

LIFT THE BAN:
WHY GIVING PEOPLE
SEEKING ASYLUM
THE RIGHT TO WORK
IS COMMON SENSE



LIFT
THE
BAN



We want to work, to pay bills, to pay tax. Put something into the community so that money can help the ones who really need help.”

Joyce

Acknowledgments

The Lift the Ban coalition would like to thank all of the people who spoke with us about their experiences of the asylum system and responded to the surveys for this report. Thanks go to the Nottingham Arimathea Trust, the RAS Voice campaign group, and Women for Refugee Women for organising focus groups with their members.

We are also grateful to Global Future for preparing the cost analysis included in section 3.2. This analysis was originally produced in 2018 and has been updated by Lift the Ban for the purposes of this report.

Methodology

This report is based on a review of the existing literature regarding asylum and work, in addition to a May 2020 skills audit and August/September 2018 survey that was completed by 283 and 246 people respectively who have direct experience of the asylum system across the country. Three focus group discussions were also held in 2018 with people who have direct experience of the asylum process in London, Manchester, and Nottingham. Finally, Survation conducted a poll of 1,006 UK business leaders between April–May 2019.

ABOUT LIFT THE BAN

The Lift The Ban coalition is made up of over 200 organisations which have joined together to campaign for the right to work for people seeking asylum. The coalition includes businesses, trade unions, charities, think tanks and faith groups.

In 2019 Lift The Ban was awarded 'Best Coalition Campaign' at the Sheila McKechnie National Campaigner Awards.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



People seeking asylum in the UK are only able to apply for the right to work after they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for over a year. Even then, the few people who are granted such permission are rarely able to work in practice because their employment is restricted to the narrow list of highly-skilled professions included on the Government's Shortage Occupation List.

This means that people are essentially banned from working whilst they wait months, and often years, for a decision on their asylum claim. Instead, they are left to live on just £5.66 per day, struggling to support themselves and their families, while their talents are wasted and their integration set back.

The Lift the Ban coalition, made up of over 200 non-profit organisations, think tanks, businesses, trade unions and faith groups, is calling on the UK Government to give people seeking asylum and their adult dependants the right to work:

- unconstrained by the Shortage Occupation List, and
- after they have waited six months for a decision on their initial asylum claim or further submission.

In this report, we argue that a policy change would:

- Strengthen people's chances of being able to **integrate into their new communities**
- Allow people seeking asylum to **live in dignity** and to provide for themselves and their families
- Give people the opportunity to use their skills and **make the most of their potential**
- **Improve the mental health** of people in the asylum system
- Help to **challenge forced labour,** exploitation, and modern slavery

We demonstrate how a change in policy could benefit the UK economy, through **net gains for the Government of £97.8 million per year.**

We also present evidence to show that a change in policy would be **popular amongst the UK public**, with 71% agreeing that people seeking asylum should be allowed to work.

We believe that people who have risked everything to find safety should have the best chance possible of contributing to our society and integrating into their new communities. As the UK seeks to build back better from Covid-19 and protect itself from the consequences of an unprecedented economic crisis, lifting restrictions on the right to work for people seeking asylum would both ensure the UK benefits from the expertise of a diverse workforce and provide significant savings for the public purse. **In other words, lifting the ban is common sense.**

1. INTRODUCTION



When people claim asylum in the UK, having left homes and loved ones in order to escape conflict and persecution, they are desperate to start their lives again.

Finding safety is their immediate priority, but once they are here people hope for a quick and fair asylum process that will allow them to enter work or education as soon as possible. Journeys to safety in the UK may already have taken months or even years, and people are eager to reach a point where they can start to rebuild their lives.

Finding work is a huge part of this rebuilding process. It allows people to participate meaningfully in their new communities. Yet people are only able to apply for the right to work after they have been waiting over a year for a decision on their asylum claim, and few are granted this permission. In the rare cases where approval is given, people must take up jobs on the Shortage Occupation List, which is highly restrictive and includes such professions as 'classical ballet dancer', 'medical radiographer', and 'hydrogeologist'.¹ In practice, therefore, people in the asylum system are effectively banned from working and must rely wholly upon state support to avoid destitution.

These restrictions on the right to work are in place despite how damaging they are – both for the UK economy and also for those people who are forced to wait for long periods of time for a decision on their asylum application, without the opportunity to develop their skills or increase their chances of being able to integrate once they are granted refugee status.

Since the launch of Lift The Ban, there has been strong support from across the political spectrum, both in and beyond parliament, for reform of the rules. In 2018, the then-Immigration Minister, Caroline Nokes, noted that there is “much merit in the arguments for reform”²; while in 2019, the then-Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, told parliament that “it is time for reform”.³ In December 2018, the Home Office began a review of the right to work policy. This is a welcome development; but more than 18 months on the review is still ongoing with no end in sight, while people seeking asylum in the UK are forced to continue living in poverty, their skills wasted.

In this report, we present the background to the current UK policy, which has been in place since 2002, and address the counter-arguments to policy change. We highlight the UK's position as an outlier among all comparable countries: no other European country has such a restrictive waiting period. This is equally true of Canada, the USA and Australia. We also set out the case for why change is needed, drawing on polling, surveys and focus groups with people seeking asylum.

We argue that giving people seeking asylum the right to work could:

- Strengthen people's chances of being able to **integrate** into their new communities
- Allow people seeking asylum to **live in dignity** and to provide for themselves and their families
- Give people the **opportunity to use their skills** and make the most of their potential
- **Improve the mental health** of people in the asylum system
- **Benefit the UK economy** by allowing people seeking asylum to contribute, as well as reducing the costs associated with asylum support
- Deliver evidence-based, **popular** and pragmatic policy change

“ At a time of crisis, now more than ever, we need people to support our NHS and key workers, yet asylum seekers who are skilled and qualified like myself are not allowed to work. We are forced to live isolated and in poverty, at serious risk of exploitation, depression and ending up homeless. We have so much to contribute to our communities that have welcomed us.”

SAM*

It is essential for the UK to ensure it is drawing on the skills, energy and enthusiasm of its population. As the country seeks to build back better from the Covid-19 pandemic and protect itself from the ravages of an unprecedented economic crisis, lifting restrictions on the right to work for people seeking asylum would allow the UK to benefit from the expertise of a diverse workforce and secure much-needed cost savings to the tune of, we estimate, £97.8 million per year.

In other words, lifting the ban is common sense.

*In order to protect the anonymity of those we spoke with, some names used in this report are pseudonyms.

2020 SKILLS AUDIT

In May 2020, after the outbreak of Covid-19, Lift the Ban carried out a skills audit of 283 people seeking asylum. See page 12.

1 IN 7

respondents had worked in

HEALTH OR SOCIAL CARE



2. BACKGROUND

The right to work for people seeking asylum in UK policy and legislation

Currently, people can apply for permission to work after they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for over a year (if that delay is not considered to have been caused by the applicant themselves). Those who have made further submissions which have been pending for over 12 months can also ask permission to work.⁴ However, even when such approval is given, this is restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List, and people seeking asylum are not allowed to be self-employed.⁵ Moreover, despite the fact that they are going through the same anguish as main asylum applicants, the adult dependants of people seeking asylum are not allowed to apply for permission to work at all – something that impacts particularly on women, who are more likely than men to be the dependants of their partners. It is unclear how many people currently have permission to work, as the Government does not collect this data, but numbers are low.⁶

RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS



- **Up until 2002**, people seeking asylum could apply for permission to work if they had been waiting for six months or more for an initial decision on their asylum claim. In July 2002, this provision was withdrawn except in 'exceptional cases'. No policy was developed to explain what these might be.
- **In February 2005**, a new Immigration Rule was introduced to comply with the 2003 European Union Directive on Reception Conditions, which the Government had opted into. This rule allowed people seeking asylum to apply for permission to work in the UK if they had been waiting for over 12 months for an initial decision on their asylum claim.
- **In 2010**, the right to work after 12 months was extended to those who have made further submissions on their claim; at the same time, however, the right to work was restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List.
- During the passage of what then became the **2016 Immigration Act**, several amendments were put forward to give people seeking asylum the right to work. On **9 March 2016**, during Report Stage of the Bill, the House of Lords passed an amendment by 280 votes to 195 which would grant people seeking asylum permission to work if a decision has not been taken on their asylum application within the Home Office target time of six months; the amendment was ultimately defeated in the House of Commons.
- **In December 2018** the Home Office announced it would undertake a review on the right to work policy but nothing has been shared of this process to date.
- **In September 2019** the **Shortage Occupation List (SOL)** was expanded following a review by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of occupations remain outside of the SOL and therefore out of scope for people seeking asylum. Furthermore, the MAC questioned the usefulness of the SOL in general.⁷



When the right to work after six months for people seeking asylum was withdrawn in July 2002, the Government argued that faster decision-making times in the asylum determination process made the previous policy irrelevant:

