

Challenging Myths and Misinformation about Asylum-seekers and Refugees



NCCRI



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



There is a growing tendency to equate refugees at best with economic migrants, and at worst with cheats, criminals or even terrorists.

Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan



Challenging Myths and Misinformation

This leaflet sets out to challenge some of the most recurring myths and misinformation about asylum-seekers and refugees in Ireland.

The UN Refugee Convention, which Ireland ratified, defines who is a refugee and implicitly supports the right to seek asylum, which is one of the fundamental rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A refugee is a person who is forced to leave his/her country due to a well-founded fear of persecution, and who is unable to return to his/her home country for reasons related to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Ireland has a legal responsibility to determine who is a refugee and to extend its protection to such a person.

An asylum-seeker who has entered Ireland and lodged an application in the asylum process has a legal entitlement to stay in Ireland at least until it can be concluded whether he/she is a refugee. This process can take time, but once concluded, if a person is recognised as a refugee, he/she will be allowed to stay in Ireland for safety and will be given rights under Irish law which are close to those of an Irish citizen.

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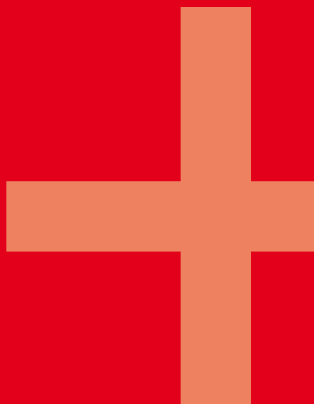
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Numbers Seeking Asylum in Ireland

There has been a significant decrease in the numbers seeking asylum in Ireland in recent years. In reality:

- Around 320,000 people have come to live and work in Ireland over the last 5 years. Asylum-seekers are the smallest category of migrants entering Ireland.
 - During the same 5 year period, the number of applications for asylum were close to 33,000.
 - In 2006, 199,850 people sought asylum in European Union countries. Only 2% of the applications were made in Ireland (4,310 people). There has been a 63% decrease in asylum applications in Ireland since 2002.
 - Over 650 recommendations were made for refugees to be recognised in Ireland in 2006. These people would be persecuted and their lives and freedom would be in danger if they were forced to return home.
 - At the end of 2006, there were 8,500 recognised refugees in Ireland.
 - Returning home in safety and dignity is the solution best preferred by refugees. For example, the majority of the Kosovars who were given safety in Ireland in 1999 voluntarily returned home when it was safe.
 - Many refugees, unable to return home, are working and contributing their skills to Ireland's rapid growth and economic success.
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Offensive Labels

Offensive labels have been applied to asylum-seekers, claiming that they are “bogus” and work-shy and out to abuse and exploit the asylum and welfare system.

The use of “bogus” ignores the fact that many asylum-seekers are eventually recognised as refugees. Many more are allowed to remain in Ireland because of serious concern about the harm that might come to them if forced to return to difficult political or social circumstances where the violation of human rights are known to exist, or there is ongoing armed conflict.

It is also important to consider the following facts:

- By law, asylum-seekers are not allowed to work, although many would like to. Only recognised refugees are allowed to take up employment.
- Asylum-seekers are housed in accommodation centers across the country, where they receive food and a small cash payment of €19.10 per adult or €9.60 per child each week.
- Many asylum-seekers become active volunteers in their local communities while waiting for decisions on their applications.
- Asylum-seekers are not entitled to go on public housing lists.
- When recognised, refugees must move from their asylum accommodation centres. If they are unable to pay for accommodation, they can apply for assistance or for the public housing waiting list the same as Irish nationals. They are assessed on the same criteria as others.
- Neither asylum-seekers nor refugees receive free mobile phones or cars from the State, as some inaccurate reports have suggested.

Respect for the Law

Asylum-seekers and refugees in Ireland all have the duty to obey Irish law, like everyone else. There are no exceptions to this.

- There is no evidence that the rate of crime is higher among asylum-seekers or refugees than in the population as a whole.
- Asylum-seekers and refugees are also the victims of crime, including sometimes violent assault and harassment.

The Asylum Process

All asylum-seekers entering Ireland are interviewed by special asylum bodies, with trained staff and access to interpreters.

- A fair and efficient asylum process is one way a country can ensure it meets its obligations under international law to protect refugees.
- UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) provides training and advice to Irish asylum bodies, when requested.
- After a fair examination of an asylum claim, if it is decided that a person is not a refugee nor in need of protection, then the State has the right to deport the person.
- All asylum-seekers in Ireland can appeal a negative first decision, in accordance with due process. Legal assistance is provided to asylum-seekers. Approximately 40% of refugee status recommendations in 2006 were given after asylum-seekers successfully appealed a first decision in their cases.

- Anyone who has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a serious non-political crime is excluded from being recognised as a refugee.

Other Useful Information

- **Subsidiary Protection**

The EU has a Directive on Subsidiary Protection, which obliges Ireland to give protection to people who are not strictly refugees according to the UN Refugee Convention, but who would face serious harm if returned to situations where there is general violence because of armed conflict, or if returned they would face the death penalty, execution, torture, or other cruel and degrading treatment.

- **Economic migrant**

Unlike refugees or asylum-seekers, economic migrants are people who have voluntarily moved to Ireland with a work visa solely to undertake employment in the State.

- **Resettlement**

Ireland is one of less than 20 countries worldwide with a resettlement programme. Having fled their home country, refugees sometimes encounter serious risks in their asylum country. The UN's Refugee Agency and countries like Ireland can help find a solution for refugees in these cases. 'Resettlement' is when a refugee in an unsafe asylum country is identified and helped to move to a safer country. These refugees are sometimes called 'programme refugees' in Ireland.

