



MOBILES, MONEY & MAYHEM THE FACTS & FIBS ABOUT ASYLUM

A POP-IT-IN-YOUR-POCKET GUIDE



Those refugees and asylum seekers...
Coming here just to pick up crisp new
trainers that they run around in to harass
the decent folk of Britain, laughing as
they install their free satellite TV in the
council flats that they queue-jumped
to get. It's outrageous isn't it? In fact it's
quite unbelievable.

The Facts & Fibs About Asylum is an
essential pop-it-in-your-pocket guide
from Refugee Action. It gives you a
chance to get to the bottom of some of
those sensational stories, outrageous
myths and big fat fibs that are told about
asylum seekers and refugees in Britain
today. Read it through to answer any
number of questions like, "why do asylum
seekers get given second-hand cars?"



THE LEGAL BIT

Since 1951, the United Nations Refugee Convention has been the cornerstone of the UN's efforts to help and protect an estimated 50 million refugees worldwide. Originally created to protect refugees fleeing the horrific aftermath of World War II in Europe, it was the first truly international agreement about refugees. It spelt out the most fundamental human rights for some of the world's most vulnerable people.

The Convention defines a refugee as someone who is outside of their country of nationality and has a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, political opinion, nationality or membership of a social group, and can't return there for fear of persecution. Yes, it's over half a century old but hey, while such treatment of individuals and groups continues, the Convention feels like something that's worth holding onto.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Please memorise these terms to save any future embarrassment round the dinner table when confusing an illegal immigrant with a refugee over the after dinner mints.

ASYLUM SEEKER

A person who:

- flees their homeland
- arrives in another country
- makes themselves known to the authorities
- exercises their legal right to apply for asylum

REFUGEE

A person who:

- has proved that they would face persecution back home
- has had a successful asylum application
- is allowed to stay in that country after the authorities say 'yes, you can stay here'

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT

A person who:

- has arrived in a new country
- has either not made themselves known to the authorities OR has stayed in the country longer than they were authorised to
- has no legal permission to be there
- is going to get in real big trouble when they're found out

REFUSED ASYLUM SEEKER

A person who:

- hasn't been able to prove that they would face persecution back home
- has had their application turned down
- is told to leave the country after the authorities say 'no, you can't stay here'

ECONOMIC MIGRANT

A person who:

- has moved to another country to work
- could be anyone from an Albanian builder to an African nurse
- strengthens the workforce
- could be illegal or legally resident, depending on how they entered the country
- might have a legal work permit or may be working illegally

EUROPEAN MIGRANT

A person who:

- is a member of a country that belongs to the European Economic Area (EEA) just like us
- has the right to live in the UK so long as they are studying, are working or have enough money to support themselves
- usually has the automatic right to work in the UK (but if they are from one of the new accession countries like Poland, they may have to register with the government first, or if they are from Bulgaria or Romania they may need a work permit depending on the type of job they want to do)

“BRITAIN IS A SOFT TOUCH FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS”

UPON ARRIVING IN THE UK ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE:

- fingerprinted (even if you're a little kid)
- photographed
- security checked
- issued with ID cards
- and may even be electronically tagged