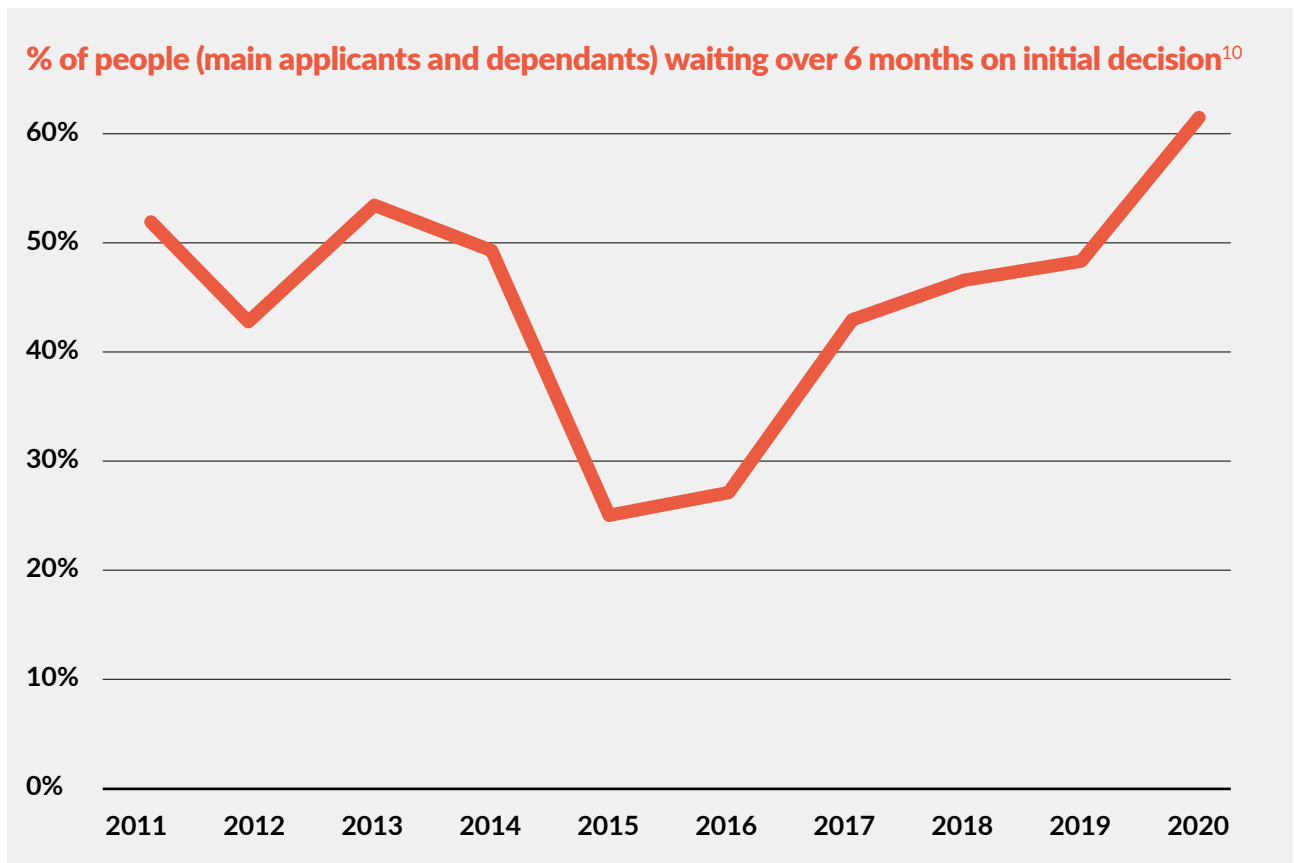
“ The asylum system is working increasingly quickly, through reforms and increased resources... This means that the employment concession, whereby asylum seekers could apply for permission to work if their application remained outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made, is becoming increasingly irrelevant.”⁸



Time and again, however, the Home Office has shown an inability to make timely and correct decisions on asylum applications. Over recent years the number of people waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for more than six months has grown dramatically.

By early 2020, the number of people (main applicants and dependants) waiting over six months for a decision on an asylum claim rose for the eighth consecutive quarter to 31,516, accounting for 61% of all those waiting.⁹ This is the highest number since public records began and a 13% increase on the previous year. It seems difficult to argue that a quick decision-making process makes the ‘employment concession’ irrelevant.

Instead, the arguments for lifting the ban on working have become increasingly compelling. Allowing people to work would give them the opportunity to live in a dignified manner while they wait for a decision on their asylum application, a process that can sometimes extend into years. It would also mean that people can maximise their potential and contribute to the UK economy and their communities. For those who end up leaving, this would give them a greater likelihood of being able to rebuild their lives elsewhere; for those who stay, their chances of being able to successfully integrate into their new communities would be far greater.



2.1 DEBUNKING THE 'PULL FACTOR'

The Government has long raised the concept of a 'pull factor' as its primary objection to giving people seeking asylum the right to work, arguing that such a policy would attract people to apply for asylum in the UK rather than elsewhere. Further, there are those who argue that a change in policy would encourage 'economic migrants' to apply for asylum in order to be able to work. According to this second argument, policies which restrict the economic rights of people seeking asylum serve as a deterrent to 'spurious' asylum applications from economic migrants. However, there is little to no evidence for this.

Researchers have widely discredited the idea that opening the labour market up to people in the asylum system draws people to the UK, or encourages people to 'choose' the UK when seeking asylum. Indeed, there is not one piece of credible, published evidence to support the long-term validity of this premise.¹¹ On the contrary, those studies that do exist – including one commissioned by the Home Office – show that **there is little to no evidence of a link between economic rights and entitlements and the destination choices of those seeking asylum.**¹² Instead, to the extent that a deliberate choice is made at all, the elements shaping such decisions are generally determined by colonial links between countries, the ability to speak the language, the presence of relatives and friends in the host country, and the belief that the host country is generally safe, tolerant and democratic – rather than a specific knowledge of the conditions of reception upon arrival.¹³ Similarly, research has shown that the introduction of restrictions on the right to work has had no impact on the volume of asylum applications and that asylum applications do not decrease when

unemployment in host countries increases.¹⁴ In fact, many people are unaware prior to arrival that they will be unable to work whilst waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. This is borne out by the results of the survey carried out by Lift the Ban coalition members. Of the 246 people who responded, 72% told us that they had not known prior to arriving in the UK that people seeking asylum are not allowed to work. Only 16% told us that they had been aware of this before their arrival.¹⁵

If the right to work is granted after six months, moreover, it becomes even more difficult than it already is (given the lack of evidence) to argue that people who would not otherwise have applied for asylum may do so as a route into work in the UK. It seems improbable that somebody would bring themselves to the attention of the authorities on the basis that there may be a chance that their asylum application will not be decided within six months and they will at that point be able to work. As academics at the University of Warwick have pointed out, for people who arrive in the UK without a visa and with the intention of working, it is easier to remain hidden than to apply for asylum and become visible to the authorities. Given the administrative hurdles involved, and the fact that applicants who are perceived as not having a genuine basis for their claim are more liable to be detained or deported, "[a]pplying for asylum would... put such individual's [sic] migration-for-work project in grave jeopardy. The availability of work in the informal economy may therefore be a greater attraction to people who have no legitimate claim for asylum than formal labour market access for those awaiting a decision on their claim."¹⁶



Of the 246 people who responded to the survey

72%

told us that they had not known prior to arriving in the UK that people seeking asylum are not allowed to work.

Only 16% (39/246) told us that they had been aware of this before their arrival.

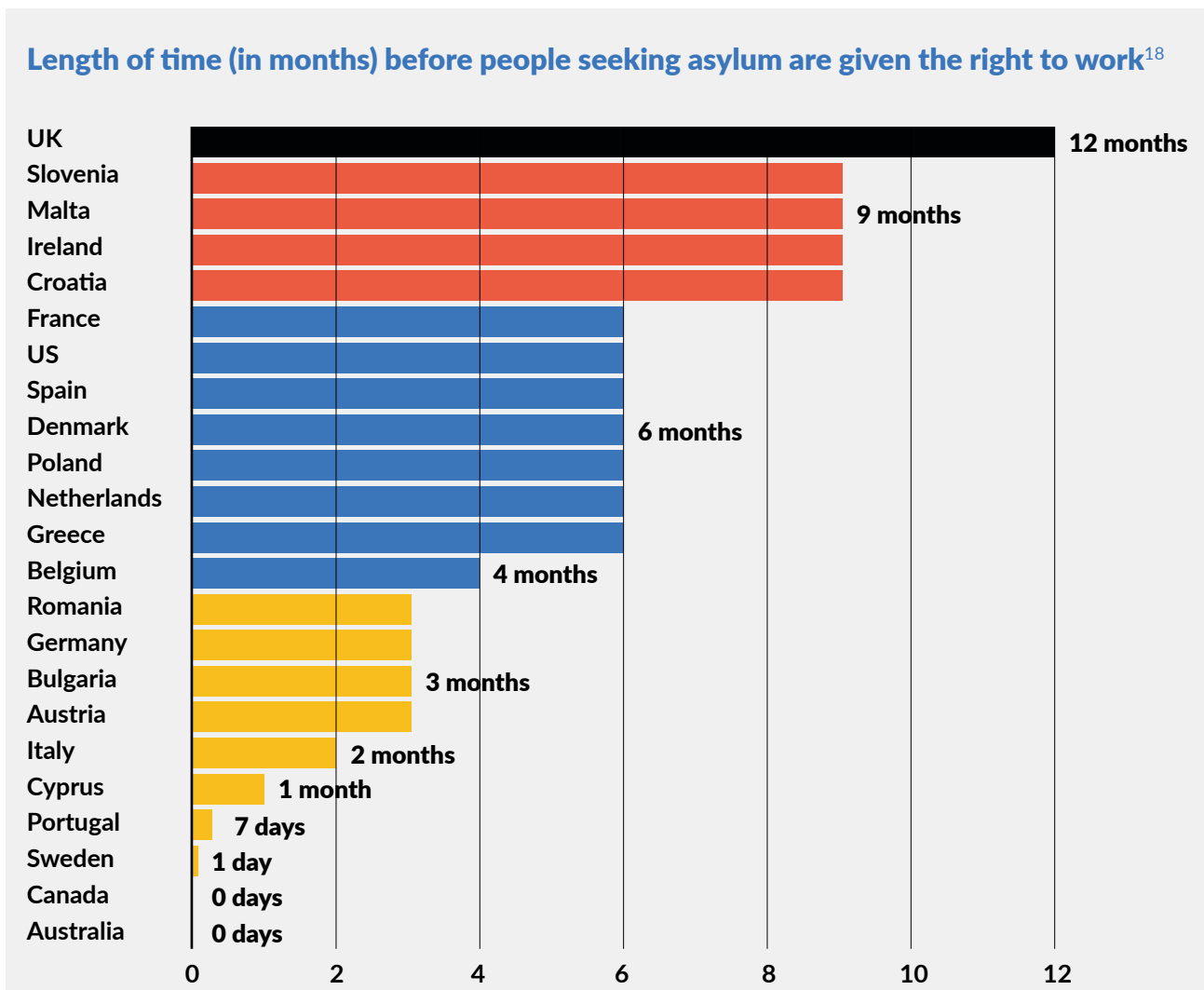
2.2 WHAT HAPPENS ELSEWHERE?

