LIFT THE BAN
LOCAL ACTIVISM PACK

HOW YOU CAN HELP WIN THE RIGHT TO WORK FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM
**INTRODUCTION**

**WHAT’S THIS PACK ALL ABOUT?**

People seeking protection in our country are effectively banned from working. As a result, many are left to live in poverty, struggling to support themselves and their families, whilst the Government wastes the talents of thousands of people. The **Lift the Ban** coalition wants people who have risked everything to find safety to have the best chance of contributing to our society and integrating into our communities. This means giving people seeking asylum the right to work so that they can use their skills and live in dignity. This activism pack is for local organisations and individuals who want to help win this right for people seeking asylum!

A growing number of refugee organisations, faith groups, trade unions and others are coming together to raise their voice and call on the Government to lift the ban which is preventing people who are seeking safety in our country from being able to work and provide for themselves and their families. These organisations have formed a coalition called **Lift the Ban** to press for change. But you don’t need to be part of the coalition to take action (though everyone is welcome to join!) If you feel motivated to campaign on this issue, then this pack can help by outlining the many ways that you can use your voice to bring about change.

There are loads of actions you can take to campaign on this issue, from talking to your MP and getting in touch with local media to holding awareness raising events and gathering petition signatures – details of all these activities are described in this pack. The team behind the **Lift the Ban** coalition is also on hand to help, so do get in touch if you need any support at lifttheban@asylummatters.org. You will also be able to access the campaign’s latest resources at www.lifttheban.co.uk.

**WHAT’S IN THIS PACK?**

- What is the campaign all about? 3
- Take action: 6
  - Contact your MP 6
  - Engage local decision-makers 9
  - Get more people involved! 12
  - Engage your local media 14
- Templates: 16
  - Press release template 16
  - Letter to your MP template 18
  - Petition sheet 20
  - Cut-out briefing for MPs 21
  - Campaign checklist 23

**WHAT’S THE CAMPAIGN ALL ABOUT?**

People seeking asylum in the UK are effectively prohibited from working. They can only apply to the Home Office for permission to work if they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for over 12 months and only for jobs that are on the Government’s restricted Shortage Occupation List (this is an ***incredibly*** restrictive list that includes jobs such as classical ballet dancer and nuclear medicine practitioner). The **Lift the Ban** coalition is calling for the right to work for people seeking asylum, and their adult dependants, unconstrained by the shortage occupation list after six months of having lodged an asylum claim or further submission.

**Why is this change needed?**

The current system is not fair: Everyone wants the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. It is simply unfair that those who have risked everything to find safety in the UK and have had to wait longer than the Government’s target of six months for a decision on their claim are not allowed to do this most basic of things (currently, almost 50% of all asylum claims take longer than six months).

It provides a route out of poverty – from destitution to dignity: People seeking asylum are given just £5.39 per day to meet all their essential living costs, such as food, clothing, toiletries and transport and the cost of their asylum application. Forcing people to live in poverty for months, or even years at a time, while they seek safety from persecution is inhumane and has a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health. Enabling people to work provides them with the human dignity of being able to provide for themselves and their families, if they are able.

The current system is wasteful: People seeking asylum who are able to work would not need to be supported for extended periods and could contribute to the economy through increased tax revenues and consumer spending. Moreover, considerable savings could be made to the costs of keeping people on asylum support if the ban was lifted.
It would help integration: For those who are eventually given refugee status, avoiding an extended period outside of work is key to ensuring their long-term integration into UK society and encouraging them to be self-sufficient. Early access to employment increases the chances of smooth economic and social integration by allowing refugees to improve their English, acquire new skills and make new friends and social contacts in the wider community. The vast majority of people seeking asylum want to work and contribute to society and are frustrated at being forced to remain dependent on asylum support.

The public support this: A recent study by the think tank British Future found that more than two-thirds of the public (68%) agreed that people seeking asylum should have the right to work.

It would bring the UK into line with the rest of Europe: The restrictive approach that the UK takes on right to work makes it an outlier within Europe. In almost all other European states people are given an opportunity to support themselves at an earlier stage and with fewer restrictions.