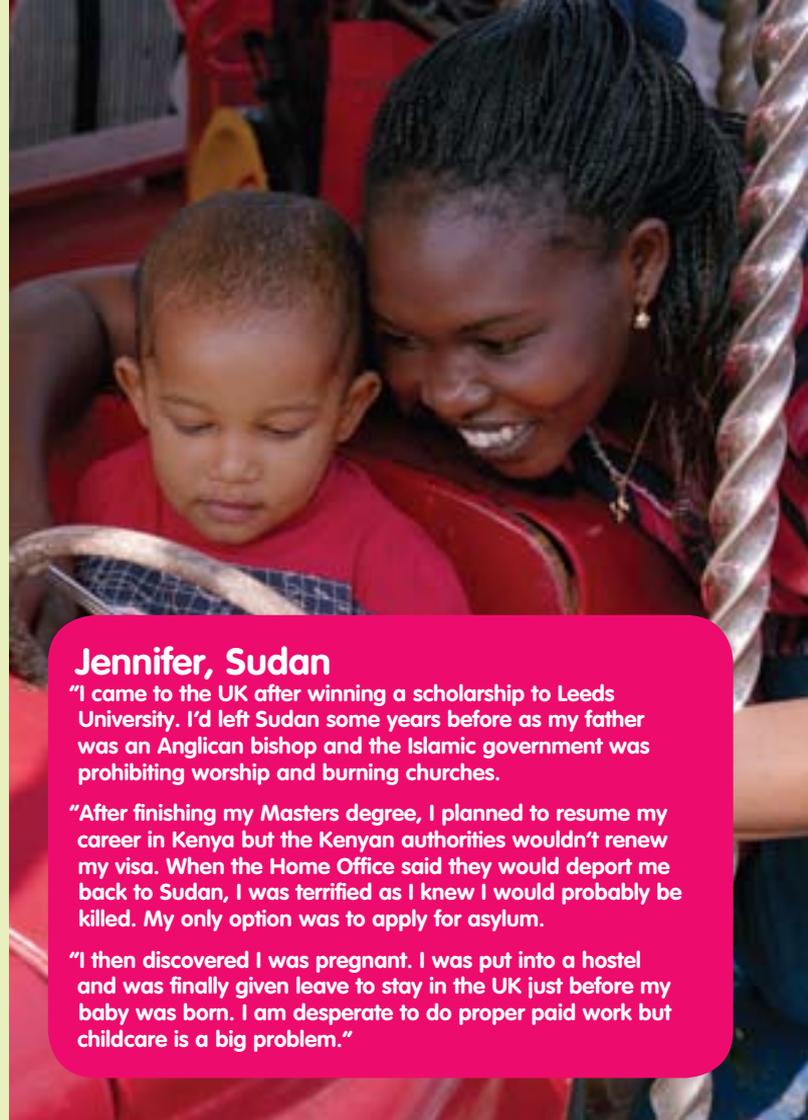
THEY MUST:

- report at regular intervals to police stations or immigration centres

THEY CAN BE:

- locked up at any point during their asylum application (including little kids and pregnant ladies)

ANY TAKERS?



Jennifer, Sudan

“I came to the UK after winning a scholarship to Leeds University. I’d left Sudan some years before as my father was an Anglican bishop and the Islamic government was prohibiting worship and burning churches.

“After finishing my Masters degree, I planned to resume my career in Kenya but the Kenyan authorities wouldn’t renew my visa. When the Home Office said they would deport me back to Sudan, I was terrified as I knew I would probably be killed. My only option was to apply for asylum.

“I then discovered I was pregnant. I was put into a hostel and was finally given leave to stay in the UK just before my baby was born. I am desperate to do proper paid work but childcare is a big problem.”

"ASYLUM SEEKERS COME HERE JUST TO CREAM OFF OUR BENEFIT SYSTEM"

We know it's hard to put yourself in the place of a person who has had to flee their country. But try. Reasons like war, ethnic cleansing, political persecution, rape or torture are just some of the reasons why people are forced to leave their homes, their jobs, people they love, everything they know. And in order to leave such dangerous situations they may entrust themselves (and their money) to people smugglers and very often have little say about their final destination.

A recent Home Office report concluded that there was absolutely no evidence to suggest that asylum seekers had a detailed knowledge of our policies or welfare benefits. So it's highly doubtful that they're rubbing their hands together at the thought of potential income support cheques and

six-monthly dental check-ups. Fear of being tortured, for instance, would be a bigger reason to leave.

The report concluded that the main reasons why some people seek asylum here are their countries' historic links with good old colonial Britain, the presence of family and friends and the fact that English is a global language. Not because it is a sure-fire bet for a new life that's sugar-coated with state benefits.

If you were that person, uprooting your entire life, wouldn't you try and find the safest place to go to? Somewhere that you think you might fit in more easily, where you wouldn't be faced with the same set of problems. It's not a crime to try and find those things, it's a basic human instinct for survival.



“WHEN ASYLUM SEEKERS COME HERE THEY ALL GET GIVEN SATELLITE TELLY”

Imagine, if you will, that you are a Home Office official considering what you will give to a newly arrived, destitute asylum seeker. Look down your list of goodies and tick what you think are the absolute essentials.