The UK's approach to employment rights for people seeking asylum is significantly more restrictive than that of almost every other comparable country.

No other nation – whether across Europe, or the USA, Australia and Canada – enforces a 12-month waiting period.¹⁷ Many other countries, moreover, do not place restrictions on the type of employment somebody can take up – unlike in the UK, where the Shortage Occupation List makes it practically impossible for people to work, even after a 12-month wait.

As the graph below demonstrates, other countries have chosen to set a considerably shorter exclusionary interval, and some allow work from the very first day. If the UK were to adopt a six-month waiting period, unrestricted by the Shortage Occupation List, it would go from being an outlier to joining the international mainstream.

Of course, even in countries with shorter waiting periods people seeking asylum continue to face a number of practical obstacles to accessing work. The most commonly cited hurdles are employer discrimination, language barriers and lack of recognition of existing qualifications. There are also some countries (such as Austria, France and the Netherlands) that restrict work either according to sectors or through limiting the numbers of days per year that people seeking asylum are permitted to work. In addition to simply giving people the right to work, therefore, it is key that conditions are put in place for this right to be realised in practice.



MAKING REFORM WORK

Countries across the globe have demonstrated that implementing the right to work for people seeking asylum is readily achievable. Here we look at six comparable countries to the UK which have made positive reform a reality.



AUSTRALIA

Australia allows some people seeking asylum to enter the labour market immediately, dependent on the type of visa issued.

Factors such as the stage of the application and mode of arrival will determine which type of visa is issued to people seeking asylum. Most will be given a Bridging Visa until their claim is decided, which often includes the automatic and immediate right to work. Even when issued with other types of visa, people seeking asylum may still be eligible to apply for permission to work.¹⁹ In practice, most people seeking asylum have the right to work in Australia.²⁰



SPAIN

People seeking asylum in Spain are permitted to work after six months. There is no labour market test and no restrictions placed on what jobs can be done.

Language and vocational training is made available to everyone during the initial, non-working six months, and a broader package of support is provided once individuals are eligible to work. This includes personalised career guidance, support in finding work, and occupational training.²¹ These policies strongly suggest that the Spanish

Government sees the costs of providing support and training to everyone in the asylum system – including those whose claims are eventually unsuccessful – as being outweighed by the benefits of ensuring that those who are granted status are well positioned and prepared to integrate into society.



DENMARK

Denmark encourages people seeking asylum to aim towards employment from the very start of their asylum journey and they can request the Immigration Service approve an offer of employment after six months if they meet certain conditions.²²

Asylum centres in Denmark give people seeking asylum access to education and activities to help integration and wellbeing. They are asked to agree a contract and schedule with these centres that must leave open the possibility that they will find employment.²³

People seeking asylum who are in employment pay Labour Market contributions at a regular rate for Danish citizens and tax at 30%.

IRELAND

For many years Ireland was, together with the UK, a rare exception to the approach taken by the overwhelming majority of comparable nations, with strict rules preventing people in the asylum system from working.

This changed in 2018 when the Irish Government allowed people seeking asylum to apply for the right to work after waiting nine months for a decision on their asylum claim²⁴ (applications can be made after eight months).²⁵

Work permits are issued for a six-month, renewable period and last for the entire asylum procedure, including during appeals. In practice, applications are accepted once a person has been waiting for eight months for a first instance decision in order to prevent delays in entering the labour market once the nine-month period has elapsed.²⁶ There are minimal restrictions on what jobs can be done, with people prohibited from being employed in the defence forces, police or civil service. Those with

permission to work also have access to vocational education and training.²⁷

Once in work, people seeking asylum pay tax at a regular rate. Their asylum support continues for a grace period of 12 weeks, after which it is paid on a means tested basis.²⁸

After just one year, 44% of people seeking asylum in Ireland with the right to work were employed²⁹ or self-employed and, by November 2019, they had contributed to the workforce of 1,708 different employers.³⁰

“ Giving eligible applicants an opportunity to work, to further their education or simply to be able to provide for their family is important for their integration and well-being.”

David Stanton, Minister for Equality, Immigration and Integration, Ireland.³¹



SWEDEN

The right to work is automatic for people seeking asylum in Sweden, with the Government viewing it as essential to integration.³²

Since 2018, Sweden has exempted people seeking asylum from requiring a work permit.³³ Self-employment is also permitted. To ensure immediate access to the labour market, people are provided with an ID card stating they have permission to work.

They are also referred to labour market programmes shortly after arrival, which provide education and

training for those who require it.³⁴ The Swedish government also funds NGOs to provide beginners' courses in Swedish and information about Swedish culture and the labour market.³⁵

People pay tax at a regular rate, and the government seeks a contribution to asylum accommodation costs on a means tested basis.³⁶



CANADA

Canada has no formal waiting period for access to the employment market. Anyone without the means to support themselves and who would otherwise be reliant on state support (nearly all people seeking asylum) can apply for the right to work as soon as they have completed an initial interview with federal authorities.³⁷

It is possible to apply for the right to work at the same time as registering an asylum claim, or by submitting a separate application afterwards.³⁸ Once in work, tax is paid and social support received at the same rate as Canadian citizens.

As the number of people claiming asylum in Canada has risen in the last two years, federal policy has focussed on getting people into work while they wait for a decision on their case. The government

has significantly reduced the time taken to process work permit applications and now processes work permits in three weeks.³⁹ 97% of applications are approved and 2017 data shows an estimated 55% of people seeking asylum in Quebec as likely to be in work. This has allowed the Canadian Government to reduce its social assistance payments for people seeking asylum, thus resulting in savings for the taxpayer.




3. THE CASE FOR REFORM

3.1 NOT WASTING TALENT

2020 SKILLS AUDIT


In May 2020 Lift the Ban carried out a skills audit with 283 people seeking asylum.



45%

of respondents' previous occupations would have defined them as

'CRITICAL WORKERS'

⁴⁰

1 IN 7

respondents previously worked in

HEALTH OR SOCIAL CARE

⁴¹

77%

of respondents had already, or would like to,

VOLUNTEER TO HELP THE NHS

⁴²

FARHAT'S STORY

Farhat is 26 and has been in the UK for nine months. She is an expert in public and international health and has worked in her home country of Afghanistan for NGOs and the government in Kabul before having to leave for fears over her safety.

She said her education, training and experience could have been put to good use while the UK tackled the Covid-19 pandemic but, because she is still waiting for a decision on her claim, she is unable to work.

“ I am a woman from war-ravaged Afghanistan, so I know a thing or two about overcoming barriers to find education and work. Amnesty International ranks my home country as the worst in the world to be a woman.

Yet I graduated from university with a bachelor's degree in Public Health. I went on to work with non-governmental organisations in the country, and was employed by the government in Kabul to build up the capacity of the health system to provide better services for people.

Against all odds I found work in Afghanistan yet, with all my skills and education in public health, I cannot get a job in the UK in the middle of a pandemic. Because I am an asylum seeker.”

She outlines what she could be doing while the pandemic still affects day-to-day life in the UK, such as working on community awareness to boost understanding of coronavirus, conducting research into the disease, or supporting more vulnerable groups in society with their mental wellbeing.

“ It gives me so much anxiety to remember that when I lived in one of the most insecure countries on the planet, I still had something to offer to the world. Now I am here in Great Britain, I can't do anything for others or myself.

I want to work because it gives me the feeling of being someone. I want to work because I don't want to look back after five or 10 years and realise I did little except sit alone in a room and wait for a decision on my asylum claim.

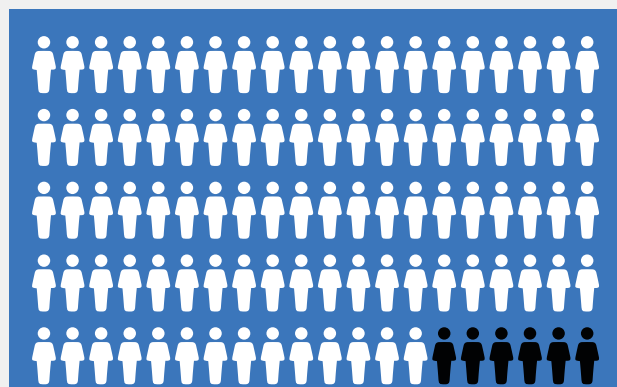
I could have been doing something positive for people's health by putting my knowledge and expertise into practice.

