingdom, hiding from the government, but at risk of starvation and homelessness.

Many others are placed in 'detention centres', such as Dungavel in South Lanarkshire, where they are forced to remain while their case is resolved. As the UK recognizes no legal restriction on the period of detention, men, women and children (though children are not detained in Scotland) are frequently

detained for periods exceeding a year. Such situations are made worse by the inefficiency of UKBA bureaucracy. Reports indicate that the uncertainty of their situation and enclosure have an undeniably harmful effect on the physical and mental well-being of detained asylum seekers. A recent report by Bail for Immigration Detainees accused the UKBA of a 'callous indifference' for having failed to safeguard children in particular, who are often separated from their parents and suffer intense psychological trauma as a result.

A Catholic View

When considering the catholic view surrounding issues of asylum, we can start by considering the Bible. The Bible itself speaks to the responsibility we all have to look after strangers in our land. *"When a stranger stays with you in your land, do him no wrong. He shall be to you as the native among you. Love him as yourself for you have been strangers in the land of Egypt."* (Leviticus 19 33-34)

As followers of Jesus, we would do well to remember the adverse circumstances that forced his parents to seek refuge in Egypt shortly after his birth, when it was no longer safe for them to remain in Bethlehem.

According to Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow "[Many are] evicted from their homes, not allowed the dignity of working to support themselves or to claim benefits, refused asylum seekers have no money for essentials such as food, warm clothes and toiletries. Many are destitute for years at a time but cannot return home, where their lives are in danger."

Cardinal Basil Hume described protection of those

fleeing persecution as a "benchmark of a civilized society". Our Catholic values tell us that we value life in its abundance, and must promote the health, safety and well being of all human beings.

What Should We Do?

Seeking asylum isn't a choice anyone willingly makes. But you can choose to help and protect. Scottish Refugee Council is the largest charity working with and for refugees in Scotland. It suggests a range of actions on its website. These include: campaigning, becoming a member, fundraising and volunteering.

www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

An immediate way of becoming involved is by joining in the wide range of activities during Refugee Week Scotland, its annual festival to celebrate the contribution made by refugees to Scotland and the welcome shown by its people.

Another charity which does excellent work is the Unity Centre in Glasgow which was opened on Saturday 11th March 2006. Very quickly the Centre has grown to play an important and perhaps unique role providing support for asylum seekers in Glasgow.



Run completely by a collective of volunteers and funded entirely by donations from supporters the Centre provides practical solidarity and support for asylum seekers especially when they face being locked up in detention centres or being forcibly removed.

Catholic Worker Glasgow
www.catholicworker.org.uk
Email: glw@catholicworker.org.uk

If someone is detained they help contact a lawyer, friends and family -, arrange for their belongings to be looked after, provide emotional support and encouragement, contact the press and media about their case and run emergency campaigns and protests to stop them being forcibly removed.

CONTACT: The UNITY Centre, 30 Ibrox Street, Glasgow, G51 1A. Tel: 0141 427 7992



Show welcome to a stranger in a strange land

"Today I am very happy. Somebody (you) come to me and ask me my problems. That makes the pain to go away and releases me from it. I am happy, because someone comes to listen to what I have to say." (Afghani male, 19)