Asylum seekers and refugees do not get large handouts from the state

- The vast majority of asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support, which is set at just 70% of income support.
- **Asylum seekers want to work** and support themselves. Many do voluntary work while their asylum application is being processed.
- Asylum seekers do not come to the UK to claim benefits. In fact, most know very little about the UK asylum or benefits systems before they arrive. *(Home Office, Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers, July 2002)*
- **Asylum seekers do not jump the queue for council housing and they cannot choose where they live.** The accommodation allocated to them is not paid for by the local council. It is nearly always ‘hard to let’ properties, which other people do not want to live in.
- Asylum seekers do not get special perks such as mobile phones and help to buy cars. **They are also denied access to many of the benefits others rely upon**, such as disability living allowance.

Asylum seekers and refugees are law-abiding citizens

- The vast majority of people seeking asylum are law abiding citizens. *(Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Guide to meeting the policing needs of asylum seekers and refugees)*
- Many destitute refused asylum seekers fear approaching the police to report incidents of sexual harassment and assaults, avoiding contact for fear of being picked up, put in detention and deported. *(Refugee Action report on destitute refused asylum seekers, 2006)*
- 6.5% of the vulnerable women who presented to the Refugee Council’s project said they had been forced into prostitution or exchanging sex for somewhere to stay. *(Refugee Council: The Vulnerable Women’s project, 2009)*
- In international and national law, distinctions are made between refugees, asylum seekers, legal and illegal economic migrants, minority citizens, travellers and others. **These distinctions are all too easily lost by the media**, and most particularly in the tabloid press. *(Memorandum from UNHCR to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007)*
- Immigration officers have the power to detain asylum seekers, even if they have not committed any crime.

Refugees make a huge contribution to the UK

- Immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse compared to their UK born counterparts. *(Institute for Public Policy Research, Paying their way: the fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK, 2005)*
• An estimated 30,000 jobs have been created in Leicester by Ugandan Asian refugees since 1972. (*The Observer, They fled with nothing but built a new empire, 11 August 2002*)

• About 1,200 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association’s database *BMA/Refugee Council refugee doctor database, 4 June 2008*.

• It only costs **£10,000 to prepare a refugee doctor to practise in the UK.** It costs **£250,000 to train a doctor from scratch.** (*BMA in BBC News, NHS fails to use refugee doctors, 16 June 2004*)

• Asylum-seeking children contribute very positively to schools across the country. This in turn enables more successful integration of families into local communities. (*Office for Standards in Education, The education of asylum seeker pupils, October 2003*)

**Asylum seekers are looking for a place of safety**

• There is no such thing as an ‘illegal’ or ‘bogus’ asylum seeker. Under international law, **anyone has the right to apply for asylum** in the UK and to remain here until the authorities have assessed their claim.

• Asylum seekers are not economic migrants. The top ten refugee producing countries in 2007 all have poor human rights records or ongoing conflict. (*UNHCR, 2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally displaced and Stateless Persons, 2008*)

• Many refugees and asylum seekers hope to return home at some point in the future, provided the situation in their country has improved.

• The 1951 Refugee Convention guarantees everybody the right to apply for asylum. **It has saved millions of lives.** No country has ever withdrawn from it.

**Britain’s asylum system is very tough**

• The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. **It is very difficult to get asylum.**

• By using visa restrictions and the e-borders programme to strengthen the borders, **the UK is closing and locking the doors to those seeking protection.** (*Refugee Council, Remote Controls: how UK border controls are endangering the lives of refugees, 2008*)

• Since 2005 people recognised as refugees are only given permission to stay within the UK for five years.

• There were only 25,670 asylum applications to the UK in 2008. **They have fallen by almost half over the last five years.** (*Home Office quarterly statistical summary, asylum statistics 2008*)

• The Home Office detains roughly 2,000 asylum-seeking children with their families each year. (*Save the Children, No place for a child, 2005*)
• **Home Office decision-making remains poor.** 23% of asylum appeals decided in 2006 resulted in Home Office decisions being overturned. (*Home Office, Asylum statistics: 4th quarter 2006, 2007*)

**Poor countries - not the UK - look after most of the world's refugees**

- The UK is home to less than 2% of the world’s refugees – out of 16 million worldwide. (*UNHCR, 2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally displaced and Stateless Persons, 2008*)
- Over 520,000 refugees have fled the conflict in Sudan to neighbouring countries, yet only 265 Sudanese people applied for asylum in the UK in 2007 (*UNHCR 2007: Global Trends; and Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2007, 2008*)
- About 80% of the world’s refugees are living in developing countries, often in camps. Africa and Asia host more than three quarters of the world’s refugees between them. Europe looks after just 14%. (*UNHCR, 2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally displaced and Stateless Persons, 2008*)
- In 2008, the UK was ranked 17th in the league table of industrialised countries for the number of asylum applications per head of population. (*UNHCR Asylum levels and trends in industrialised countries 2007 and 2008*)
A refugee is someone who has fled to another country seeking protection from war or persecution. An economic migrant is someone who has moved to another country to work.

Under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention people have the right to apply for protection in the UK.

In Leicester alone, over 30 000 jobs have been created by Ugandan Asian refugees since the 1970s.

11 refugees from the UK have won Nobel Prize for science.