Giving asylum seekers the right to work benefits the government, too. It will have a bigger workforce to actively contribute to the development and economy of the country, and the person seeking asylum can also gain the financial autonomy that enables them to support themselves and their families.”



ASYLUM SURVEY

In August and September 2018, Lift the Ban coalition member organisations across the UK carried out a survey with 246 people who have direct experience of the asylum process. The survey asked them about their education and employment history, pre-arrival knowledge of UK asylum policy, reliance on food banks, and work aspirations.



94% of respondents said that they **would like to work** if they were given permission to do so.⁴³

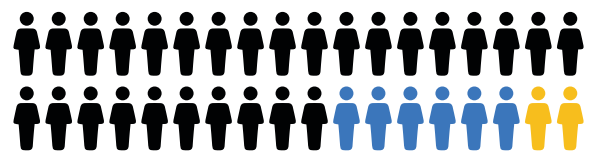
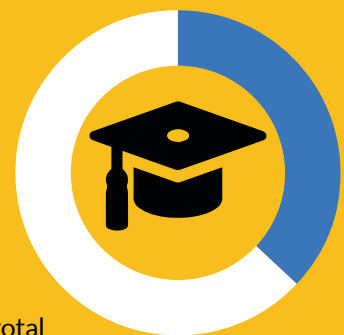
Only three people said that they would rather not work. One of these people told us that they would first like to study, though there may be a range of reasons why people seeking asylum may not want or be able to work, including specific health problems, disabilities, or childcare responsibilities.

74%

of respondents told us that they had secondary-level education or higher.

37%

of those surveyed held an **undergraduate or postgraduate university degree**, which falls just short of the percentage of the total UK population classed as graduates (42%).



Of the **36 people surveyed who had applied for permission to work** after waiting for an asylum decision for over 12 months, **only 8 were granted permission**. Only **2 of these were able to find jobs in reality**. Survey respondents who had not found employment told us that this was because of the restrictions imposed by the Shortage Occupation List.

The Covid-19 crisis has exposed not only how reliant we are on the skills and effort of each other but also the importance of feeling able to contribute to society at large. As such, it threw into sharp relief the absurdity of preventing people seeking asylum from sharing their talents. The ban on working has never made sense but it seems particularly self-defeating in the face of a global pandemic.

In May 2020 the Lift the Ban coalition carried out a skills audit with people seeking asylum. Almost half of respondents (45%) reported previous occupations that would fall into the Government's definition of "critical worker" during the Covid-19 pandemic, with 1 in 7 having worked in health or social care. Demonstrating their commitment to contributing to the emergency effort, 77% reported wanting to or having already volunteered to help the NHS.

“ I need to work. I'm a strong woman. I can give many things back to this country. I can work. I am educated so I need to work. I have so many skills”

Kemi

These findings echo a previous Lift the Ban survey that found 94% of respondents would like to work if given permission to do so. Asked about their qualifications, 74% of people told us that they had secondary-level education or higher. Over a third (37%) of those surveyed held an undergraduate or postgraduate university degree, which falls just short of the percentage of the total UK population classed as graduates (42%).⁴⁴ Nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents were working before they came to the UK,⁴⁵ despite the fact that many of their countries of origin have been at war for years, or have some of the world's lowest employment rates. These findings are consistent with a Refugee Council survey

undertaken with Zimbabwean people seeking asylum in 2009, which found that the majority of people surveyed had a high level of education and vocational qualifications.⁴⁶

As a result of current policy, the Government is creating a situation whereby people are forced to live in limbo for long periods of time and are unable to put their talents to use. Their many and varied skills are being wasted, at best; at worst, they are being lost.

“ What pains me, is that back at home I used to work for an international NGO... I could afford anything I wanted at the time. But I am here because I need protection in a foreign country.”

Faith, focus group participant

“ [You feel] useless and like all your experience and education is wasted. That's the feeling I get.”

Elene, focus group participant

In addition to their desire to use their skills, the majority of focus group participants expressed their wish to provide for themselves and their families, rather than being dependent on others, including the government. Many spoke of the contribution that they would be able to make to the UK economy, should they be given the right to work.





“ This experience has made me feel very powerless. I wish I had permission from the government to work, help in any way I could in these really hard moments because these people, the frontline people really are amazing.”

William



OCCUPATIONS SURVEY

Work histories given by 2018 survey participants included:

 **INTERIOR DESIGNER.** BARRISTER. 
HOTEL MANAGER. CAR MECHANIC.
AIRLINE FLIGHT COORDINATOR.
ACCOUNTANT. INSURANCE REPRESENTATIVE.
BANKER. TRAVEL AND TOURISM OPERATOR.
CLERK. PLUMBER. SOLICITOR.  SECRETARY.
FARMER. CLERICAL WORKER.  **LECTURER.**
SUPERMARKET WORKER.  **BUILDER.**
SOCIAL WORKER. SALES EXECUTIVE.
 **GRAPHIC DESIGNER. SHOP OWNER.**
WAITER. **CIVIL SERVANT. JOURNALIST.** 
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY. CASHIER.
TRADER. TELECOMMUNICATIONS ENGINEER.
 **INTERPRETER.** CONSTRUCTION WORKER.
 **SHEPHERD. RESTAURANT OWNER.** 
IMMIGRATION CONTROL OFFICER.
POLITICIAN. PHARMACIST.  **DRIVER.**
 **CALL CENTRE AGENT. SEAMSTRESS.**
 **DENTAL HYGIENIST. BANK TELLER.**
TAILOR. BICYCLE RENTAL AGENT. 
TV & DOCUMENTARY DIRECTOR.
ADMINISTRATOR. GOLD MINER.
 **TOWN PLANNER. TAXI DRIVER.** 
 **SOLDIER. ELECTRICIAN.** 
STATISTICS ASSISTANT. **NURSE.**
FISHERMAN. CAR SHOWROOM MANAGER.
CLEANER. PHARMACEUTICAL ASSISTANT. 
MEDICAL LABORATORY ASSISTANT.
CARTOGRAPHER. SOFTWARE ENGINEER. 
ACCOUNTS EXECUTIVE. BUSINESSMAN.
 **ENGINEER. AIRCRAFT TECHNICIAN.**
 **PETROL COMPANY WORKER. COUNSELLOR.**
FACTORY WORKER. HAIRDRESSER. 
TEACHER. PROCUREMENT OFFICER.

AAMIINA'S STORY



Aamiina has been waiting for four years for a decision on her asylum claim. She studied English and accounting in her native Somalia before getting a good job working for the government. After receiving death threats from terrorist group Al Shabaab, she fled to the UK.

“ People should have a chance to work. Most of the people when they flee their countries, they do so because they have a reason. They don't want to leave, they are happiest when they are at home. But problems happen and that's why they come here.

We should at least have the right to set up our life, to work while we wait. If I got the chance to work, my whole appearance would change. I would be able to smile more, to socialise with people a lot, and I could do so many things.

I believe I can help some people. I would be living a normal life, like anybody else. I can pay tax, pay my rent, do my own shopping. I would live like anybody else.

Being young and healthy is a lifetime opportunity. When you have the opportunity and you can get a job, and you're healthy, I don't see why you would ever just sit and live on benefits. There are many people who come here and work really hard, paying their tax, doing their best.”

“ Working is what's important in life, because when you work, you are active. Your emotions and your body wake up. Whatever job you do, it gives you hope.”

Aamiina said one of the worst things about the asylum process has been the lack of communication. However, she has been able to fill some of her time volunteering with her community. She hopes a positive outcome on her asylum claim will come soon, so she can build her life back, go back to education and support her children.

“ Having a job would make me proud of myself and it would help me because I could support my kids and my mum. I could help feed them.

This would help me sleep at night. I would start to focus on what I can do next, what I can be doing tomorrow. And that would keep my mind busy. I would have responsibilities to take care of and that is a great feeling, something to be proud of.”

3.2 BENEFITING THE UK ECONOMY

As the UK seeks to build back from the unprecedented economic shock of Covid-19, it is assumed that the Government will be seeking out policies that are not only in the interest of society at large but also cost effective where possible. They need look no further than lifting the ban on the right to work for people seeking asylum.



We calculate that a change in policy would result in an economic gain of **£97.8 million per year** for the UK Government, as a result of additional tax revenues and savings. This is based on the amount that the Government would save by not having to provide subsistence (cash) support to people, plus the extra money received by the exchequer through payroll contributions from income tax and National Insurance.⁴⁷ It should be noted that these two elements only show the short-term financial benefits of lifting the ban, as longer-term savings would also accrue when people are better able to integrate, speak the language, and support themselves, including in the period after receiving refugee status when many find themselves homeless, having fallen through the gap between two support systems.

A policy that could put millions back into the public purse, whilst improving people's lives, must be taken seriously. This could never be truer than during a time of economic crisis.

NET BENEFIT TO THE UK ECONOMY OF A CHANGE IN POLICY

■ Low-end estimate

**£22.8
MILLION
PER YEAR**

If 25% of people who are currently waiting more than six months for a decision on their initial asylum application are able to work full time on the national minimum wage, the Government would receive an extra **£10.4 million per year** from their tax and National Insurance contributions.