- Second-hand car
- Slick new trainers
- Food
- Gym membership
- Satellite TV
- Somewhere to sleep

Aygun, Turkey

“My husband was wrongly suspected of being a Kurdish guerrilla in Turkey. He was beaten and tortured. The authorities drove us out of our village. They interrogated us, sometimes all through the night, called us ‘dirty Kurds’ and said, ‘We’ll burn you all’.

“One day when they beat me in front of my children, I knew I had to get out. When we made it to the UK, I was so happy because we were safe. But it has not been easy here. Children on the estate throw stones at us, smash our windows and call us names. I am afraid to go out and I keep my children inside the house.”



"THEY GET TO JUMP THE QUEUE FOR NICE COUNCIL FLATS"

Asylum seekers do not qualify for council housing tenancy or housing benefit and they do not get their housing paid for by the local authority. Instead, those that can't stay with friends or family or pay their own rent, are sent to live in places run and paid for by the Home Office.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

When they arrive, the really unlucky ones are sent straight to detention centres or are refused any form of support by the Home Office. The more fortunate ones are given government housing (they don't get to choose where) and get moved about all over the country during the asylum process.

The housing that the government provides is usually hired from private landlords or specialist housing associations. Sometimes local councils might be paid to help the Home Office find housing - but

only when the council has proved that local people can't use it.

PROPERTIES WITH THAT WOW FACTOR

Asylum seekers are not living it up in penthouse apartments and spending their time picking out new colour schemes for the master bedroom. Often they find themselves living with strangers in crowded, grubby accommodation in a part of town no-one else fancies. It's not what anyone would really want to call home.

If eventually an asylum seeker proves their case and is given permission to stay here as a refugee, then they have to leave this temporary housing and either find and pay for their own housing, or queue up on the council housing waiting list just like UK citizens.

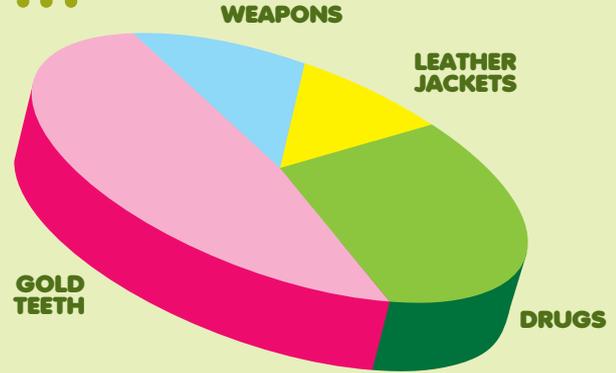


"ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE BLOWING THEIR BENEFIT ON NEW LEATHER JACKETS"

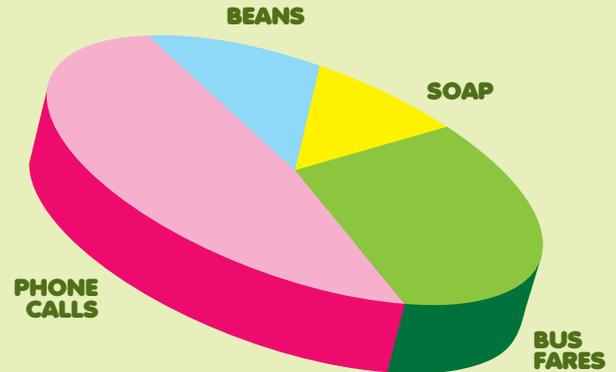
Because asylum seekers aren't allowed to work they're given basic financial support to live on. In Britain if you're a single person aged 25 or over and on income support you're entitled to get £60.50 a week. But if you're an asylum seeker in Britain you get 30% less than that. You get £42.16. A week. Which you'd probably want to spend on some of life's essentials like, say, food rather than blowing it all on a nice leather jacket.

All asylum seekers come into the country with clothes on their back, and maybe those sporting a leather jacket got it from a market in Kabul rather than at the January sales.

MYTH



COMMON SENSE



"...AND IF IT'S NOT LEATHER JACKETS IT'S MOBILE PHONES"

It's essential that asylum seekers are able to communicate with their solicitors, but often the accommodation that they are given will either be without a pay phone or be in high demand.

This contact is so fundamental to their asylum application that they may save up for a mobile. And seeing as anyone from your spotty teenage brother to your nan can pick up a pay-as-you-go handset for £9.99, it seems a sensible thing to save up a tenner for.