Granting the right to work must not mean an obligation to work for people seeking asylum. For many, looking for employment will not be a realistic option while they are also pursuing their asylum claim and work may not be appropriate for those who have suffered significant trauma from their experiences prior to coming to the UK.

Why has the Government opposed reform?

It hasn’t always been this way. People seeking asylum have been allowed to work in the UK under both Conservative and Labour Governments. However, since 2002 regulations have slowly changed and now most people seeking asylum are completely unable to work.

The Government’s main argument against the right to work is fear of creating a ‘pull factor’ for people seeking asylum – the idea that a less restrictive system would attract people to the UK who otherwise might not come. However, there is no evidence to support this. In fact, a recent review of 29 academic papers found that there was no correlation between right to work and where people seeking asylum chose to seek protection. Instead, research shows that people are more likely to flee to countries where they have family or friends, speak the same language and believe the country respects human rights.

Do I have to ask for the right to work to be granted only after six months?

The Lift the Ban coalition has agreed to focus our campaigning efforts on securing the right to work for people who have been waiting for more than six months for a decision on their asylum claim or further submission. The reason we have focused on six months is because it can help us neutralise one of the Government’s main arguments against the policy – which is that granting people seeking asylum the right to work could encourage unfounded claims from economic migrants looking for easy access to work. However, that argument is undermined when a six month restriction is introduced because all clearly unfounded applications should be refused by the Home Office within its six month target for deciding straightforward claims. In addition, most European countries have some sort of time restriction before people seeking asylum can start working, and very few allow for work from the day an asylum claim is made. It is very unlikely that the UK would move from one of the most restrictive policies in Europe to one of the most generous.

For these reasons, we believe that calling for a six month restriction will be best received by MPs of all political parties. That said, coalition members who are keen to campaign with the message that people should be allowed to work from Day 1 – that is, as soon as they put in an asylum claim – are free to do so. Particularly when it comes to public campaigning, this message can help build support for the general principle of giving people seeking asylum the right to work. However, when it comes to discussions with your MP, if you find that they are not supportive of allowing work from Day 1, we would suggest you introduce the six month restriction as a compromise. See below for tips on working with your MP!
**Contact your MP**

**Why is this important?**

The success of this campaign depends on getting support from MPs of all political parties. In the past, a significant number of MPs have shown support for this issue in principle. But to win the campaign, we'll need them to take the next step and be willing to publicly call for and, if necessary, vote for, reform. Therefore, it is incredibly important that they hear from their constituents! By meeting with your MP you can give them the power to speak up for the right of people seeking asylum to work, with the confidence that they have the backing of the people that they represent.

**How do I get in touch with my MP?**

You can find out who your MP is and how to access their website by going to: [http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/](http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/).

Go to your MP’s website to find out when they hold meetings (known as ‘surgeries’) in their constituency and then get in touch to book an appointment. To help with this, we’ve produced a short template letter introducing the campaign, explaining what it is calling for, and requesting a meeting to discuss in more detail (see page 18).

MPs get loads of emails every day so do try to personalise the letter and make sure to include your address (including postcode) as they often only respond to people in their constituency.

If you don’t get a response from your MP, you can follow up by phone to book a meeting. It’s usually best to call the constituency number provided (rather than the Westminster number). If you manage to secure a face to face meeting, this will be a great opportunity to convey in a simple, personal way why you think people seeking asylum should be allowed to work. Below are some tips to help you prepare.

**I’ve secured a meeting with my MP! How can I prepare?**

- **Find out more about your MP:** If you’re meeting for the first time, you can do some research about your MP, including their party and whether they have said anything relevant on asylum or refugee issues. You can do this by looking at their voting record, questions they’ve asked and motions they’ve supported, as well as looking at any media coverage or their social media feed. An excellent place to find information about your MP and their record is at [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com). This should help you understand their position on asylum and refugee issues more broadly, and perhaps on the right to work specifically, and allows you to consider the messages which could resonate best. The Lift the Ban team is also on hand to help you prepare and answer any questions so do feel free to get in touch at lifttheban@asylummatters.org.

