Article: Refugees and Asylum Seekers (Work and Education)

Summary

This article tells you whether you can work, train or go into education if you are a refugee or asylum seeker. There's information on English language (ESOL) classes, and advice about how to use any qualifications you have from your home country. You can also find information about other people who can help you.

Immigration status

Your immigration status affects whether or not you can work, have training or go into education. This article talks about the following types of immigration status.

- Refugee: someone who has claimed asylum and been given refugee status by the Home Office.
- Asylum seeker: someone who has claimed asylum but not had a decision on their application.
- Discretionary Leave (DL) and Humanitarian Protection (HP): the Home Office might give someone DL/HP if they don't meet the conditions for refugee status but there are reasons why they should be allowed to stay in the UK.
- Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR): this is given to people who have no time limit on their stay in the UK.

Employment

Refugees are allowed to work in the UK. They have the same rights as other workers. For example, they must be paid at least the national minimum wage.

If you are an asylum seeker, you usually can't do paid work. However, the Home Office might give you permission to work if you've waited more than 12 months for a decision on whether you can stay in the UK and it's not your fault that you've had to wait so long to get this decision.

Asylum seekers without permission to work also can't become self-employed.

Voluntary work

Both refugees and asylum seekers can do voluntary work. This usually involves unpaid work to help a charity or voluntary organisation but it's possible to get work experience through volunteering in very many areas of work.

There are also paid jobs in charities and voluntary organisations. However, asylum seekers without permission to work can't do these.

Lots of people in the UK do voluntary work for many reasons. You could:

- find out what a job you're interested in is really like
- learn things and get new skills
- improve your English
- meet people and make friends
- help people
- get experience and references to add to your CV.

Voluntary work can be especially good for asylum seekers - you can get skills and experience while you are waiting for permission to do paid work.

You can volunteer for lots of things, such as:

- working in a charity's shop or office
- giving advice to other refugees and asylum seekers
- interpreting
- helping with community groups
- looking after older people
- protecting the environment.
While you won't usually get paid, you should get expenses to cover things you have to pay for yourself as part of the job, such as travel, meals and staying in hotels.

For help and advice on looking for voluntary work, see ‘Further Information’ at the end of this article.

**Using your skills and qualifications**

Lots of refugees and asylum seekers come to the UK with valuable skills and qualifications gained in their home countries. Some refugees and asylum seekers are highly qualified professionals, such as doctors, engineers, dentists and teachers.

However, it can be difficult to return to your profession, for example, if you had to leave your country quickly and didn't have time to bring important documents or references with you. Also, to practise in this country, you might have to pass English language exams or re-qualify.

There are organisations, called professional bodies, that are responsible for certain careers. Many of them work with refugees to help them get back into work. For example, the British Medical Association (BMA) helps refugee doctors.

Your qualifications and experience from home can be very important in the UK. However, you need to find out how they compare to UK qualifications, so employers can easily see what you are able to do.

If you have a professional qualification, for example, as a doctor, lawyer, engineer or teacher, you should contact the professional body to find out how your qualification compares to UK qualifications.

Otherwise, an organisation called UK NARIC (see ‘Further Information’) can help you to get a comparison. You'll need to give some information, such as the title of your qualification, and when and where you studied it.

**Re-qualification**

You might have to re-qualify if employers don't accept the qualifications you have from your home country. This could mean getting new qualifications or doing training courses here in the UK.

Many professional careers, such as teaching and medicine, are regulated. This means that you have to have certain qualifications before you can do those jobs.

Other types of work are not regulated, so you might be able to start work here in the UK. However, employers might still want you to have taken certain exams or training courses.

Re-qualifying can take a long time and cost a lot of money. If you have to go to college or university, you will need very good English language skills.

Sometimes, working in a related area can help you to re-qualify. For example, working as a technician can help you to gain experience and do training courses that can take you back up to professional level.

**Criminal convictions: do I need to tell employers?**

You should get advice on this. Organisations that work with refugees and asylum seekers should understand that some countries put people in prison for things like their political beliefs or taking part in demonstrations. However, other employers might not know as much about this situation.

The UK has certain rules for when you have to tell employers about criminal convictions. Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, some convictions become ‘spent’ or ignored after a set period of time. This means you don't usually have to tell an employer about them.

There are some jobs where you have to tell your employer about all your convictions, including spent ones. These jobs include working with children or vulnerable adults (such as disabled people), some legal work, police and probation work.

For advice about these issues, you can talk to NACRO (see ‘Further Information’). If you do have to tell employers about your convictions, you can get some advice about the best ways to do this so that employers understand your situation.
Refugees who receive benefits are able to take part in government training schemes such as Intermediate and Advanced Level Apprenticeships, and training to help unemployed people. Asylum seekers, with or without permission to work, can't join government training schemes.

For information about Apprenticeships, please see the Apprenticeships website in 'Further Information'. To find out about training for unemployed people, contact your local Jobcentre Plus office.

Education

Refugees and asylum seekers have the legal right to education, as long as they meet any entry requirements and can pay the course fees. To show that you have the right qualifications to do a course, you might need to ask UK NARIC for advice on how your qualifications from your home country compare to those in the UK.