Christiane, Democratic Republic of Congo

"When I opened the letter telling me I had leave to remain I screamed and shouted and called my family - many of them have been forced to flee too and are in various countries. I've been apart from my husband for two years and want to be reunited so we can start a family.

"When I fled the Congo, I was a trainee solicitor but to become a solicitor here I need to study for a further two years. I may work in a shop to finance it. Making the transition to life as a refugee is difficult but I want to feel more a part of Britain and build a future."

WELCOME TO REFUGEESEA

Please take a moment to cast your eye over this map of 10 of the scariest countries that people flee from, and discover some of the varied and exceptional reasons for them upping sticks and getting out of there.

SO, WHO'S MY NEIGHBOUR?

We know it's sometimes hard to get an idea of who lives in your area, what with some papers telling us all kinds of nonsense about wall-to-wall asylum seekers and refugees. So we thought we'd do the maths for you with all the proper numbers and everything.



WHO'S LIVING IN THE UK

ONLY 7.9% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION OF THE UK COMES FROM A NON-WHITE ETHNIC GROUP.

91% OF THE POPULATION OF ENGLAND AND WALES WERE BORN IN THE UK.

AT THE BEGINNING OF APRIL 2008, THERE WERE ABOUT 49,370 GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED ASYLUM SEEKERS LIVING IN THE UK, THAT'S ONLY 0.08% OF THE UK'S POPULATION OF 60.6 MILLION.

AT THE END OF 2007, THE UN ESTIMATED THAT THERE WERE 299,700 REFUGEES LIVING IN THE UK, THAT'S 0.5% OF THE UK'S POPULATION.

92%
WHITE

4%
ASIAN
OR ASIAN
BRITISH

2%
BLACK
OR BLACK
BRITISH

2%
OTHER
ETHNIC
GROUP

0.08%
SUPPORTED
ASYLUM
SEEKERS

AFGHANISTAN

Fighting between armed groups, warlords, suicide attacks, persecution of women and religious minorities, death penalty.

IRAN

Persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, women and gay people; lack of political freedom, including the right to protest peacefully; arrests without charge; torture; imprisonment of protesters; media repression; death penalty.

CHINA

One-party state, political repression, media repression, persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, death penalty.

IRAQ

Fighting between armed groups, military occupation, suicide attacks, kidnapping, assassinations, attacks on civilians, death penalty.

ERITREA

Persecution of religious minorities, arrests without charge, political repression, torture, imprisonment of protesters, media repression, compulsory military service, death penalty.

ZIMBABWE

Media repression; torture; forced evictions and destruction of homes; lack of political freedom, including the right to protest peacefully; repression of people who defend human rights and non-governmental organisations; blocking of aid and humanitarian assistance.



SOMALIA

Civil war, violence between factions, warlords, state collapse, fighting between armed groups, threats to people who defend human rights, kidnappings, death penalty.

PAKISTAN

Discrimination against religious minorities, arrests without charge, paramilitary forces, violence between factions, political repression, torture, imprisonment of political opponents, violence and discrimination against women, media repression, death penalty.

SRI LANKA

Conflict between government and armed groups, attacks on civilians, mass displacement, extrajudicial killings, abductions and enforced disappearances, media repression, detention without charge, mass arbitrary arrests, detention of political opponents and civil society activists, recruitment of child soldiers.

NIGERIA

Arrest without charge, execution without trial, torture, corruption, media repression, repression of civil society groups, violence between factions, death penalty.

"MOST ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES ARE CRIMINALS"

Aren't there always a couple of rotten apples to spoil the barrel, a couple of bad eggs in every community that ruin it for the rest of us by bringing crime to our streets? It's the same story worldwide and that includes the asylum seeker and refugee community too. But you'll be pleased to hear that the entire asylum seeking and refugee population aren't out raping and pillaging their way round the UK.

A report published by the Association of Chief Police Officers found no evidence that asylum seekers are more likely than anyone else in the community to commit criminal offences, and that asylum seekers are more likely to be the victims of crime than the perpetrators.



Selima, Somalia

"My family is from a minority ethnic group that is persecuted by another tribe in Somalia's civil war. My father was taken away and murdered. I watched my auntie being raped in our home. I lived in fear of being raped. My mum told me I had to escape because I was a young woman. She said it was better for her to die than me.