If they no longer require subsistence (cash) support but retain support for accommodation, the Government would save **£12.4 million per year**.

■ Our estimate

**£97.8
MILLION
PER YEAR**

If 50% of people who are currently waiting more than six months for a decision on their initial asylum application are able to work full time on the national average wage, the Government would receive an extra **£73.1 million per year** from their tax and National Insurance contributions.

If they no longer require subsistence (cash) support but retain support for accommodation, the Government would save **£24.7 million per year**.

■ High-end estimate

**£356.9
MILLION
PER YEAR**

If 100% of people who are currently waiting more than six months for a decision on their initial asylum application are able to work full time on the national average wage, the Government would receive an extra **£146.2 million per year** from their tax and National Insurance contributions.

If they no longer require both subsistence (cash) support and also accommodation support, the Government would save **£210.7 million per year**.

We arrive at this estimate based on the following:

- By March 2020, 31,516 people – main applicants and dependants – were waiting more than six months for a decision on their initial asylum application, and approximately 24,000 people were over 18.⁴⁸
- Assuming that a person seeking asylum works full time (37 hours a week)⁴⁹ on the national minimum wage, they will pay a total tax and National Insurance contribution of £1,727 per year.⁵⁰ If they are paid at the current national average wage, they will pay a total tax and National Insurance contribution of £6,091 per year.⁵¹
- While somebody is awaiting a response on their asylum claim, they are eligible for accommodation and/or subsistence (cash) support if they are destitute or are likely to become destitute within 14 days.⁵²
- Support rates were set at £39.60 per week from June 2020 and the National Audit Office estimates accommodation to cost £560 per month.⁵³ Over a year, therefore, the approximate cost of supporting one person waiting for a decision on their asylum claim is £8,779. Even if we assume that people may need to retain some kind of accommodation support – given the fact that somebody earning the national minimum wage salary is likely to require assistance with paying for their housing, and people seeking asylum are currently not eligible for housing benefit – the Government could still save £2,059 per year for each person that no longer requires subsistence (cash) support and is in employment.⁵⁴

“With the amount of money they are spending on us, they could have let us work, and could have given it to the elderly, supported children, they could have developed the country. How many years have the taxpayers money been wasted on me, when I could have worked?”

July

“I believe that the Government should lift the ban and allow asylum seekers the right to work so that they can support themselves, support their families, and contribute to the society as well. They can always pay tax and the Government will get something in return as well.”

Mary

“I do not want handouts but would like to actively participate to the economy and the community”

Skills audit respondent

“I want to be the engine of this economy, I want to be the part of the team of workers in the UK.”

Skills audit respondent



BUSINESS BACKING

UK businesses strongly back lifting the ban. Polling among over 1,000 business leaders by Survation in 2019⁵⁵ showed that:

67% believed people seeking asylum should have permission to work after waiting six months for a decision on their asylum claim

66% would consider hiring people seeking asylum for a vacancy in their business

66% felt lifting the ban could help ease the skills shortage in the UK

64% believe that people seeking asylum could bring benefits to the workforce in terms of diversity of experience and skills

71% said it would help integration if people seeking asylum were allowed to work

3.3 HELPING PEOPLE TO INTEGRATE

The Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, published in March 2018, set out its ambition "to build strong integrated communities where people - whatever their background - live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities". Just before he became Prime Minister, Boris Johnson echoed this sentiment in stating that "people need to be allowed to take part in the economy and in society in the way that shared experience would allow".⁵⁶

The Green Paper included increasing the integration support given to people recognised as refugees after their arrival in the UK. Yet the current policy excluding people seeking asylum from working undermines attempts to ensure that they are able to effectively integrate once they are granted refugee status. Indeed, discussing refugees' access to the UK labour market, one leading academic in asylum and refugee policy refers to what she calls the "inherent contradiction between UK refugee integration strategies that focus on employment... and restrictive government policies that negatively affect access to the labour market."⁵⁷ Such restrictive policies include those which limit access to the labour market for people seeking asylum.

Employment is widely seen as one of the most important factors in securing migrant integration.⁵⁸ And, in addition to the direct benefits that work brings to people's ability to integrate, employment may have indirect benefits for other key areas of integration, for instance learning the language.⁵⁹ Early intervention, moreover - including early labour market integration - has been consistently shown to be key for successful integration.⁶⁰ Policies that see integration starting at 'Day 1', as soon as somebody arrives in the UK, are therefore likely to be more effective than those which consider integration to begin only when somebody has been granted refugee status.⁶¹

Evidence suggests that, when people seeking asylum are subject to extended periods during which their access to the labour market is restricted, their economic integration is slowed. One study put the cost of a pre-2000 employment ban for people seeking asylum in Germany at €40 million per year on average in terms of welfare expenditures and forgone tax revenues from unemployed refugees.⁶² The study also found that the longer the employment ban, the worse the subsequent employment trajectories of refugees. It referred to "an influential early integration window", where the period following arrival proves significant in determining subsequent integration trends, and where "early investments

yield disproportionate integration returns." This is consistent with a study of people seeking asylum in Switzerland, which showed that the longer somebody waits for a decision on their asylum claim, the lower their subsequent chances of finding employment.⁶³

Currently, without the right to undertake many basic everyday activities, and receiving under £6 per day to live on, sometimes for years, many people claiming asylum lose hope that they will ever be able to rebuild their lives. Furthermore, the impact of the asylum process, and the long delays that people are often subject to, do not vanish for them and their families when refugee status is granted. For those waiting to receive a decision, after a long period of exclusion from mainstream services and the job market, their ability to rebuild their lives will have been damaged.

“ Just let us work straight away. This would be the best thing for everyone - it builds your confidence, you wouldn't even feel the situation - sitting home all day not being able to do anything is so difficult.”

July

Waiting a long time for a decision on an asylum application means that people will struggle to make up for lost time in the jobs market when they are eventually granted status. One former solicitor we spoke to as part of the focus groups, for instance, was worried about her employment prospects after having waited for a decision on her asylum claim for five years:

“ I'm worried about my future job because of these five years that I lost. When you're applying for a job it is important for employers if you have experience; so this five year gap that I have, I've tried my best to fill this gap. But I had no chance to work in my profession... I would not be so worried if I had had the opportunity to [study], but now I don't think I will find a job that is suitable for my education because of my lack of experience working in this country.”

Moreover, whilst people are permitted to volunteer for a charity or public sector organisation while they await a decision on their asylum application, there are few other opportunities for them to develop their skills or to improve their employability prospects. This includes the chance to learn English, as people seeking asylum are not eligible for government-funded English language teaching until they have waited six months for a decision on their asylum application, at which time they receive only partial funding to cover 50% of the course.⁶⁴

“ I have lost my sense of identity with the society, and I do not know how to socialise with my peers. It’s demoralising and my confidence has never been lower.”

Olivia

The Government’s current approach excludes people from the labour market from an early stage, ostensibly to prevent the integration of those who are not recognised as needing protection. But the actual outcome of current policy merely serves to set back the subsequent integration of those who are granted refugee status. Attempts to ensure earlier integration – including in the labour market – would mean that people are better able to integrate into their new homes and communities, at an earlier stage.

71%

**PUBLIC
SUPPORT
FOR CHANGE**



Polling undertaken in 2018 with a wide cross-section of the UK population showed that **71%** of people polled agreed with the statement:

When people come to the UK seeking asylum it is important they integrate, learn English and get to know people. It would help integration if asylum-seekers were allowed to work if their claim takes more than six months to process.

The statement united people whose views on migration otherwise vary widely – **with only 8% of those polled disagreeing** – as well as those with different views on key political topics such as Brexit: **63% of Leave voters** and **78% of Remain voters** agreed that asylum-seekers should be allowed to work.⁶⁵

Furthermore, a poll in June 2020 found that **73% of Scots** agree that people seeking asylum should be allowed to work to support themselves and their families.⁶⁶



3.4 ALLOWING PEOPLE TO LIVE IN DIGNITY

“ I want to work because it gives me the feeling of being someone. I want to work because I don't want to look back after five or 10 years and realise I did little except sit alone in a room and wait for a decision on my asylum claim.”

Farhat

There are various factors that define our identities, and work is clearly a very significant one. An intentional policy of restricting people's access to the labour market for months and sometimes years is certain to have a significant and harmful impact on those people's sense of pride and dignity. Indeed, research supports the idea that work contributes to people's well-being: one analysis carried out by the Office for National Statistics in 2014 showed that people whose total household income consists of a high proportion of cash benefits, regardless of the actual level of that income, are likely to experience lower life satisfaction, lower ratings for the perception that the things one does in life are worthwhile, lower happiness, and higher anxiety.⁶⁷

During focus groups we held to discuss work with people who have first-hand experience of the asylum process, employment was frequently identified as a central part of their identities, and a fundamental part of their humanity:

“ I want to work in this country because I want to find my identity. My identity is my work, my identity is my job. If I can work, I can improve my life and I can help other people. I will be happy and confident.”

Ahmed, focus group participant

Participants told us that being denied the right to work is “degrading” and marked them out from others, meaning that they lost respect for themselves. Several people told us they no longer felt human:

“ Being here, we are not working, it's like we've been put to one side, as if we are not human beings. The way they treat us like we are nobody, we are animals.”