Asylum seekers account for only 3% of net immigration to the UK.

Almost a third of refugees have contributed to society by doing voluntary work since arriving in the UK.

Many refugees have academic or teaching qualifications. There are more than 1,500 refugee teachers in England.

The UK hosts 2% of the world’s 10 million refugees.

More than 1,100 medically qualified refugees are recorded on the British Medical Association’s database. It only costs £10,000 to prepare a refugee doctor to practise in the UK. It costs £250,000 to train a doctor from scratch.

Estimates of the UK’s refugee population suggest that it only amounts to 0.6% of the total UK population.

Under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention people have the right to apply for protection in the UK.

A refugee is someone who has fled to another country seeking protection from war or persecution. An economic migrant is someone who has moved to another country to work.
The world's refugees - total 21.1m

North America 1m

Europe 5.6m

Asia 8.4m

Africa 5.3m

Latin America & Caribbean 575,610

Australia & New Zealand 76,000
Balthazar Hategekimana
This former civil engineer walked 4,000 km, from Goma, DR Congo, to find refuge. He told me he missed the cultural activities he used to have access to: going to libraries, the theatre and the cinema, and listening to the radio. His favourite piece of classical music is Beethoven's Symphony number three. He now works for an aid agency in Loukolela, Congo-Brazzaville.

Fayia Ansumana
This 14-year-old orphan from Sierra Leone introduced himself as Aboubacar Guitar, a world-famous musician. He was putting on
a show at the Golden Rule Children Centre in Kissidougou, Guinea. He had no guitar, but a beautiful voice.

Victor Saa Luceny

The director of the Golden Rule Children Centre is a refugee from Sierra Leone. He described how rebel soldiers broke into his home and forced his wife to kill their baby daughter. The experience convinced him to give the rest of his life to helping children.

This three-year old girl was found in the smoking ruins of her home. Her parents were killed but she managed to survive. She has since been adopted by Victor Saa Luceny.
Francois Niyomugabo

I met Francois Niyomugabo, 14, as he was returning to Rwanda after seven years in DR Congo. His mother had died and he had been separated from his father. He said he was going back because there was no one to look after him in DR Congo. But he also had no-one to go back to in Rwanda. He had missed out entirely on schooling and was illiterate. He said he had chest pains and found it difficult to speak.

Souleymane Sidibe

This displaced Guinean boy and his family had recently arrived in Kissidougou after
being displaced by fighting in the Parrot’s Beak. He told me he wanted to become a soldier "to save the lives" of his parents and younger brothers.
Behind bars

Many refugees arrive to a hostile reception in a host country. In the UK alone there is an average of 1,000 asylum seekers in detention at any one time. Mohamad Salmon talks to BBC News Online's Kate Goldberg about his reception, first in Germany and then the UK.

It is difficult to imagine Mohamad Salmon, a gentle young man of 22, in prison. Yet he has already been imprisoned three times – in three different countries.

He is a softly-spoken religious man, who enjoys playing football and cricket. But, like many other Tamils in Sri Lanka, a few years ago he found himself caught in the middle of the conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the rebel group, the Tamil Tigers.

When the Tigers killed his brother, he knew that he would be next if he did not escape. He had already been accosted by the Tigers several times, demanding supplies such as oil and batteries.

“They kept me in a dark room. I was very afraid they would send me back to Sri Lanka.”

He had also already been arrested and tortured by government forces, accusing him of being an accomplice to the Tigers.

“They hung me upside down, and beat me with a pipe,” he said. He is still unable to move his lower arm.

So his father paid an agent to take him to Germany, where he believed he would be safe.

Handcuff welcome

After a marathon journey, he arrived at the German border 15 days later, and was promptly arrested.

He was handcuffed and led to a cell. When I asked how he was treated, he said, almost thankfully:

“They didn't hit me or assault me. But they kept me in a dark room. I was very afraid they would send me back to Sri Lanka.”

He was later put in prison, where he shared a cell with common criminals. Not knowing any German, he spoke little. He saw in the new millennium in silence.
His worst fears seemed to be confirmed when the court ruled that he entered Germany illegally, and would be deported. Germany does not recognise people fleeing "non-state persecutors" such as the Tamil Tigers as refugees.

But he was granted a reprieve, and sent to a camp in East Germany. In a startling indictment of local racism, his bitterest rancour was reserved for the time in the camp.

He described how the local people beat him up, and spat at him on the street.

"I hated that place. The people were harsh," he said.

**Short-lived freedom**

In desperation, he made his way to the UK, where he claimed asylum on entry. He stayed with a Tamil acquaintance for the first six months, while he waited for his application to be processed.

"I was very happy in London," he said.

But he was then told that the Home Office had found out that he came through Germany, which according to EU law counts as a "third safe country", and he would be sent back.

Mr Salmon said he would definitely be deported to Sri Lanka if he went back to Germany, and in Sri Lanka he would certainly be killed. But he was ignored.

"I was working at a petrol station when they came and arrested me. They took me to Heathrow and told me they had booked my flight."

His managed to contact a lawyer, who filed an appeal.

In the meantime he was taken to Tinsley House Detention Centre near Gatwick, and spent the second successive New Year behind bars.

He has now paid £2,000 in bail for his freedom. At the time of writing he was awaiting the result of his appeal.