



Lift the Ban: Why people seeking asylum should have the right to work

Lift the Ban is a coalition of more than 230 organisations, including trade unions, faith groups, businesses and others who are campaigning to win the right to work for people seeking asylum. Our policy report is available here: [Lift the Ban: Why people seeking asylum should have the right to work](#).

The problem:

- People seeking asylum in the UK are **effectively banned from working**, forcing them onto asylum support (£5.39 per day) whilst they wait for a decision on their 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 **unnecessary cost** on the public purse.
- The ban **wastes the talents** of those thousands who are not allowed to work, **prevents them from living in dignity**, denies them the chance to support themselves and their families, and doubles the risk of them experiencing a **major mental health problem**.

Key messages:

- A reform of the current policy would **benefit around 26,000 people** whose cases have been pending for more than six months and would offer them the **opportunity to provide for themselves and their families**.
- A study by British Future found that **71% of the public supports the right to work after 6 months**. Notably, there are large majorities in favour both among people who voted to leave the EU and those who voted to remain.
- If the ban was lifted, 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. Our 2018 research estimates that the **net gain to the UK economy from this change could be £42.4 million**.
- The Lift the Ban coalition is therefore 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.

Arguments for reform:

- **It would support integration**. For those who are eventually given refugee status, avoiding an extended period outside of work is key to ensuring long-term integration into UK society and encouragement 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. A recent study from Germany found that the longer the employment ban, the worse the subsequent employment trajectories of refugees.
- **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, transport and any costs related to 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.** Change would save money for the Government and provide an economic boost. 94% of people seeking asylum want to work. 74% had secondary-level education and 37% had a degree (compared with 42% of the UK population). If the ban was lifted, people seeking asylum able to work would not need to be supported for extended periods and could contribute to the economy through increased tax revenues. In our 2018 research, we estimated that **the net gain to the UK economy from this change could be £42.4 million.**
- **The public support change.** In a recent poll, the majority of respondents supported the right to work after 6 months, recognising **the value of working as a route to integration.** Respondents with diverse views on migration were united in this support.
- **It would bring the UK into line with policy in all other comparable countries.** The restrictive approach that the UK takes on right to work makes it an international outlier. **In all comparable countries people are given an opportunity to support themselves at an earlier stage and with fewer restrictions.** For example, Germany and Switzerland allow work after 3 months - and Canada allows work from day 1 and places a great emphasis on helping people support themselves.

Counter-arguments against reform:

- **The 'Pull Factor'.** This argument suggests 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.
- **False Claims.** This argument proposes that economic migrants would claim asylum in order to access the UK labour market. **Our proposal of a six month waiting period would provide a strong safeguard against this.** It's implausible that somebody would bring themselves to the attention of the authorities on the basis that there might be a chance that their asylum application will not be decided within six months. Such a clearly unfounded asylum case would be refused by the Home Office much earlier.
- **Protecting the UK workforce.** This argument regards the effect that a policy change could have on the resident labour market. However, our proposal should be seen in context. It would provide a right to work for approximately 26,000 people who are dispersed to cities across the country. **This group represents 0.06% of the current UK labour force of 32.4m.** Furthermore, by allowing this group to work, the Government could go some way towards addressing the concerns of [business leaders](#) regarding the ongoing skill shortages within a variety of UK industries.

Progress in Parliament:

Two Private Members' Bills from [Christine Jardine](#) and [Catherine West](#) seeking to extend asylum seekers' rights to work were introduced during the 2017-19 session without receiving a second reading. In December 2018, the then Home Secretary expressed that he would be seeking a Home Office [review](#) of the policy, reiterating in July 2019 his belief that it is "[time for reform](#)". Recent contributions from the [Prime Minister](#) and [Home Office Ministers](#) have confirmed this review is ongoing.