Martha, focus group participant

Others spoke about how it had felt to live on under £6 per day, which is the financial support that people in the asylum system receive. Indeed, **over half (52%) of survey respondents told us that they had used a food bank at some point in the past year**,⁶⁸ which gives a sense of the degree of poverty that people are currently living in.

“ It is humiliating not being able to work, as you can barely afford food and simple things like tampons are very hard to buy when you are an asylum seeker. Now with the pandemic charity shops have been closed. We can barely afford to buy clothes in the big shops. It's hard, it's hard for everyone.”

Mary

Several parents spoke of the shame they felt in not being able to provide for their families and children, and the impact this was having on their mental health. In particular, people told us that their children did not understand why they were staying at home every day, instead of going to work like other people's parents, and they were afraid that this would result in their children losing respect for them.





“ I was just crying the whole time. I just wanted to kill myself. People keep coming, trying to give you things. Come on, I have my hands. Let me work and get the things for myself. I can even help other people, I don't need people helping me.”

Hope

3.5 ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

There is considerable evidence to suggest a strong and positive link between employment and mental health. Data from the NHS, for instance, shows that employed adults are less likely to have a common mental health problem than those who are economically inactive or unemployed.⁶⁹

Research also suggests a link between unemployment and depression, with the latter worsening when people lack the support networks provided by friends and families.⁷⁰ Many people claiming asylum will be in this position, having left their support networks behind when fleeing their countries. Even after arriving in the UK, people may be 'dispersed' to an unknown part of the country – thus moving them away from friends, acquaintances, community organisations and specialist support services – if they are unable to pay for their own accommodation and require support from the Home Office to avoid being left destitute. Indeed, research into mental health outcomes in people seeking asylum has shown that unemployed people in the asylum system were more than twice as likely to have major depressive disorder.⁷¹

“ I want to work, look after my family and contribute to the economy. It's even more difficult in this pandemic. I don't want my depression to deteriorate because I don't want to be looked after - I want to look after my children.”

Rukayat

Another study undertaken in Australia in 2013 with 29 people seeking asylum, who had no right to work, found that:

“ When our interviewees were asked to identify the biggest challenges they faced now they were living in the community, not having the right to work was the most common answer... Being without the right to work creates forced unemployment... Even though many of those we interviewed were trying to structure their days with some of the very few activities available and affordable to them, spending waking hours with very little to do was compounding the mental distress of their other major concerns.”

Similarly, during recent research undertaken in the UK by Refugee Action into the experiences of people going through the asylum system, being deprived of the right to work was identified as one of the main challenges for people waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.⁷² Giving people the right to work could therefore go some way to improving the mental health outcomes of those going through the asylum process.

3.6 CHALLENGING FORCED LABOUR AND EXPLOITATION

During a speech to the United National General Assembly in September 2017, then-Prime Minister Theresa May set out the UK Government's intention to eradicate forced labour and modern slavery.⁷³ Boris Johnson reiterated this commitment in his first speech to the House of Commons as Prime Minister⁷⁴ and the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, has emphasised that the Government wants to stop the "exploitation of vulnerable individuals".⁷⁵

There is good reason to believe that a change in policy which allows people seeking asylum to work could help in the fight against forced labour. Long periods spent in poverty, without the right to work, make people more vulnerable to exploitation, including exploitative labour.

One study that explored experiences of forced labour among people seeking asylum in England found that "the experience of severely exploitative labour, including forced labour, is often unavoidable for refugees and asylum seekers in order to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families."⁷⁶

The OECD has also found that legal barriers to employment risk people resorting to informal work.⁷⁷ Giving people seeking asylum permission to work earlier in the process may help to tackle this, thus helping to reinforce the Government's efforts to end forced labour and exploitation.

“ One time, this rich-looking man said to me: 'I am assuming you are an asylum seeker. You're a beautiful woman, if you had a man look after you like me, you would look better and be happier.' I said, 'What's that to you?' and left. Imagine if, at that point – at my weakest point in life – I would have said yes to him. What would have happened to me? Would I have been turned into a prostitute or used by different men? But sometimes... there were times, when I needed money, and I would say: 'what if?'"

Faith, focus group participant





TEEM'S STORY

Teem has refugee status and now runs his own fashion label. During the Covid-19 pandemic he has been using his skills to give back to his community, making scrubs for NHS staff, selling masks for the public and using the proceeds to make others for people seeking asylum. He has also been volunteering with the NHS.

However, Teem remembers the trauma of waiting for a decision on his claim and the confusion of being granted permission to work after 12 months, but not being able to get a job because his profession was not on the Government's shortage occupation list.

“ Normally, after one year you can apply for permission to work, and I was granted permission to work but you can't do anything with it. People are entitled to apply so they get it but then there is the list of jobs that you can apply for – if you don't fit the jobs then you don't get a job. So, I don't know what the purpose of having it is.

I was over the moon when I got my permission to work. I was so happy. I started ringing recruitment offices and started looking for work. But then I got an interview and I got a job in retail again and the employer called me to say that they rang the Home Office and they declined the permission to work because I am not allowed to work in retail.

People try to understand what is meant by 'hostile environment' – this is what they mean by hostile environment. You put people to live where they want them to live and then you tell them they can apply for permission to work but then you impose restrictions on that – knowing that no one would get a job. So what is the point of giving people that hope? For me, it is hostility. It is giving people hope and then knocking them down. It kills your confidence and destroys you mentally.”

Teem was a student in the UK. However, he is a gay man and from a country where it is not legal. He claimed asylum in the UK. He had been working and had money, but applying for asylum pulled him out of the job market and a life of relative comfort into one of destitution.

“ I had hope that in six months something good will happen. But then six months came and nothing, a year gone and nothing came. Two years later – I was refused. When I became an asylum seeker, I had a laptop, an iPhone, an iPad, nice clothes, nice shoes – but then I had to sell everything. I had run out of money and I was not going to ask people for money. I sold everything to pay for rent and everything.

I only claimed [asylum support] a year after I claimed asylum. Because I didn't want to live on benefits. I have no words to explain how difficult and crazy it is to live on £37 a week. And I used to earn £2,000 a month.

What a waste of money it is for the Government to pay for all these asylum seekers – to pay my accommodation and benefits – how much is this costing the economy and the public [finances]?

Working gives you a sense of responsibility, it takes your mind off everything. You are busy, you are earning money – you could do your own thing. You could buy food and clothes freely.”

4. CONCLUSION

A POPULAR AND EVIDENCE-BASED CASE FOR CHANGE

The Lift the Ban coalition is calling on the UK Government to give people seeking asylum and their adult dependants the right to work:

- ➔ unconstrained by the Shortage Occupation List, and
- ➔ after they have waited six months for a decision on their initial asylum claim or further submission.

A policy change that gave people seeking asylum the right to work would be both pragmatic and popular. There is strong public support for giving people seeking asylum the right to work – with 71% of a wide cross-section of the UK population agreeing that if people were allowed to work after waiting for six months for a decision on their asylum claim, this would help them to better integrate. And lifting the ban could also be beneficial to the UK economy, leading to a potential net gain for the Exchequer of £97.8 million.

People seeking asylum want to work. Currently, they go to enormous lengths to volunteer and study, often walking hours every day to attend courses run by voluntary organisations – because taking the bus could mean that they cannot afford to eat that day. If they had the right to work earlier in their asylum process, people would be better able to live in dignity, fulfil their potential, and have the best possible chance of integration into their new communities.

“ I don't want to sleep. I had dreams in my own country but I couldn't do that because of the war [and the] fighting. But I want to do that here. I have the chance [but] I can't do that if I can't work. When I stay at home alone, I can't stop thinking. I need something to do. I want to do things to make me feel better.”

