

Asylum Seekers Facts

What is an asylum seeker?

Asylum is protection given by a country to someone fleeing from persecution in their own country. An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision on whether they will be granted refugee status.

Does the UK have more asylum-seekers than most countries?

No, it does not. In the year ending September 2021, the UK received 37,562 asylum applications from main applicants only.

In the year ending June 2021, EU countries received 418,495 first time asylum applications from non-EU citizens. The top nationalities of people applying for asylum were Syrian (75,615), Afghan (49,905), Venezuelan (19,235), Colombian (18,160), Pakistani (17,960), Iraqi (16,420), and Turkish (13,845).

In the year ending June 2021, Germany received the highest number of asylum applicants (113,625) in the EU+, followed by France (87,180) and Spain (67,405). (Source: UNHCR)

Where do asylum-seekers in the UK come from?

Amongst adults, Iran was the top nationality claiming asylum in the UK in the year ending September 2021.

The top five countries of nationality for asylum applications (from main applicants) were: Iran (6,002), Eritrea (4,412) Albania (4,010), Iraq (3,042) and Syria (2,303).

(Source: UK Government Immigration statistics, year ending September 2021)

In 2020, there were around 6 asylum applications for every 10,000 people living in the UK.

Across the EU27 there were 11 asylum applications for every 10,000 people. When compared with EU countries, the UK ranked 14th out of the individual countries in terms of the number of asylum applications per capita. (Source: House of Commons statistics).

Comparative costs

The annual cost to the UK tax payer of asylum seekers is around £1 billion.

Compared with –

£44 billion on defence in 2020-21; (source: Statista);

£30 billion on the war in Afghanistan (source: BBC)

£8.4 billion on military operations in Iraq 2003-2009 (source: Daily Telegraph)

£5 billion a year on nuclear weapons (Source: National Audit Office)

What do you think is better use of taxpayers money?