- **Highlight the experience of refugees and people seeking asylum:** MPs don’t often hear from people who have been through the asylum system, and hearing from them directly can have the most impact. People who have or are going through the system are best able to convey how being unable to work impacts on health, wellbeing, confidence, or any other aspect of a person’s life. If you have direct experience yourself, do share your story with your MP if you feel comfortable to do so. If you do not have direct experience, do consider inviting refugees and people seeking asylum to attend the meeting with you, or simply bring anecdotes or stories of people that you work with who have first-hand experience.

- **Work with others:** Consider bringing a group of people to your meeting who represent a diverse group of constituents. MPs are more likely to take notice if varied members of the community unite behind an issue. This also allows you to speak about the issue from different perspectives – for example, a local business owner could talk about challenges in finding employees locally, or a doctor could talk about the health benefits of allowing people seeking asylum to work.

- **Plan your key messages:** MPs have very busy schedules so make sure to ask at the start of your meeting how much time you have and stick to it. It’s unlikely you’ll be able to talk about the issue in great depth so, before the meeting, pick out the top three messages you want to convey and get them across as quickly and simply as you can. To help with this, at the end of this pack you will see a briefing paper on right to work for MPs. Simply cut this out and give it to your MP during your meeting.
Be clear on how they can help: The **Lift the Ban** campaign is likely to evolve over the coming months in line with political developments and influencing opportunities – so what we’re asking of MPs may change over time. For a first encounter, we’re keen to know where MPs stand on the issue of granting the right to work to people seeking asylum and their adult dependants unconstrained by the shortage occupation list after six months of having lodged an asylum claim or further submission. There is a good chance that your MP will not be familiar with the details of current policy on the right to work for people seeking asylum – and therefore you should be prepared to walk them through it.

Ask your MP if they would support lifting the ban on right to work for people seeking asylum. If your MP is supportive, you can agree to follow-up with additional ideas that can help give profile to the issue and build support for it in the community and Parliament.

Be clear on the opportunity: We believe there is a real opportunity to lift the ban on right to work by seeking an amendment to the upcoming Immigration Bill. While this has been unsuccessfully attempted in the past, there are reasons to believe that the current political environment is more favourable – with Brexit and the Windrush scandal triggering widespread debate on immigration and a commitment from Government to work towards a more fair and compassionate immigration system. An Immigration Bill is expected in late 2018/early 2019 so the next few months will be crucial to build sufficient parliamentary support to secure an amendment. Ask your MP if they would be prepared to vote in favour of reform if and when the opportunity arises.

Don’t give up: If your MP disagrees with you, ask why and make sure to understand their motivations. A few MPs will probably never agree on this; but for others, it could be that, if you understand their objections or concerns, you can then work on changing their minds. Perhaps they need to see that the issue is of increasing importance in the local community and at a national level. In the sections below, we’ve included ideas on how to encourage local decision-makers, such as Councillors and Metro-Mayors, to speak up on the issue, and ways to engage local media to build a more compelling case for change. As public and political support for the issue grows, MPs could be convinced to change their minds, so don’t give up and instead think about alternative ways to get the issue on their radar.

**What should I do after the meeting with my MP?**

Publicise your meeting: During the meeting, you can consider taking a photo with your MP and asking them for a quote in support of lifting the ban preventing people seeking asylum from providing for themselves. Make sure to confirm that they are happy for these to be shared publicly! Then you can share on social media channels using **#LifttheBan** or even pitching it to local press for a news story – see more suggestions on this in the local media section below.

Follow up immediately: Send a follow-up email or letter to your MP after you’ve met summarising your key points and the action your MP agreed to take, as well as asking them to feed back on the outcome of their action. Don’t forget to say thank you!

Let us know how it went! The **Lift the Ban** team will be keen to hear how your meeting went so do get in touch to let us know at lifttheban@asylummatters.org. If you’ve promised to send over any resources or address any of your MP’s concerns, we’re also on hand to help you think through next steps.