"My uncle helped me flee to the UK. It was a difficult time. When I arrived here, it was like being dropped in the ocean. I couldn't bear to live without my children. I got very depressed and tried to kill myself."

"...AND IF THEY AREN'T CRIMINALS THEY'RE PROBABLY TERRORISTS"

There is nothing to suggest that asylum seekers are more likely than anyone else to be involved in terrorism against us Brits.

Acts of terror are just as likely to be carried out by British citizens, foreign tourists or visitors. The people who attacked the Twin Towers carried proper documents letting them enter the US legitimately, while all but one of those who committed the London bombings were British born and bred. And what with all the finger-printing and ID-checking in place for asylum seekers, it seems doubtful that terrorists would go through such a strict route of entry and might choose a more undercover way in.

But what about all those asylum seeking terrorists we keep hearing about? Well, our journalists do a very thorough job of scouring courts and prisons just to catch a sniff of any asylum seeker or refugee up to no good, and if they're involved in an act of terror then all the better. There's really no need for them to bother talking about the law-abiding majority when the big, loud headlines about the few bad'uns are the stories that shift more papers.



MYTH



REALITY

"ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE ALL LAZY, WORK-SHY SO-AND-SO'S"

Asylum seekers are not actually allowed to work in Britain until they are granted refugee status. But with more than 2,000 refugee and asylum seeker health professionals and an estimated 1,500 refugee teachers across the UK, it doesn't mean they don't want to.

Whether they are doctors or mechanics, most refugees in the UK are skilled and eager to work. Department for Work and Pensions research has found that there is in fact a higher proportion of qualifications and skills among asylum seekers and refugees than among the UK population. Sadly, they don't always end up working in their chosen profession as their qualifications aren't transferable or employers are wary of hiring them.

Once they've got themselves settled into life in the UK, refugees tend to do alright for themselves - look at the Mini, fish & chips, Marks & Spencer, all brought to you by UK refugees. In hard economic terms, 2001 government figures show that the foreign-born population accounted for 10% of UK GDP. That's about five times as much as North Sea oil.



Sheka, Sierra Leone

"Ever since I was a child, I wanted to be a journalist. After working for a national newspaper in Sierra Leone, I started my own, which the government tried to ban. They imprisoned me for exposing government corruption and I spent a week in solitary confinement. I refused to be silenced and kept writing in hiding.

"While I was in the UK for a conference, my brother warned me not to return home. The authorities wanted to arrest me again for criticising the government. Sierra Leone is still not safe for journalists. My family has begged me for years to give up journalism. But I can't. It is my life."

"YOU CAN'T MOVE IN BRITAIN FOR REFUGEES"

Although we Brits like to compete in most things, we're actually lagging in the 'Country With The Most Refugees' race. A recent MORI poll showed that on average, the British public believes that 23% of the world's refugees and asylum seekers are walking our streets. That's nearly eight times the actual figure.

The number of asylum applications to the UK is at its lowest level since 1989 and in total we host only 3% of the world's refugees and asylum seekers. That ranks us 8th in the world, behind Pakistan, Iran and Germany.



 +  +  = all the refugees and asylum seekers in the world
 +  = % that Brits think are living in the UK
 = % that are actually living in the UK

"ALL THOSE ASYLUM SEEKERS EVER DO IS HANG AROUND STREET CORNERS"

There are a few ways to look at this. One is that hanging around outside of your home with your mates is just a simple cultural difference and something that people in other countries do (and not just bored British teenagers). We don't all have panic attacks on holiday when we see groups of Italians hanging round the piazza do we? We accept that socialising like that seems rather nice. Well, it's no different to what Africans or Middle Easterners do, or anyone else from a place with half-decent weather for that matter.

Another reason for people hanging around outside is that often the place they're sent to stay in isn't so nice. Their accommodation might be cramped, damp and full of people in the same situation. With no job, no telly, no radio or anything else to do to pass the time, it can all get quite depressing and stressful. It's somewhere you'd need to get away from occasionally, even if it is just on a street corner to have a chat with a mate.



Mahdi, Iraq

"I grew up in the holy city of Karbala as a member of Iraq's persecuted Shi'ite majority. One day my father was accused of selling banned religious texts and was taken away. Months later, we found out that he had died at the hands of Saddam's brutal secret police. It was then that I joined an uprising against the dictatorship.