There are many types of course you can study, at several levels.

**Further education (FE)** is for people aged over 16. It is below the level of a degree, foundation degree or HND. The fees you have to pay depend on your immigration status. Refugees and people with Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) or Humanitarian Protection (HP) usually pay home student fees (lower fees). FE courses can be free to refugees and people with ILR who are single parents, disabled or on benefits. They can also be free to people with HP who are on benefits.

Refugees and people with ILR and HP can get learner support funds. These help with some of the costs of education. Asylum seekers aged over 18 are not able to get learner support funding.

**Higher education (HE)** courses include degrees, foundation degrees, HNDs and diplomas of higher education. They are mostly available at universities and HE colleges.

Refugees and people with HP are charged home student fees. They can receive student support such as tuition loans and maintenance grants (people with HP need to have three years’ residency in the UK before they can receive this support).

Some universities and HE colleges consider asylum seekers to be international students who must pay overseas fees. Others charge home fees, usually if you have a valid Standard Acknowledgement Letter or an Application Registration Card from the Home Office.

However, asylum seekers can't usually get student support until the Home Office has made a decision on their application.

You should speak to the university or look at its website to see how it charges asylum seekers.

If your immigration status changes while you are on a course, you must tell the college or university immediately so that you can receive student support or pay lower fees.

**ESOL**

ESOL is English for Speakers of Other Languages. It's very important that you learn English, for lots of reasons. It's important in education and work - and it also helps you make friends and feel part of the community where you live.

ESOL is aimed at students of different abilities. The lowest level is Entry Level, which is split into Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3. These are followed by Level 1 and Level 2.

If you're an English speaker living in the UK as a 'skilled' or 'highly skilled' migrant (see the UK Border Agency website), you must pass the 'Life in the UK' test to achieve UK citizenship. If you're not an English speaker or a skilled or highly skilled migrant, you must pass an ESOL Entry Level 3 course that includes citizenship materials.

You can take ESOL lessons in colleges and private language schools. Local councils often run lessons, for example, in community centres. Some refugee organisations also run ESOL classes.

Refugees who receive Jobseeker’s Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance can have free ESOL classes. Asylum seekers who’ve been in the UK for six months without a decision on their application can receive co-funded ESOL (they have to pay 50% of the course fees).

If you are an asylum seeker aged 16-18 and get asylum support, you can get free ESOL. If you become 19 years old after you started a course, you can complete the course.
Where you have to pay, fees vary. Refugees usually pay the lower ‘home’ fees, while asylum seekers might have to pay the higher ‘overseas’ fees.

However, the organisation that gives ESOL classes, such as a further education college, can decide how it wants to charge. You should ask the college or language school how much it costs for ESOL.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Home Office**  
  Address: Direct Communications Unit, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF  
  Tel: 020 7035 4848  
  Email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk  
  Website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office)

- **Volunteering England**  
  Part of NCVO  
  Address: Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL  
  Tel: 020 7713 6161  
  Email: ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk  
  Website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

- **Working for a Charity**  
  Managed by NCVO  
  Address: Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL  
  Tel: 020 7520 2512  
  Email: workingforacharity@ncvo-vol.org.uk  
  Website: [www.workingforacharity.org.uk](http://www.workingforacharity.org.uk)

- **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)**  
  Scottish enquiries  
  Address: Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB  
  Tel: 0131 4748000  
  Email: enquiries@scvo.org.uk  
  Website: [www.scvo.org.uk](http://www.scvo.org.uk)

- **National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)**  
  Address: The Tower, 2 Furnival Square, Sheffield S1 4QL  
  Tel: 0114 2786636  
  Email: navca@navca.org.uk  
  Website: [www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk)

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**  
  National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)  
  Tel: 0800 015 0400  
  Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk  
  Website: [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)

- **UK NARIC**  
  International qualification comparison information from ECCTIS Ltd  
  Address: Oriel House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 1XP  
  Tel: 0871 3307033  
  Website: [www.naric.org.uk](http://www.naric.org.uk)

- **Community Service Volunteers (CSV)**  
  Address: 237 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NJ  
  Tel: 020 7278 6601  
  Email: information@csv.org.uk  
  Website: [www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)
• Do-it
Volunteering made easy - a volunteering database run by charity YouthNet
Website: www.do-it.org.uk

• Nacro Resettlement Advice Service
Address: Park Place, 10-12 Lawn Lane, London SW8 1UD
Tel: 020 7840 1212
Email: resettlement.helpline@nacro.org.uk
Website: www.nacro.org.uk

• Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU)
Address: The Learning Centre, 236-250 Holloway Road, London N7 6PP
Tel: 020 7133 2110
Email: ragu@londonmet.ac.uk
Website: www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/

• Refugee Council
Tel: 0808 8082255
Website: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

• Refugee Action
Address: Victoria Charity Centre, 11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB
Tel: 020 7952 1511
Email: info@refugee-action.org.uk
Website: www.refugee-action.org.uk

• Asylum Support
UK government services and information
Website: www.gov.uk/asylum-support