Survey respondent



ENDNOTES

- 1 'Immigration Rules Appendix K: shortage occupation list', available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-k-shortage-occupation-list>
- 2 House of Commons (24 October 2018) vol. 648, Col. 143WH, available at: <https://bit.ly/2OZnasP>
- 3 Home Office Topical Questions (15 July 2019) vol. 663, Col. 584, available at: <https://bit.ly/3fFEAUl>
- 4 An individual whose asylum claim has been refused or withdrawn, and has exhausted their appeals rights, may submit new evidence to support their claim. This is called a 'further submission'. See 'Submit new evidence to support your asylum claim' on gov.uk website, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/submit-new-evidence-asylum-claim>
- 5 See 1
- 6 Whilst public figures for the numbers of people granted permission to work are not available, (See Home Office Written Questions (17 December 2018) 202855, available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-12-17/202855/>) the experience of Lift the Ban coalition members – who work with people seeking asylum on a daily basis – suggests that these numbers are extremely low. The results from our survey support this assertion.
- 7 See Migration Advisory Committee (2019) 'Full Review of the Shortage Occupation List', available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806331/28_05_2019_Full_Review_SOL_Final_Report_1159.pdf
- 8 House of Commons (23 July 2002), vol. 389, Col. 1041W, available at: <https://bit.ly/32j55vc>
- 9 See Immigration statistics data tables, year ending March 2020, 'Asylum applications awaiting a decision' data set on gov.uk website, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets>
- 10 Ibid. Percentage calculated using stats for March each year.
- 11 A systematic review of research into the relationship between labour market access for people seeking asylum and the numbers of asylum applications received, published in 2016, found that not one study reviewed has found a long term correlation between labour market access and destination choice. See Lucy Mayblin and Poppy James (2016) 'Labour market access for asylum seekers', Policy Briefing: 03/16.2, available at: <https://asylumwelfarework.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/is-access-to-the-labour-market-a-pull-factor-for-asylum-seekers-long.pdf>
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Ibid. See also Vaughan Robinson and Jeremy Segrott (2002) 'Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers', Home Office Research Study 243 (London) and Heaven Crawley (2010) 'Chance or choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK', British Refugee Council (London), available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0001/5702/rcchance.pdf>
- 14 See for instance Roger Zetter, David Griffiths, Silva Ferretti, Martyn Pearl (2003) 'An Assessment of the Impact of Asylum Policies in Europe 1990- 2000', Home Office Research Study 259; Thomas Holzer, Gerald Schneider, and Thomas Widmer (2000) '#The Impact of Legislative Deterrence Measures on the Number of Asylum Seekers in Switzerland (1986-1995)', International Migration Review, 34(4): 1182-216; Eric Neumayer (2005) 'Bogus refugees? The determinants of asylum migration to western Europe', International Studies Quarterly, 49(3): 389- 409.
- 15 The remaining 12% either answered 'Don't Know/Can't Remember' or did not answer the question.
- 16 Mayblin and James (2016) 'Labour market access for asylum seekers', op cit.
- 17 Lithuania and Hungary enforce a complete ban on working.
- 18 For almost all see Asylum Information Database country reports at <https://www.asylumineurope.org/>; for USA see Gower, M. (2019) 'Should asylum seekers have unrestricted rights to work in the UK?', HC 1908, available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01908/>; for Australia see Deakin University, Australian National University, MONASH University, CareerSeekers New Australian Internship Program, 'A Guide for Employers: supporting access to employment for those from a refugee or asylum seeking background', 2018, available at: http://deakincreate.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2019/02/DEA_GuideforEmployers_RefugeesAsylumSeekers_AMEND01_WEB.pdf; and for Canada see Government of Canada (4 November 2019) 'Claiming asylum in Canada – what happens?', available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2017/03/claiming_asylum_incanadawhathappens.html
- 19 Refugee Council of Australia, 'I have a Bridging Visa' factsheet, available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/bridging-visas-info/>
- 20 Deakin University, Australian National University, MONASH University, CareerSeekers New Australian Internship Program, 'A Guide for Employers: supporting access to employment for those from a refugee or asylum seeking background', 2018, available at: http://deakincreate.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2019/02/DEA_GuideforEmployers_RefugeesAsylumSeekers_AMEND01_WEB.pdf
- 21 Asylum Information Database country report for Spain, available at: https://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_es_2019update.pdf
- 22 The Danish Immigration Service (2018) 'Conditions asylum seekers must meet in order to work', available at: <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/US/Housing/Conditions-asylum-seekers-must-meet-in-order-to-work>
- 23 The Danish Immigration Service (2020), 'Conditions for asylum seekers', available at: <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/You-are-waiting-for-an-answer/Asylum/Conditions-for-asylum-seekers>
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- 26 See Government of Ireland, 'Labour Market Access for International Protection applicants' LMA7, available at: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/form-LMA7.pdf/Files/form-LMA7.pdf>
- 27 Ibid
- 28 Ibid
- 29 Government of Ireland (30 June 2019) 'Ministers Flanagan and Stanton observe first anniversary of labour market access for asylum seekers', available at: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR19000179>
- 30 Asylum Information Database country report for Republic of Ireland, available at: <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/republic-ireland>
- 31 See 24
- 32 EMN Sweden (2018) 'EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2017 Report', available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/17a_sweden_arm_part2_2017_en_0.pdf
- 33 Swedish Migration Agency (26 June 2020) 'Working while you are an asylum seeker', available at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Working.html>

ENDNOTES

- 34 See 32
- 35 Swedish Migration Agency (28 February 2020) 'Activities while you are waiting for a decision' available at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Activities-while-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision.html>
- 36 Ibid
- 37 Government of Canada (4 November 2019) 'Claiming asylum in Canada - what happens?', available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2017/03/claiming_asylum_incanadawhathappens.html
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- 39 HC Canada (29 May 2019) CIMM-112, available at: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/cimm/meeting-112/evidence>
- 40 Of 283 respondents, 133 answered this question
- 41 Of 283 respondents, 133 answered this question. Of these 133 respondents: 14 worked in social care; 7 worked in health care
- 42 Of 283 respondents, 133 answered this question
- 43 Of the total number of survey responses (246), 27 responses that did not include this question (i.e. the question was not posed as not included on the survey version) have been discounted. The remaining 10 respondents either left their answers blank or answered 'Don't Know'.
- 44 Office for National Statistics (2017) 'Graduates in the UK labour market: 2017', available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/graduatesintheuklabourmarket/2017>
- 45 This percentage only includes the 215 respondents who told us that they had been 18 or over when they arrived in the UK
- 46 See Lisa Doyle (2009) 'I hate being idle': Wasted skills and enforced dependence among Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK', Refugee Council, available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/I_hate_being_idle.pdf
- 47 The calculations used in this section are based on analysis by Global Future for the 2018 Lift The Ban report
- 48 See 9
- 49 Full time working hours are not clearly specified in law and can be anything over 35 hours. However, ONS data for Jan-March 2020 pegs this at 37 hours. See Office for National Statistics (2020) 'Average actual weekly hours of work for full-time workers (seasonally adjusted)', available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/timeseries/ybuy/lms>
- 50 Minimum wage in this case is taken as £8.72 per hour, since this is the minimum wage applicable to most adults. This would give annual earnings of £16,777.28, with a taxable income of £4,277.28. At a 20% rate this would equal annual tax of £855.46. Similarly, for the same level of earnings, at the National Insurance (NI) rate of 12% would give an annual NI payment of £871.52. Thus, an overall contribution of tax and NI of £1,727 (rounded up).
- 51 Latest ONS statistics show that the median gross annual earnings ('average wage') for full time employees is £30,414.80. See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2019> This would give a taxable income of £17,914.80 at 20% tax rate, equaling an annual tax of £3,582.96. Similarly, for the same level of earnings, the NI rate of 12% would give an annual payment of £2,507.96. Thus, an overall contribution of tax and NI of £6,091 (rounded up).
- 52 See Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, section 95, available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/33/contents>
- 53 See National Audit Office (2020) 'Asylum Accommodation and Support', available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Asylum-accommodation-and-support.pdf>
- 54 Given that people seeking asylum are currently not eligible for mainstream benefits, housing benefit will not be available to them. Many people in work are unable to afford housing costs without extra assistance, and this is likely to be the case for people seeking asylum who are given permission to work and find employment. Other countries have addressed this issue in a range of ways; in the Netherlands, for instance, if people seeking asylum who are staying in state-run reception facilities find employment, they are requested to contribute a certain amount of money towards their accommodation costs. In this case, where somebody is working, it is unlikely that the state would take on the entire cost of their accommodation. For the sake of simplicity, however, we assume here that the entire cost would continue to rest with the UK government.
- 55 Polling conducted by Survation among 1,006 UK business leaders for Refugee Action and the Lift The Ban coalition between April-May 2019, published Aug 2019, available at: <https://www.survation.com/majority-67-of-british-business-leaders-surveyed-agree-that-people-seeking-asylum-should-be-able-to-work-after-waiting-6-months-for-a-decision/>
- 56 Jeffrey, M (6 July 2019), 'Boris Johnson calls for all immigrants to learn English and criticises lack of integration', Politics Home, available at: <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/boris-johnson-calls-for-all-immigrants-to-learn-english-and-criticises-lack-of-integration>
- 57 Alice Bloch (2008) 'Refugees in the UK labour market: The conflict between economic integration and policy-led labour market restriction', *Journal of Social Policy*, 37(1): 21-36.
- 58 For relevant literature see Lucy Mayblin (2014) 'Asylum, welfare and work: Reflections on research in asylum and refugee studies', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 34(5/6): 375-391. A survey of 207 migrants undertaken in 2018 by Migrants Resource Centre asked people where they learn the most about British community and values. By far the most popular response was 'in the workplace'; 43% of survey respondents chose this reply, whereas the second most popular responses - 'in your neighbourhood and community' and 'through mainstream media' - received only 15% of responses each. See Migrants Resource Centre (2018) 'Integrated Communities Strategy: MRC submission of evidence and response to the government green paper consultation', available at: https://www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MRC-response_Integrated-Communities-Strategy_final1.pdf
- 59 Language learning appears to be more successful when the learner has a particular motivation (for instance employment) to learn. See for instance David Lasagabaster, Aintzane Doiz and Juan Manuel Sierra (eds.) (2014) 'Motivation and Foreign Language Learning: From theory to practice' (John Benjamins Publishing: Philadelphia). Research also shows that unemployed adult students face obstacles - including to language learning - "because they feel emotionally and personally detached from a society that has rejected them, leaving them professionally and economically inactive." See Sergio Bernal Castaneda (2017) 'Lifelong learning and limiting factors in second language acquisition for adult students in post-obligatory education', *Cogent Psychology* 4(1).