**Let us know how it went**

**ENGAGING LOCAL DECISION-MAKERS**

**Why is this a local issue?**

Whilst securing the right to work for people seeking asylum requires change at the national level and the primary targets for our campaigning are therefore MPs, local decision-makers have an important role to play in raising the profile of the issue locally and putting pressure on national decision-makers.

Local councils already do a lot to help people seeking safety to settle and integrate, and they often step in to care for vulnerable people who have been let down by the Home Office. Destitution in our towns and cities has a negative effect on local communities, and may put a greater burden on local support services. So it
is likely that many local councils will be supportive of a reform that enables people seeking asylum to escape poverty and provide for themselves and their families.

In addition, as part of the Government’s new Integrated Communities Strategy, local councils will play an even greater role in facilitating integration in the local community. The right to work for people seeking asylum will improve the integration outcomes of those recognised as refugees who will end up settling locally, easing the pressure on local councils to support people in finding housing, employment and accessing support.

Persuading local decision-makers to speak out in support of the campaign sends a powerful signal that the local community is supportive of change on the right to work for people seeking asylum, and can act as a catalyst for getting others, including MPs, to speak out.

**How do I get in touch with my local decision-makers?**

Every local council is made up of councillors (members) who are elected by the public. Much like MPs, elected councillors represent the residents of their ward and hold regular surgeries where they hear from residents about the issues concerning them. You can find out who your local councillors are and when they hold surgeries for local residents at https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors.

Executive members of the council are responsible for a particular department, such as health and social care, housing and homes, or children and schools, to name a few. You may have to do a bit of research to find out which councillor’s portfolio includes local migration and integration issues and therefore could be a good target for this campaign.

Building relationships with key councillors is important and many of the same principles apply to working with them as with MPs – such as presenting this as a local issue, showing how local communities are being affected, and being clear on how they can help (more on this below).

In addition to meeting directly with councillors about the campaign, you can also ask a question at a council meeting, for example, “Will the local council consider supporting calls for the national Government to lift its ban which is preventing people seeking asylum in the UK from being able to work and provide for themselves and their families?” Details of relevant council meetings and how to submit a question should be on your council’s website.

**What can local decision-makers do?**

Many local councils, metro-mayors and devolved national governments have already publicly stated their support for a more fair and humane immigration and asylum system. So there is already positive action to build on in many places. Below are some ideas of what you can ask your local decision-makers to do in support of the campaign:

- **Join the Lift the Ban coalition:** The coalition is open to all – from faith groups to trade unions, think tanks to businesses – we’re keen to demonstrate widespread backing from across society for the campaign. Local councils would be a welcome addition and to join they only need to agree with the main ask of the campaign. As with other coalition partners, their involvement beyond this can be as limited as they choose, and we would always ask them to opt into any further joint initiatives of the coalition.

- **Write to local MPs to back the right to work:** Where councils are supportive of the issue, encouraging them to build pressure on the local MP can be an effective way to demonstrate local support for the issue.

- **Provide a supportive quote for the media:** Securing a quote from a local councillor about why they feel granting people seeking asylum the right to work could benefit the local community could be part of a local news story. More information on securing local media coverage is on page 14.

- **Sign up to a joint letter to the Home Secretary and Immigration Minister:** We’ll be writing to the Home Secretary and Immigration Minister about the growing level of support for the right to work for people seeking asylum and securing the backing of council leaders will help add weight to these letters. If you think your council may be supportive, let the Lift the Ban team know.
What can Devolved Administrations do?

If you live in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or one of the areas within England that has directly elected a mayor, you have an additional layer of government to contact and appeal to. All the actions listed above for local authorities and councillors apply equally to these bodies as well as to individual Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), Assembly Members (AMs) and Mayors.

Scotland
Find your local MSPs here:
http://www.parliament.scot/msps.aspx

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government has responsibility for the devolved aspects of refugee and asylum policy within Scotland (but crucially does not have the power to change the restrictions on work for people seeking asylum).

Wales
Find your local AMs here:

The Leader of the House has responsibility for the devolved aspects of refugee and asylum policy within Wales (but does not have the power to change the restrictions on work for people seeking asylum).