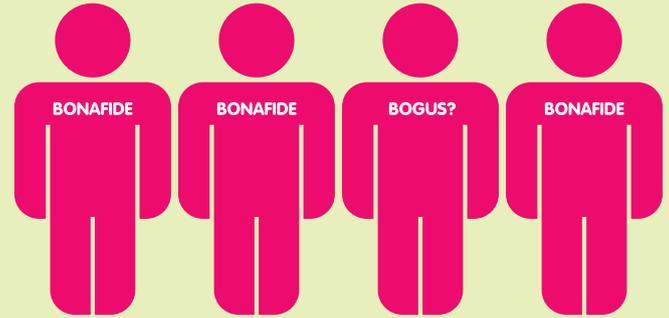
"I was later arrested and imprisoned for six months before fleeing to the UK. It's been hard, but now I've been granted leave to stay here and as well as finding a full-time job, I've just joined a local football team."

“IT’S THE BOGUS ASYLUM SEEKERS I WORRY ABOUT”

The term ‘bogus’ is a bit confusing and when people use it they usually mean one of two things.

‘BEING ILLEGAL’ BOGUS

First off, let’s not confuse asylum seekers with ‘illegal immigrants’. An illegal immigrant is someone who decides to leave their native country and goes to another to live - but does it without telling the authorities. This is different to asylum seekers who have made themselves known to the authorities and are legally allowed to stay until their case is assessed. Refugees have gone through the asylum process and have been given the big thumbs up from the authorities after a successful application and have a legal right to stay. Because both go through legal channels to get their status, asylum seekers and refugees simply can’t be called illegal, because they’re well, legal...



‘PULLING A FAST ONE’ BOGUS

We might not like it, but it’s a fact of life that any system can be taken advantage of. You know, like when people claim for a ‘lost’ camera on holiday or claim benefits for kids they don’t even have. So yes, sadly there might well be some who cynically abuse the asylum system to get into the UK. But don’t forget that our asylum process is very tough, and the burden on asylum seekers to provide concrete proof of their situation is extremely heavy.

This means that the vast majority of asylum seekers who get turned down are not trying it on. They may have had their application refused because they had a rubbish lawyer, or if they didn’t have their personal dossier of evidence ship-shape when desperately fleeing their country. It doesn’t mean that they were uncovered by the Home Office as some kind of professional trickster.

"THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT LETS THEM ALL STAY"

Many asylum seekers get turned down, and after appeal if they still get a negative response then they have to go home. But just 'sending them back' instantly isn't as simple as you might think.

Although the government removes thousands of people each year (10,725 in 2007) some asylum seekers can't be deported because there might not be any flights back or their country might not take them back.

In 2007, some 2,865 people signed up to the government's voluntary return scheme. This costs the government just £1,100 a head rather than the usual £11,000 it costs to force someone onto a plane. Others choose to leave under their own steam and many just get stuck in detention centres.

It's easy to see those who try to dodge deportation as fraudsters but often they're just scared stiff of going back. Don't forget that most asylum seekers actually want to go home, it's just that they want to wait until the war/political oppression/state collapse/suicide attacks have been sorted.

THANKS FOR THAT

We hope that this guide has helped to simplify the often complex issues surrounding asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Thank you for reading it. We hope that next time you hear some outrageous claim about refugee antics you'll be in a better position to easily spot some of those big fat fibs.

Refugee Action is an independent national charity that has 26 years of experience in working with refugees to build new lives in the UK. We'd really like to live in a society in which refugees and asylum seekers are welcome, respected and safe, and where they can reach their full potential. We hope after reading this you might too.

The Refugee Awareness Project is supported by the Big Lottery Fund and is co-financed by the European Refugee Fund.



**AFTER YOU'VE GOT ENOUGH
INFORMATION FROM THIS LITTLE
BOOK ABOUT THE ASYLUM
SYSTEM FOR YOU TO BE ABLE TO
IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS, MAKE
SURE THAT YOU PASS IT ON TO
SOMEONE ELSE SO THAT THEY CAN
IMPRESS SOMEONE TOO.**

We give free talks to anyone who fancies finding out a bit more about asylum in the UK. For more info please call 020 7654 0673 or email nationalrap@refugee-action.org.uk



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