
REFUGEES IN ROSSENDALE

What is a refugee? A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence. Refugees have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most cannot return home or are afraid to do so (UN High commission for refugees).

What is an asylum seeker? When someone applies for asylum in the UK, they are asking the UK to recognise that they are a refugee. While they are waiting for a decision, people are often referred to as 'asylum seekers' rather than refugees, although the majority are eventually recognised to be refugees.

In the year to March 2025, for 47% of people applying for asylum, the Home Office's initial decision was that they are genuine refugees¹. Most of those refused at this stage appeal for their case to be reconsidered by a Court. Recently around 75% of initial applications have resulted in a positive decision either initially or through the Court. Of those whose appeal is unsuccessful ('failed asylum seekers'), many go on to find further evidence to support their case and are eventually granted refugee status, or another form of protection.

Can you be a refugee without first being an asylum seeker? Some refugees have come to the UK through schemes that meant they did not have to apply for asylum. There have been schemes for Syrians, Ukrainians and Afghans. Most schemes are now closed, and currently very few refugees are able to come to the UK without applying for asylum.

Recent UK asylum statistics Asylum seekers and immigrants made up 16% of immigrants to Britain in 2024². The UK has receives fewer asylum applications per head of population than most other European countries ranking 14 out of 27, In 2024, there were around 16 asylum applications for every 10,000 people living in the UK. Across the EU27 there were 22 asylum applications for every 10,000 people.

¹ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/stay-informed/explainers/top-facts-from-the-latest-statistics-on-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum/>

² <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01403/>

How many refugees are there in Rossendale? There are no statistics collected about the number of people who have been recognised as refugees who are living in Rossendale (or any other area).

We do have figures for those claiming asylum, who receive asylum support. In March 2025 there were 247 asylum applicants living in Rossendale and receiving financial support.

What do we know about the refugees living in Rossendale? We have some idea about this through information from the people attending Rossendale Refugee Support Group (RRSG)

- In the last three years over 500 individuals from Rossendale and nearby areas have used RRSG.
- About three quarters have been people seeking asylum. (Many of these have now been granted refugee status)
- People come from many different countries, most commonly Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan and Eritrea. There are not many Ukrainians using the group as there is support elsewhere specifically for Ukrainians.
- We have had just over 40 families come to our group, but most people who use the group are single, and most are men. Many of the single people have families back home.
- People come from a wide range of backgrounds, for example teachers, engineers, subsistence farmers, students. Some have left behind comfortable homes and lifestyles.

What is life like for asylum seekers in Rossendale? Those who are destitute are provided with 'asylum support' – this includes basic housing, typically a room in a shared house, and £49 a week to cover all expenses (food, transport, clothes, phone etc). They have no choice about where they live. The housing is usually in low cost housing in less popular areas.

Many people comment that people in Rossendale are friendly. Some have said that they don't find as much racism here as in other places.

Life as an asylum seeker can be difficult:

- Most are separated from their family and friends.
- Many are very worried about family back home, some of whom will be living in dangerous situations
- Many are very isolated. Many have limited English. Some have no regular face to face contact with anyone who speaks the same language.
- None know how long they will have to wait for a decision on their asylum claim. Many people wait years. There are RRSG clients who have waited over four years for a decision. Recently claims are being processed more quickly.
- Although people are entitled to a solicitor to assist them with their asylum claim, there are very few solicitors available and most people who have come to Rossendale recently can't get one.

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- Most are not permitted to do any paid work, even if they are highly educated and skilled.
 - The majority have lived through traumatic experiences. Well over half are estimated to have been subject to human rights abuses in their home country or on their journey. Most people who have arrived in the last year or two have arrived by boat.
 - Many are regularly stressed by UK news that makes them fear they will be sent home. News from home can also be stressful, especially for those with families in dangerous situations
 - Most people find £49 a week very hard to live on, and many struggle to afford enough food, or to pay for the data they need to speak to family and friends.

Those recognised to be refugees and given a right to stay in the UK

Those recognised as refugees receive the same rights to work, study, benefits, and housing as British people. They currently usually have 56 days to leave their asylum accommodation and find somewhere else to live. Families with children, and people with severe health problems are given emergency accommodation, but this is usually outside Rossendale, in a hotel or hostel. Children then usually have to leave their school abruptly and may then be out of school for months. Because of the general shortage of accommodation in the UK, those not entitled to emergency accommodation often end up homeless.

Those who have a spouse or children outside the UK are entitled to bring them here on a 'family reunion' visa. It can take months, or years, to receive this.

Those whose asylum claims are refused

Those whose claims are refused, and who do not manage to appeal successfully, have to leave their accommodation usually within 21 days. They are offered help to return back to their own country but for those who have fled out of fear, this is not a good option. They have no entitlement to any housing or financial support in the UK, and can easily find themselves street homeless.

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