Northern Ireland
Find your local MLAs here: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/your-mlas/

Mayors
If you are unsure as to whether you have a directly-elected mayor, then see this page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directly-elected_mayors_in_England_and_Wales #List_of_directly-elected_mayors

GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR MSPs, AMs AND MAYOR

Why is this important?

It’s really important for us to show politicians that this issue is a popular one as it will help to convince them to act. MPs are often cautious about voting on issues when they don’t know how their constituents will respond – so we need to make it clear that their constituents are in favour of the campaign! One of the best ways to do this is to have support from a truly diverse range of individuals and organisations.

How do I get others to support the campaign?

Below are some ideas for how you can tell people in your local area about the campaign and encourage them to take action:

Join the Lift the Ban coalition: The coalition is open to local campaigning groups, faith institutions, service-delivery organisations, refugee-led groups and others who want to take action to secure change. Get in touch with the Lift the Ban team at lifttheban@asylummatters.org to let us know if you’ve had others join so we can make sure to add them to our central mailing list.

Engage local influential people: Individuals who play an important role in the local community can be useful allies for the campaign. They are people who are particularly active within the community, whose insights are valued and respected, and whose support is often needed to secure local change. They can include local faith leaders, business owners, prominent grassroots activists, or health-care providers, to name just a few. You can ask them to write to your MP or local councillor, or even join a discussion with them. Otherwise they could offer a supportive quote for media purposes or attend a local event on the issue to signal their support.

Share the petition: The Lift the Ban coalition has created a petition to signal the public’s growing support for granting people seeking asylum the right to work. We need as many people as possible to sign it! Encourage your family and friends to sign the petition. You can also set up stalls at local events, fetes and other gatherings (such as churches, mosques etc) to encourage people to sign the petition. A petition form for you to photocopy and use at these events is at the end of this pack (you can also access the petition online at www.refugee-action.org.uk/lifttheban). Once you have secured signatures, send the petition forms to the Lift the Ban team at Lift the Ban, Refugee Action, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB. You can also request Lift the Ban stickers, posters and badges to use at petition stalls – just get in touch with us at lifttheban@asylummatters.org.

Hold a local event: One of the best ways to raise awareness about an issue and encourage people to support is to hold a local event. As above, you can request Lift the Ban stickers, posters and badges to use at an event by contacting us at lifttheban@asylummatters.org. Events can take whatever form you choose but below are some ideas to get you thinking:
- Hold a film night. Pick a film, grab some friends, tuck into free ice cream and end the night by signing the petition. Email benjerrycampaigns@gmail.com to get some ice cream and find out more
Put on a panel event with local speakers who can talk about the issue (e.g., people seeking asylum in your community, local political representatives, local journalists).
Reach out to local businesses and art centres – see if they are willing to put on an event in support of the campaign.
Whatever event you put on, don’t forget to photocopy petition sheets (see page 20) and encourage attendees to sign them!

Get active on social media: Social media is a great platform to reach new people with our concerns – so don’t forget to document all of your local activity online using #LiftTheBan. In particular, photos work really well on social media so do share snaps from your activities, such as meeting your MP or holding a petition stall.

Find your news angle: Local reporters receive lots of press releases, so you want a story that will grab their attention. Think about what makes your campaign activity interesting: is it the involvement of people seeking asylum, are you targeting a local MP or planning something attention-grabbing to highlight the impact of not being able to work?

Write your press release: Once you have decided on your news angle, you need to get some information ready before contacting a journalist. You can do this by filling in the template press release at the end of this pack:
- Include your news angle in the headline and first paragraph
- Answer the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how?
- Make sure your link to the local area is clear
- The press release should have short paragraphs and be no longer than one side of A4
- Always include your contact details with a mobile phone number

A picture is worth 1,000 words: Local newspapers are always on the hunt for good pictures to help fill their pages. And remember, even radio stations have websites and social media pages now too.

Make sure the photo is good quality: use a digital camera and make sure the picture is well lit and the people fill the frame.

