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**Facts about asylum seekers**

Do you know the facts about asylum seekers?

St Helens Borough Council aims to promote better public understanding of asylum seekers. Here we have some key questions and answers for people to understand why asylum seekers are placed in the borough and what their impact is.

**An asylum seeker is….**

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded. A person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

**Why does St Helens host asylum seekers?**

St Helens has hosted asylum seekers since 2016. In 2016 St Helens Borough Council was part of partnership of all 6 Local Authorities in the Liverpool City Region to host asylum seekers in their areas following the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999. In the last year more Northwest local authorities have started to host asylum seekers and more are expected to do so in the future.

Where asylum seekers are allocated is a decision taken by central government.

St Helens Borough Council has no control over that policy.

St Helens, like all areas of the country, should play a fair and balanced role in resettling asylum seekers/refugees within the community and in liaison with other Councils in the area.

A humanitarian crisis is taking place and we are an open and friendly borough, as our appeal for donations to refugees earlier in the year proved. The UK is home to less than 1% of the world's refugees – out of more than 50 million forcibly displaced people worldwide.

**If the Council is concerned by the use of hotels by Serco what can it do?**

St Helens Borough Council has no control over the use of hotels or numbers. Nor does the Council provide any financial assistance to the housing of asylum seekers.

We have had discussions with Serco and the Home Office to make clear our concern about the use of hotels to temporarily host asylum seekers and to press for a date when it will end. At a Liverpool City Region and Northwest level, Serco and the Home Office are being pressed for the hotel situation to be resolved.

**Where have the asylum seekers come from?**

Asylum seekers come from all around the world and are often from countries affected most severely by war and political instability.

**Are asylum seekers mostly male?**

Over the last few years there has been an increase in the number and proportion of single asylum seekers, particularly males, claiming asylum. We cannot give definite reasons why asylum seekers are mostly single males, other than that they have a greater degree of mobility to leave their country of origin compared to single females and families. It is common for single males, where they have left their dependent family in the country of origin for them to apply for family reunion if they are granted refugee status.

**Has crime increased since the arrival of asylum seekers in St Helens?**

No. The vast majority of asylum seekers are law-abiding and are much more likely to be the victims of crime rather than perpetrators. People who have committed serious crimes are excluded from protection under the UN Convention on Refugees. States can also expel people who they regard as a threat to national security.

**Can asylum seekers work?**

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and St Helens Borough Council works closely behind the scenes to support government agencies identify illegal working. Since 2002, only those with full refugee status, Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave to Remain have been allowed to enter employment.

**What do asylum seekers live on?**

St Helens Borough Council is not paying any financial support to asylum seekers with all support coming from central government. Almost all asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support – this can be as little as £5 a day to live on. According to research carried out by the Refugee Council most asylum seekers do not know about welfare benefits before they arrive and have no expectation that they would receive financial support.

**Are the asylum seekers getting beneficial treatment for healthcare?**

Asylum seekers have the same rights as any UK citizen to access health care and children's education. Migrants, including refugees, make an enormous contribution to the NHS, which relies heavily on foreign labour.

**What positive benefits does this country get from immigration?**

Refugees make a huge contribution to the UK once they can access work and contribute through taxes, job creation and supporting the local economy through new businesses. Asylum-seeking children contribute very positively to schools across the country. This in turn enables more successful integration of families into local communities.