**Advice on talking to people about asylum seekers who don’t already agree with you!**

***(Adapted from Student Action for Refugees Group Guide)***

If you’re talking to people you’ll often get involved in a more or less polite discussion about asylum. So how do you persuade someone? What approach should you take when debating?

Here are some general things to keep in mind:

Stay calm ☺ - it’s easy to get overly passionate when talking about things important to you, but you won’t convince anyone by shouting!

Learn your facts and use them – even if you’re not sure how to respond to a question you can state the facts you know and provide some basic information.

Make a couple of key points, and keep repeating them – don’t wait for people to ask the right question to make your main argument, as they probably won’t! Stick with a few key points (politicians do this all the time!)

Use positive terminology– many of the usual discussions about asylum use negative terms (e.g. ‘burden’), so avoid these and talk about asylum positively.

Don’t try and answer what you don’t know - There’s no shame in saying you’re not sure about a particular fact. You can admit that you are unsure of a certain question, or respond by repeating the facts you know.

Put yourself in their shoes - different arguments appeal to different people – keep in mind that not everyone has the same point of view as you, so what you find convincing won’t always be convincing to others.

Talk about the individual people rather than abstract terms – try to make discussions about real people (mothers, fathers, sons), not just statistics.

Distinguish clearly between asylum and immigration – emphasise that asylum seekers and refugees are here asking for protection and are part of a different process to migrant workers.

**Answering Tricky Questions**

Here are some typical questions you might get and some key points you might respond with:

1. “Why do refugees always come to Britain?”

• They don’t. Britain hosts just 2% of the world’s refugees.

• 75% of refugees go to countries bordering their own and 80% are hosted by developing countries in the global south. e.g. 73,700 Somalis fled to Kenya in 2010, yet only 675 claimed asylum in UK

• There are currently less people applying for asylum in the UK than there has been for more than 15 years due to the fall in asylum applications. There were just 19,894 applications for asylum in 2011 – that’s not even enough people to fill one quarter of Old Trafford’s football ground, let alone swamp the UK!

• In 2011, the UK received 0.4 asylum applicants per 1,000 people in its population. That’s below the European average.

2. “Immigration is reaching unsustainable levels – we’re full up”

• Asylum seekers are not economic migrants

• Asylum seekers make up just 4% of migration to the UK

• Only 19,894 people claimed asylum in the UK in 2011. This is around 0.03 per cent of the population

3. “They’re all bogus and only here for the generous benefits”

• There is no such thing as a ‘bogus asylum seeker’. Article 14 of Universal

Declaration of Human Rights states that seeking asylum is a human right.

• Thousands of asylum seekers are living in extreme poverty as a result of government policies which do not give them enough to live on and deny them the right to work to support themselves.

• A single asylum seeker gets just £5 a day (£36.62 a week) to pay for all food, travel, clothing, toiletries and all other expenses excluding housing and fuel bills. That’s 50% of the income support a British citizen is entitled to. It has been calculated that £45 (70% of Income Support) is the bare minimum that asylum seekers need to meet their essential living needs.

• A 2010 study by the Refugee Council found that over two thirds of refugees did not choose to come to the UK. Refugees who did choose to come to the UK came mostly because of family, language, colonial connections, and a sense that the UK is democratic and tolerant country. They had little knowledge of the asylum process and the benefits available.

4. “They take our jobs and our homes”

• Almost all asylum seekers are forbidden from working and those that are permitted to work can only take jobs where there are skills shortages in Britain.

• They cannot choose where they live and are sent to ‘hard to let’ properties

5. “At this time of economic crisis, shouldn’t we be looking out for British citizens first?”

• A 2011 study conducted by the Refugee Council, found that 82% of Brits feel that protecting the most vulnerable is a core British value.

• The UK has an international obligation to protect refugees. The Refugee Convention – which outlines international obligations to protect those fleeing war, torture and oppression - was drafted following the Holocaust in the wake of the persecution and death of millions of innocent people. To date, no country has repealed their commitment to welcome refugees. Do we really want the UK to be the first?

• People including Albert Einstein, Karl Marx, Ed Miliband, Mo Farah and the singer M.I.A. would not have achieved what they have were it not for the protection offered to refugees.

6. “Why let asylum seekers work when there aren’t enough jobs for British people?”

••• Firstly, when government spending is being cut, it doesn’t make sense to force people who could work to live on benefits for months on end.

••• Some asylum applications can take a long time and it is sensible to allow people to support themselves, develop their skills and contribute to the economy while they wait!

••• Employment helps people to start rebuilding their lives and offers self-respect, dignity and helps integration. No wonder the Trade Union Congress supports the right to work, and 128 MPs have signed up to the principle to date!

••• Under the current system asylum seekers who do have permission to work can only take jobs where there are skills shortages in Britain.

7. “If asylum seekers are refused, why don’t they go home?”

• Many refused asylum seekers cannot return home through no fault of their own. This may be because there is no safe travel route back to their country, their Government refuses to provide them with documents or they are too ill to travel.

• Just because an applicant has been refused asylum it also doesn’t mean that it’s safe for them to return. Many Zimbabwean asylum seekers have been denied protection in the UK even though the Courts ruled that it is too dangerous for them to be sent back. This leaves them in limbo, without status, but unable to return home.

8. Given the current cuts, can we really afford to give asylum seekers more?

••• Still Human has calculated that £45 (70% of Income Support) is the bare minimum that asylum seekers need to meet their essential living needs. And that’s all we’re asking for.

••• Having to provide emergency health care, shelter and other support to those who are destitute or living in extreme poverty is a far larger drain on the British economy than just giving people the basics they need to survive!

There is no such thing as a ‘bogus asylum seeker’! Article 14 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that seeking asylum is a human right.

**Definitions**

**Refugee**: someone who is in need of protection and would be at risk of persecution if they returned home. Under international law the word “refugee” has a very precise meaning: someone who: “…owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country…” (United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951)

**Asylum seeker**: someone who has asked to be recognised as a refugee and is waiting for the government to make a decision. They have made themselves known to the authorities and are part of an on-going legal process.

**Refused asylum seeker**: someone who has had their claim for asylum turned down because the Home Office has decided that they do not need protection in the UK

**Economic migrant**: a person who leaves their home country to work in another country. They can normally return home when they choose to.

**Quick Facts about Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

In 2011, the UK received 19,894 asylum applications. That’s not even enough to fill ¼ of Old Trafford football ground! Of these, under 6000 were granted some form of protection.

80% of the world’s refugees are living in developing countries. The UK is home to less than 2% of the world’s refugees. Europe looks after just 14% of the world’s refugees.

Almost all asylum seekers do not have permission to work in the UK. They can apply for permission one year after they have applied for asylum, but only those who are still waiting for an initial decision on their asylum case and only in jobs where there are skills shortages, like chemical engineers, orchestral musicians or ballerinas!

Most asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute and who are not allowed to work to support themselves get just over £5 a day to pay for food, travel, clothing, toiletries and all other expenses excluding housing and fuel bills. This is not enough to meet their essential living costs and forces most to live in extreme poverty.