Pick up the phone: Find out which newspaper or radio station covers the area you are from/live in – the contact details can be found either in the newspaper, on the website or in your local directory. Always call before sending an email:
- Call in the morning when reporters are less busy
- Phone the number listed for the ‘newsdesk’ or ‘editorial’, and ask to speak to the reporter who covers your local area
- If the reporter is interested in your story, offer to send your press release and picture by email
- Always send the press release in the body of the email, not as an attachment – and never as a PDF

What about engaging people seeking asylum and refugees?

This is one of the most important aspects of the campaign as it involves elevating the voices of people who have been or are going through the asylum system and therefore will be directly affected by policy change which grants them the right to work. People who have been through the system (often known as ‘experts by experience’) are best placed to talk about the impact of not working while waiting on an asylum decision on their lives, their health and wellbeing. Their individual stories are the best way to gain public support for the wider policy issue.

We hope that many experts by experience will take the lead on campaigning on the issue around the country. But for those who are not keen to lead on organising and mobilising, there are a number of other ways that they can get involved. Bringing people with direct experience to meet with local decision-makers can be a particularly effective way to communicate the issue. Enabling experts by experience to provide first-hand testimony in the form of quotes and stories are also powerful ways to highlight the human impact of the current policy. It’s a good idea to use such testimony when engaging with local media, but always make sure you get consent to do so from those sharing their story. And do let the Lift the Ban team know of anyone who is happy to share their story at a national level.

Engage your local media

How can I engage local media in the campaign?

Publicising your Lift the Ban activities in your local media is a great way to bring the campaign to a wider audience, build support for its aims and influence local decision-makers.
For immediate release or embargoed until:
<insert date of press release>

<insert headline>

[The headline should be short and punchy. It should make the reader want to read on and spark the interest of the journalist you’re pitching to. It should sum up your chosen news angle. For example: People seeking asylum in Birmingham fight for right to work]

<Insert intro: the first paragraph should start with a snappy summary of the news story – who, when, what, where and why>

<Insert second paragraph: Press releases should give information in order of importance, with the most interesting and newsy elements higher up. Expand on your intro to start building a picture>

<Insert: the name of your group> is part of the national Lift the Ban coalition campaigning for people seeking asylum to have the right to work and provide for themselves and their families.

[Include any powerful stats and details. For example, if it’s about an open letter or petition, how many signatories has it gained, who are prominent members of the campaign group, how many people are you expecting at an event?] 

<Insert quote: It’s good to include a quote from someone impacted by the issue to humanise the story. Someone seeking asylum can sum up what being banned from work means to them and why it’s damaging their wellbeing and ability to support themselves and their family. Keep it to around two short paragraphs>

<Insert another paragraph between quotes to break them up, add a detail about your campaign/activity that doesn’t need to be right at the top of the story>

<Insert quote: Add a quote from your group, providing an overview, of your campaign activity or event. Give the person’s full name and job title>

<ENDS>

For more information contact <insert: give the names, telephone number and email of who the journalist can contact for further information>

Notes to editor:
<Insert: Any background information, links to photographs, research, websites that you think might be helpful>

Lift the Ban is a national coalition of organisations campaigning for people seeking asylum, and their adult dependants, to have the right to work, unconstrained by the shortage occupation list after six months of applying for asylum, or making a further submission. We want people who have risked everything to find safety in our country to have the best chance of contributing to our society and integrating into our communities.

Always use a clear font for press release, ideally Arial. You can download a Word version of this template at www.lifttheban.co.uk
Dear <MP’s Name>

Lift the Ban: Give People Seeking Asylum the Right to Work

As a constituent, I am writing to you to ask you to support the aims of the Lift the Ban campaign, as set out below, and to request a meeting to further discuss the issues raised.

The coalition behind the Lift the Ban campaign – which is made up of refugee organisations, faith groups, trade unions, businesses and individuals from across the county – is aiming to secure changes to the restrictions that the Government places on the right to work for people who are seeking asylum in the UK.

