The Lives Behind the Stereotypes: The Reality of Seeking Asylum in the UK

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Despite the right to asylum being enshrined within international law, asylum seekers in the UK are often burdened with hostile policies and tarnished with a spiteful narrative. From the government's active role in stigmatising those who seek asylum to the misinformation rabidly peddled throughout the media, asylum seekers are demonised at every step of their perilous path to refuge.

It is essential to break down the inflated claims, the exaggerated untruths, and instead cast a light upon the reality of seeking asylum. Leaders of the EU referendum's Leave campaign and prominent political figures, including the current Prime Minister, are determined to propagate a distorted version of reality, issuing unlawful warnings to those seeking refuge.

When such influential figures are complicit in the demonisation of asylum seekers, it is easy to see how the public may become detached from the real lives behind such cruel stereotypes. Those who make the often life-threatening journey to a foreign country in their desperate quest for safety have likely endured unimaginable suffering.

Asylum seekers can be young children who have had the sheer misfortune of being born, through no fault of their own, into critical, war-torn environments which pose a threat to their very existence. In fact, nearly half of the world's 25.4 million refugees are under 18.

On the opposite end of the scale, asylum seekers can be elderly individuals who have spent their entire lives in their native countries, only to be faced with no choice but to flee everything they have ever known.

Asylum seekers can be innocent victims of persecution, endangered by powerful authorities or figures which are set on destroying them simply for who they are; for a core aspect of their identity whether it be their sexual orientation or their religious beliefs.

And yet despite the vast differences and diverse backgrounds which shape who they are, all have one crucial thing in common: they are human beings who, above all, simply want to ensure the safety of both themselves and those they hold dearest. They have their own hopes, dreams and ambitions; their own fears, uncertainties and weaknesses.

Contrary to popular belief, those seeking asylum make up a tiny percentage of the UK population. Within the last twelve months, 32,693 applications for asylum were made in the UK. This, when compared with Germany which received 161,900 applications, puts into perspective the inflammatory claims upheld by those who scaremonger the public into believing the UK is being 'swarmed' with asylum seekers.

Feeding this toxic narrative is the damaging – and false – stereotype that they are a burden to public services and the welfare system. This simply is not true. On the contrary, asylum seekers are entitled to a mere £37.75 per week from the government to cover all necessities.

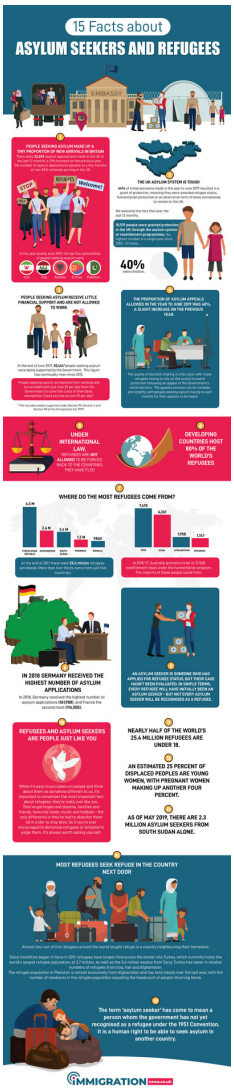
It actually costs significantly more for the government to keep asylum seekers in detention – with Global Detention Project reporting that this costs £92.67 per day. Home Office statistics suggest that approximately 24,700 people entered immigration detention in the UK in 2018, making crystal clear the government's priorities.

Evidently, the Home Office would rather dedicate funds to holding vulnerable individuals – who have likely suffered significant trauma and/or persecution – in a prison-like environment as opposed to helping to support them with their transition and integration into a new, foreign society.

A recent parliamentary report found that, of those detained in 2018, more than half were simply released again. This suggests that the Home Office often unnecessarily detains those who pose no risk of absconding, no threat to public safety and have no prior convictions.

As one of the most developed countries, the UK ought to eradicate this hostile mentality and approach to asylum seekers and instead take pride in its ability to provide safety. We need to look at the lives behind the cruel, manipulative stereotypes and realise that those seeking asylum simply wish for a life free from harm and danger.

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