

The Guardian

Should they be given residency?

A survey for this newspaper, in 2000 reported that 80% of the public believe that Britain was a 'soft touch' for asylum seekers and two thirds believe that there are too many immigrants. But first the facts and figures, in 2001 there were 71,000 asylum applications to the UK; down 11% on the previous year. This figure excludes dependants. With dependants, the figure is 88,300 this also represents an 11% decrease from the previous year. In the first three months of 2002, there was a slightly higher monthly average of asylum applications compared to the previous year. It takes an average of nine months for them to be told whether they will be allowed residency, temporary or otherwise.

With such facts and figures the public could become very anti towards immigrants, but a recent survey for this newspaper, in 2002 reported that the British public was four times more likely to be positive than negative towards Asylum seekers arriving in their community.

In a council of Europe survey Britain were found to be the unfriendly country concerning refugees. So who is telling the truth?

The UK national and local press has been blamed for attacks on asylum seekers and migrants but this newspaper was against the ideas of exploiting this.

So do we believe that asylum seekers should be given residency in the UK?

Those arguing in favour of refugees being given asylum in the UK say that the reality is people are forced to leave their homes and families in fear of their lives and travelling to the UK in search of safety and a little dignity. They do not come from safe countries but from troubled areas such as the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. These countries all experience serious conflict or reveal common human rights abuse.

We could say that some newspapers are to blame for contributing to the rise in racial tension and an increase in public disorder, namely labelling asylum seekers as scroungers but until recently they were humiliated by being given vouchers to support themselves. This has since April 2002 been changed in favour of cash however it still only amounts to about 70% of the income support that would be given to a UK citizen.

Asylum seekers in need of accommodation have no choice over where they are sent, merely being cast off to an area known as a "cluster" area to relieve the expense on any one region. This means that they often have poor access to legal advice and community support.

Cluster areas are often areas that are not used to housing immigrant communities and therefore more likely to be racists. Racist incidents against asylum seekers have increased, in October 2001 alone asylum seekers reported 112 incidents to the national asylum support service. Accommodation for asylum seekers is not 5 star quality more like sub-standard.

Asylum seekers are legally unable to work for the first six months while awaiting the outcome of their applications. Even when they can work it is difficult for them to find anything suitable as they may have language problems, lack of training, and no transport.

Negativity towards asylum seekers can be demonstrated by common feelings such as council taxes go up to fund their stay. The Home Office estimates that it will spend over £350 million to meet the cost of supporting asylum seekers in 2003-2004. Despite some recent Government concessions, local authorities say they face a £90 million shortfall in funding to support asylum seekers. They argue that extra costs of health, education social care are not fully met by central Government.

With racial tensions rising, the majorities of asylum seekers has no criminal motives and wish to be peaceful but some will retaliate by using violence as a reaction to racial attacks. In 2001 an estimated 20 new asylum seekers were arriving in Luton every week, and it is likely that the figure is still around this level. The asylum seekers in Luton come from over twenty countries therefore, in such multicultural area racism could increase.

In 2000, 47,000 illegal workers were found. Illegal workers often claim asylum when discovered. Public fury is fired by coverage of news stories. The rival paper "The Times & Citizen", earlier ran a story about refugees given work by a local factory in Bedford, who were clocking into work; then escaping through a hole in the fence to spend the day in the town centre. They would return at the end of the day to clock back out again, until discovered in town by a security guard on his day off. This becomes more than just an issue of racism, practicalities have to be considered. Somebody has to pay for asylum seekers. Areas where large numbers of them have settled are now suffering from increased council taxes.

In conclusion to the debate regarding asylum seekers entering the UK it can clearly be seen that the pros and cons seem to be equally balanced.

The growing number of asylum seekers do seem to place considerable strain on our services however among these so called hoards could be a future architect, an eminent actor, a scientist, doctor or the next famous concert pianist. Immigrants have value too!

To end on a humorous note nobody mentions the vast numbers of asylum seekers trying to buy fake passports so they can flee Britain to avoid deportation! So maybe our "soft touch" approach is not shared by the actual asylum seekers themselves?!!!!