



## 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 September 2025, for 45% of people applying for asylum, the Home Office's initial decision was that they are genuine refugees<sup>1</sup>. Most of those refused appeal for their case to be reconsidered by a Court, and in 2024, 43% were granted protection. 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. Thus well over two thirds of asylum seekers are eventually recognised as refugees.

### 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. There has until 2025 been the possibility of immediate family dependents (90% of whom are women and children) being able to join those recognised to be refugees. All these schemes are currently closed, and very few refugees are able to come to the UK without applying for asylum.

### How does the UK compare with other European countries?

The UK receives fewer asylum applications per head of population than most other European countries ranking 15 out of 27.

### How many refugees are there in Rossendale?

In September 2025 there were 245 people living in asylum accommodation in Rossendale. There were also 98 people in Rossendale who came through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and 26 who came through Afghan resettlement schemes. There are no statistics collected about the total numbers of refugees in Rossendale (or any other area), for example we don't know how many arrived as asylum seekers then stayed in the area after being granted refugee status. However we do know that many move away at this stage to areas where they have connections or believe they have a better chance of finding work.

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

## 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 550 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 Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Syria. There are not many Ukrainians using the group as there is support elsewhere specifically for Ukrainians.
- We have had over 50 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. However, recently more people are experiencing hate incidents.

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. Recently claims are being processed more quickly than last year, but over 20% wait more than a year.
- 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.
- For everyone waiting for a decision on their asylum claim, the future is uncertain. They do not know if they have a future in the UK, and they can at any time be detained and held in immigration detention for an indefinite period.
- 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. Healthy single people usually have 28 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 currently cannot apply for their family to come to the UK on a 'family reunion' visa. This possibility is expected to be re-opened in 2026, but with new conditions, that will make it unattainable for many.

## Those whose asylum claims are refused

Those whose claims are refused, and whose appeals are unsuccessful, 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. Unless there is a clear reason why they cannot return, they are not entitled to any housing or financial support in the UK, and can easily find themselves street homeless.

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