- 60 See OECD (2017) 'Finding their Way: Labour market integration of refugees in Germany' (OECD, Paris), available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Finding-their-Way-Germany.pdf> ; also OECD (2014) 'International Migration Outlook 2014' (OECD, Paris), available at: https://hidacipes.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/OECD_IMO-20141.pdf ; also OECD (2016) 'Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection' (OECD, Paris), available at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants_9789264251236-en#page69
- 61 The 2018-2022 New Scots Integration Strategy, for instance, talks of the importance of integration from Day One: "The key principle of the New Scots strategy is that refugees and asylum seekers should be supported to integrate into communities from day one of arrival, and not just once leave to remain has been granted." Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/01/7281>
- 62 Moritz Marbach, Jens Hainmueller and Dominik Hangartner (2018) 'The Long-Term Impact of Employment Bans on the Economic Integration of Refugees', *Science Advances* 4(9).
- 63 Jens Hainmueller, Dominik Hangartner and Duncan Lawrence (2016) 'When lives are put on hold: Lengthy asylum processes decrease employment among refugees', *Science Advances* 2(8).
- 64 Refugee Action (2016) 'Let Refugees Learn: Challenges and opportunities to improve language provision to refugees in England', available at: <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/letrefugeeslearnfullreport.pdf> . Fully-funded courses are sometimes provided at the discretion of colleges.
- 65 Jill Rutter and Rosie Carter (2018) 'National Conversation on Immigration: Final report', available at: <http://www.britishfuture.org/articles/national-conversation-final-report/>
- 66 Survation carried out a poll with a representative sample of over 1,000 Scottish residents, online, 9-15 June 2020. See <https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/survey-shows-desire-for-new-approach-to-refugee-protection-in-scotland/>
- 67 See Office for National Statistics (2014) 'Income, Expenditure and Personal Well-being, 2011/12', available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160107224013/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_365207.pdf
- 68 Nineteen of the total number of survey responses (246) were discounted as the question had been removed from the versions of the survey they completed. Of the remaining 227 responses, 119 people replied that they had used a foodbank; 99 responded that they had not. The remaining respondents either answered 'Don't Know/Can't Remember' or left the response blank.
- 69 See the 2007 and 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Surveys, which look at the mental health and wellbeing of people in England, available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey> . Also see Sally McManus, Paul Bebbington, Rachel Jenkins and Traolach Brugha (eds.) (2016) 'Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014' (NHS Digital: Leeds), available at: https://files.digital.nhs.uk/pdf/q/3/mental_health_and_wellbeing_in_england_full_report.pdf
- 70 Margaret Linn, Richard Sandifer and Shayna Stein (1985) 'Effects on unemployment on mental and physical health', *American Journal of Public Health* 75(5): 502-506.
- 71 Debbie Hocking, Gerard Kennedy and Suresh Sundram (2015) 'Mental Disorders in Asylum Seekers: The Role of the Refugee Determination Process and Employment', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 203(1): 28-32.
- 72 Refugee Action (2018) 'Waiting in the Dark: How the asylum system dehumanises, disempowers and damages', available at: <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Waiting-in-the-Dark-Report.pdf>
- 73 See 'PM speech to UNGA on modern slavery; 'behind these numbers are real people', available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-to-unga-on-modern-slavery-behind-these-numbers-are-real-people>
- 74 House of Commons (25 July 2019) vol.663, Col. 1458, available at: <https://bit.ly/30VeAwC>
- 75 House of Commons (23 October 2019, vol. 666, Col. 981, available at: <https://bit.ly/2CCle4b>
- 76 Hannah Lewis et al. (2013) *Precarious lives: Experiences of forced labour among refugees and asylum seekers in England*, Research Report, University of Leeds.
- 77 OECD (2016) 'Making Integration Work', op cit.

THE LIFT THE BAN COALITION MEMBERS

A

ACH (Ashley Community Housing)
Abigail Housing
Action for Refugees
Action for Refugees in Lewisham
Action Foundation
Adam Smith Institute
Advance Myanmar
Afghan Association
African Rainbow Family
Anti Slavery International UK
ASSIST Sheffield
Asylum Link Merseyside
Asylum Matters
Aurora Textile Collective

B

Baobab
Barking & Dagenham Council for Voluntary Service
Barnsley Borough of Sanctuary
Beacon Bradford
Bearwood Action for Refugees
Ben & Jerry's
BIASAN
Birmingham City Council
Birmingham Community Law Centre
Blackburn YMCA
Boaz Trust
Bradford City of Sanctuary
Bread & Roses
Breadwinners
Bright Blue
Bright Minds, Big Futures
Bristol Hospitality Network
Bristol Refugee Rights
British Future
British Red Cross
Burma Campaign UK
The Business Group Salford

C

CARAG (Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group)
Caras
CBI
Centre
The Centre for Entrepreneurs
Child Poverty Action Group
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
CIPD
Citizens Advice North Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent

City of Sanctuary
CLEAR
Code Your Future
Community Arts North West
Community Foundation Northern Ireland
Community Links
Community Organisers
Consonant
Coventry City Council
Coventry Cyrenians
Coventry Independent Advice Service
Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre
Cranhill Development Trust
Creative Youth Network
Crisis
Croydon Refugee Forum

D

DASH - Huddersfield
Derby City of Sanctuary
Displaced People in Action
Doctors of the World

E

ECPAT UK
Entraide
Escape the City
Ethnic Youth Support Team

F

Fatima House
First Wednesday LGBT Asylum Support Group
Freedom from Torture
Freedom United
Friends of the Drop in for Asylum Seekers and Refugees
Friends without Borders

G

Gateshead City Council
Global Future
Global Link
Good Chance Theatre
Greater Lincolnshire Area of Sanctuary
Greater Manchester Humanists
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
Growing Points
Growing Together Levenshulme

H

Hartlepool Asylum Seekers and Refugee Group
Hartlepool Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Hastings City of Sanctuary
Hay, Brecon & Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees
Helen Bamber Foundation
Help Refugees
Help the Homeless - University of Liverpool
Home4U
Hope at Home
Human Rights Consortium Scotland

I

IARS International Institute
Ice and Fire Theatre Group
IMIX

J

JCORE (The Jewish Council for Racial Equality)
Jesuit Refugee Service
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
Joint Policy Issues Team (Church of Scotland, United Reformed Church, Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church)
Just Fair

K

Kalayaan

L

Law Centre NI
Law Centres Network
Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network
Leeds City of Sanctuary
Leeds Refugee Forum
Lesbian Immigration Support Group
Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Liberty
Local Welcome
London Network of Churches
Look Ahead
LSGMigrants

M

Made in Roath
Mafwa Theatre
Manchester Migrant Solidarity
Manchester Refugee Support
Network
Maryhill Integration Network
Meeting Point
Micro Rainbow International
Micro Rainbow
Middlesbrough Council
Middlesbrough Voluntary
Development Agency
Mid Wales Refugee Action
Migrant Rights Network
Migrant Voice
Migrants Organise
Migrants Organising For Rights
and Empowerment
Migration Matters Festival
Migrateful
Migration and Asylum Justice
MOTHERSHIP

N

NACCOM
NASUWT
NEU
The New Journey Foundation
Newcastle City Council
Newcastle Council for Voluntary
Service
No More Traffik
North East Law Centre
North of England Refugee
Service
Northern Ireland Community of
Refugees & Asylum-Seekers
Northumberland County of
Sanctuary
Nottingham Refugee Forum

O

Oasis Cardiff
Olmec
Open Door North East
Oxfam
Oxfam Cymru

P

PAFRAS
The Peter Tatchell Foundation
Phosphorus Theatre
Positive Action in Housing
Praxis

Q

Quakers

R

Race on the Agenda
RAMP
RAS Voice
Reading Refugee Support Group
Recruitment & Employment
Confederation
Redcar & Cleveland Council
Refugee & Migrant Forum of
Essex and London - RAMFEL
Refugee Action
Refugee and Me
Refugee and Migrant Centre
Refugee Council
Refugee Education for Equal
Employment Opportunities
(REFEO)
Refugee Rights Europe
Refugee Survival Trust
Refugee Women Connect
Regional Refugee Forum North
East
Restore
RETAS Leeds
Right to Remain
Migrants at Work (AKA Right to
Work UK)
Ripon City of Sanctuary
Riverside Community Health
Project
Roma Project
Romanac Consulting Ltd
Room to Heal
Routes
Runnymede Trust

S

Salford Voluntary & Community
Services
Salvation Army
Scottish Homelessness Network
Scottish Refugee Council
Shiva Foundation
Shpresa Programme
Sisters United
Social Workers without Borders
Sona Circle
South Yorkshire Migration
and Asylum Action Group
Southampton Action
Space4U
Speak Street
St. Augustine's Centre Halifax

St. Chad's Sanctuary
St. Vincent de Paul Society
Bradford
Stories of Hope and Home
Stroud District Council
Student Action for Refugees
Swansea City of Sanctuary
SWAP Wigan
SWVG

T

Tai Pawb
Tees Lanka
Tees Valley of Sanctuary
TGP Cymru
The Bike Project
The Church at Carrs Lane
The Entrepreneurial Refugee
Network
The Entrepreneurs Network
The Sanctuary Refugee Welcome
Group Newport
The Sophie Hayes Foundation
The Trussell Trust
The Welcoming
TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol
Cymru/Together Creating
Communities)
Trinity Centre Canolfan y
Drindod
TUC

U

UKLGIG
Unison
Unseen

V

Veeloop
Voices Network
VONNE

W

Waging Peace
War on Want
Welsh Refugee Coalition
Welsh Refugee Council
Women for Refugee Women
WomenCentre

Y

Young Roots

lifttheban@asylummatters.org

www.lifttheban.co.uk

[#LiftTheBan](https://twitter.com/LiftTheBan)