Under our current system people seeking asylum are effectively banned from working. They can only apply to the Home Office for permission to work if they have been waiting for a decision for over 12 months and only for jobs that are on the Government’s restricted Shortage Occupation List (this is an incredibly restrictive list that includes jobs such as ballet dancer and nuclear medicine practitioner).

The Lift the Ban coalition is proposing the right to work for people seeking asylum, and their adult dependants, after six months of having lodged an asylum claim or further submission, and unconstrained by the shortage occupation list.

The case for change is clear:

- **The current system is not fair:** Everyone wants the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. It is simply unfair that those who have risked everything to find safety in the UK and have had to wait longer than the Government’s target of 6 months for a decision on their claim (almost half of all claims take longer than 6 months) are not allowed to do this most basic of things.

- **It provides a route out of poverty:** People seeking asylum are given just £5.39 per day to meet all their essential living costs, including food, clothing, toiletries and transport and often the cost of their asylum application. Forcing people to live in poverty for months, or even years at a time, while they seek safety from persecution is inhumane and has a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health.

- **The current system is wasteful:** People seeking asylum who are able to work would not need to be supported for extended periods and could contribute to the economy through increased tax revenues and consumer spending. Moreover, considerable savings could be made to the costs of keeping people on asylum support if the ban was lifted.

- **It would help integration:** For those who are eventually given refugee status, avoiding an extended period outside the jobs market is key to ensuring their long-term integration into UK society and encouraging them to be self-sufficient. Early access to employment increases the chances of smooth economic and social integration by allowing refugees to improve their English, acquire new skills and make new friends and social contacts in the wider community.

- **The public support this:** A recent study by the think tank British Future found that more than two-thirds of the public (68%) agreed that people seeking asylum should have the right to work.

- **It would bring the UK into line with the approaches taken across Europe:** The restrictive approach that the UK takes on access to the jobs market makes it an outlier within Europe. In almost all other European states people are given an opportunity to support themselves at an earlier stage and with fewer restrictions.

(Insert here any local or specific information relating to:

- Any appropriate references to public statements that the MP has made on this issue
- Brief and relevant accounts of your experience of going through the asylum system or of the experiences of people you know
- Brief and relevant reflections on the potential impact of such changes in your area (if you live in an asylum dispersal area)

I want people who have risked everything to find safety in our country to have the best chance of contributing to our society and integrating into our communities. I want a fair and effective immigration system. It is not fair to deprive people of the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families while they wait, often years, for a decision on their asylum claim. It is not effective to waste the talents of our population, or to keep people suffering in limbo.

I look forward to hearing from you and about your availability to discuss this issue in more detail.

Yours sincerely,
People seeking safety in our country are effectively banned from working. As a result, many are left to live in poverty, struggling to support themselves and their families, whilst the Government wastes the talents of thousands of people.

We are calling on the Government to lift its ban and allow people to work whilst they claim asylum. Sign the petition below to join us!

To: Home Secretary "We are asking you to grant the right to work in the UK for people seeking refugee status."

Signed:

Name

Postcode

Signature

Send completed petition sheets to:
Lift the Ban Coalition, Refugee Action, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB

Your details will be shared with Refugee Action so that it can be collated and presented to the Home Secretary. Your data will not be used by Refugee Action for any other purpose. These petition sheets will be kept securely until they are presented to the Home Secretary, after which all data will then be deleted.

Key Messages
- People seeking asylum in the UK are effectively banned from working, which means they are forced onto asylum support whilst they wait for a decision on their asylum claim.
- This forced inactivity is at odds with Government policy aimed at moving people away from welfare dependency and into work, increases the difficulty of integration for those who are eventually permitted to stay, and places an entirely unnecessary cost on the public purse.
- The Lift the Ban coalition is calling for the right to work for people seeking asylum, and their adult dependants, unconstrained by the shortage occupation list, after six months of having lodged an asylum claim or further submission.
- A reform of the current policy would benefit around 10,000 people and their adult dependants whose cases have been pending for more than six months and offer them the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families.
- We’re asking MPs to support lifting the ban on the right to work for people seeking asylum, by raising the profile of the issue in Parliament and voting in favour of reform if and when the opportunity arises, such as during the upcoming Immigration Bill.

What’s the current situation?
- People seeking asylum in the UK are effectively prohibited from working. They can only apply to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) for permission to work if they have been waiting for a decision for over 12 months and only for jobs that are on the Government’s Shortage Occupation List – an incredibly restrictive list that includes jobs such as classical ballet dancer and nuclear medicine practitioner.
- The changes that we are seeking would represent a return to how the UK approached this issue under previous Conservative and Labour governments. Prior to 2002 people seeking asylum could work if they had been waiting for more than six months for a decision. A system by which people could apply for permission after 12 months was introduced in 2005 in order to comply with the 2003 EU Directive on Reception Conditions. The Shortage Occupation List was introduced in 2010 and further limited work prospects.
- We believe that the right to work should be granted to people seeking asylum, and their adult dependants, unconstrained by the shortage occupation list after six months of having lodged an asylum claim or further submission.

What are the arguments for reform?
- It provides a route out of poverty. People seeking asylum are given just £5.39 per day to meet all their essential living costs, including food, clothing, toiletries and transport and often the cost of their asylum application. Forcing people to live in poverty for months, or even years at a time, while they seek safety from persecution is inhumane and has a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health. Enabling people to work provides them with the human dignity of being able to provide for themselves and their families, if they are able.
- The current system is wasteful. People seeking asylum who are able to work would not need to be supported for extended periods and could contribute to the economy through increased tax revenues and consumer spending. Moreover, considerable savings could be made to the costs of keeping people on asylum support if the ban was lifted.
It would help integration. For those who are eventually given refugee status, avoiding an extended period outside of work is key to ensuring their long-term integration into UK society and encouraging them to be self-sufficient. The Home Office’s own research into the factors that influence refugee integration concluded that “disrupted employment histories [have] an adverse effect on future employment.” Early access to employment increases the chances of smooth economic and social integration by allowing refugees to improve their English, acquire new skills and make new friends and social contacts in the wider community.

The public support this, Time and again, opinion polling shows that the public strongly support the right to work for people seeking asylum. A recent study by British Future looking at public attitudes to refugee protection found that more than two-thirds of the public (68%) agreed that: “When people come to Britain seeking protection, it is important that they integrate, learning English and getting to know people. It would be helpful if asylum-seekers were allowed to work if their claim takes more than six months to process.” It would bring the UK into line with the rest of Europe. The restrictive approach that the UK takes on right to work makes it an outlier within Europe. In almost all other European states people are given an opportunity to support themselves at an earlier stage and with fewer restrictions.

**Why has the Government opposed reform?**

- The primary Government objection has been the fear of creating a ‘pull factor’ for people seeking asylum – the idea that a less restrictive system would attract people who otherwise might not have done so to claim asylum in the UK. However, all the available evidence suggests that permission to work does not act as a pull factor. A recent review of 29 academic papers found that there was no correlation between right to work and where people seeking asylum chose to seek protection. Instead, research shows that people are more likely to flee to countries where they have family or friends, speak the same language and believe the country respects human rights. A related second objection is that reducing the restrictions on working would lead to a greater number of unfounded claims from would-be economic migrants. However, those looking for easy access to the labour market in the UK are unlikely to make an asylum application and bring themselves to the authorities on the basis that they might be able to apply for permission to work after six months. Even if this were the case, they would never have an opportunity to do so as the Home Office aims to decide all straightforward claims within six months. Anyone making an unfounded claim for asylum would have this dealt with quickly and cannot manufacture delays by not engaging with the process, as these people can be refused for non-compliance.

Lift the Ban is a growing coalition of over 40 refugee organisations, trade unions, faith groups, businesses and others who are campaigning to win the right to work for people seeking asylum. Visit our website www.lifttheban.co.uk or get in touch with us on lifttheban@asylummatters.org to learn more about the coalition.

---

1. Immigration Rules Appendix K: Shortage Occupation List
3. James & Mayblin Policy Briefing: 03/16.1 Labour market access for asylum seekers University of Sheffield (2016)