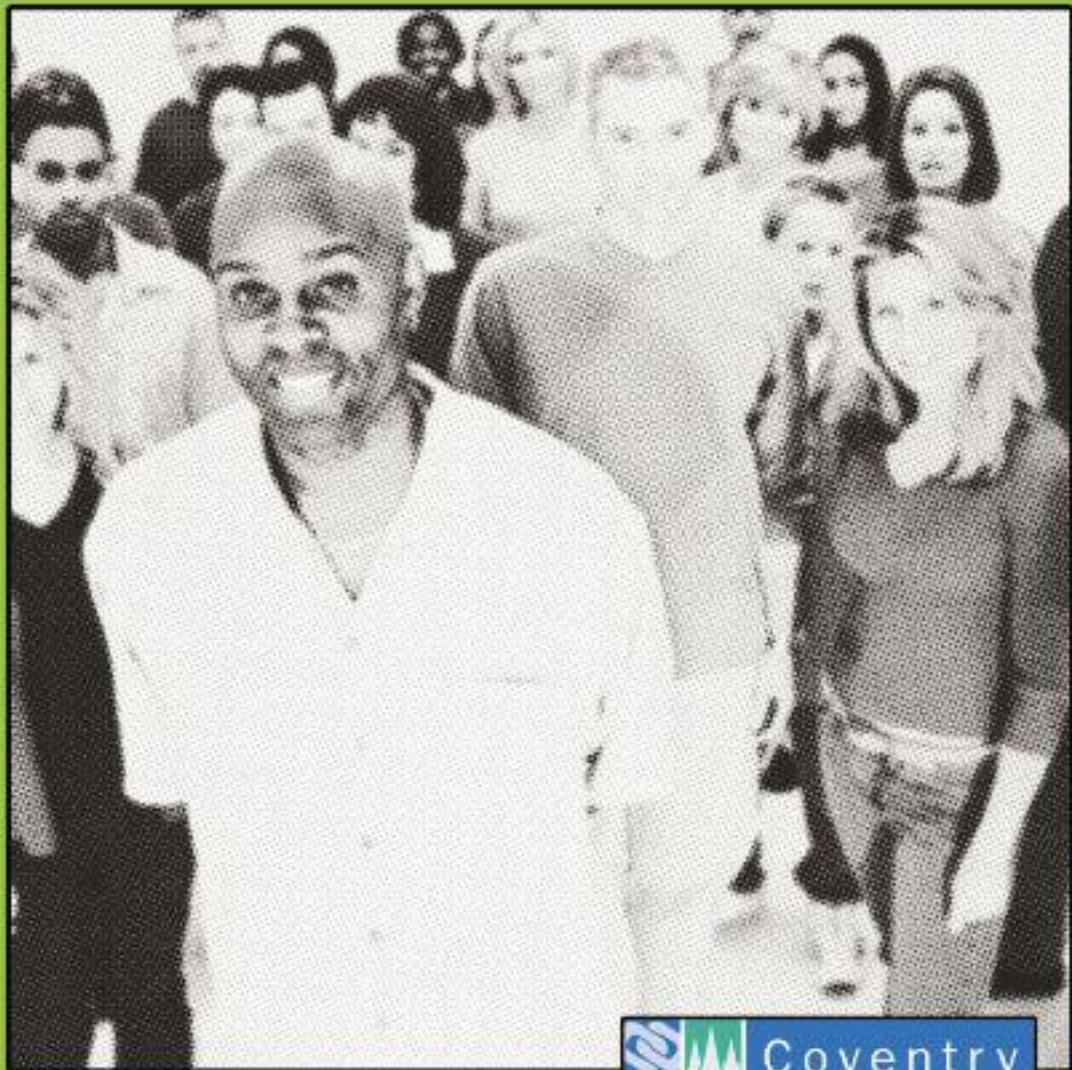


# Facts, Myths, Truths and Stories

...about people coming to Coventry



## **Coventry's Population**

Coventry has a long tradition of welcoming people to the city from all over the world. These people have brought new skills and expertise with them and have been proud to make Coventry their home. In 1685, for instance, French refugees settled here following religious persecution in their country and introduced the weaving trade to Coventry – a trade that helped make the city wealthy and successful.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries people came to Coventry from across England, Scotland and Wales, the Commonwealth and Ireland to settle here, and in the 1970s the city made a new home for East African refugees fleeing from Uganda and the regime of Idi Amin. More recently people have come to Coventry from Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa and from the new accession states in the European Union, including Poland.

Today Coventry is a city of around 306,000 residents and has a younger population than average for the UK. The population of Coventry is growing but this is largely due to natural population growth and not migration. People move in and out of the city every year, including students from the UK and overseas who come to Coventry to study in the city's two universities. Coventry's vibrant economy means that new people are also arriving here to work, mostly from within the UK and the European Union. Others may come to Coventry as asylum seekers because they fear for their safety in their home country.

### **About this leaflet**

This leaflet answers some of the questions that are asked about people who are coming to Coventry; helps to explain the difference between being an asylum seeker, a refugee and an economic migrant; and tells the stories of some of the people who have recently come to the city to live, work and study.

## **What is an asylum seeker?**

An asylum seeker is a person who has arrived here and has applied to the Home Office to stay in the UK because they fear persecution in their country of origin. While the Home Office is considering their case, they are classified as asylum seekers and they are not usually allowed to work.

If asylum seekers are not able to support themselves they may be placed in temporary accommodation and given some financial support – adults are currently entitled to 70% of the amount paid to residents receiving income support benefit. Asylum seekers must demonstrate that they meet very strict criteria if their application is to be successful. In 2007 27% of asylum applicants were granted asylum at their first hearing; 23% of those who appealed against a refusal were subsequently allowed to remain here as well.

## **What is a refugee?**

A refugee is defined (under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees) as *“a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”* The Convention was drafted in response to the horrors of the Holocaust, when fleeing Jewish refugees were denied entry by many countries, and because of the millions of people who became refugees in Europe during and after World War II.

If a person meets these criteria, and their asylum claim is accepted by the Home Office, they are granted refugee status. This gives them the right to remain in the United Kingdom for five years – then their case is reassessed.

### **What is the difference between asylum seekers and refugees?**

Asylum seekers are waiting for the Home Office to make a decision about their application to stay in the UK. Refugees have had their application accepted and can stay in the UK. They are allowed to work, must pay taxes and are entitled to the same benefits as any other citizen.

### **Where do asylum seekers and refugees come from?**

Asylum seekers come from all over the world. In 2007 across Britain the largest numbers came from Iraq, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, China, Pakistan, North Korea and Sri Lanka. In Coventry the largest group of asylum seekers is Kurdish people from Northern Iraq, others in the city come from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and around 60 other countries

### **What is an economic migrant?**

An economic migrant is someone who comes to the UK to work. European Union (EU) citizens, including UK citizens, have the right to live and work in any other EU member state but are not entitled to all that member state's benefits. Since 2005 twelve countries, mainly from eastern Europe, have joined the EU and these are known as the accession states. Many recent economic migrants to the UK come from these countries, particularly from Poland. The most recent of the EU accession states are Bulgaria and Romania who joined in January 2007. For seven years workers from these two countries can only apply for jobs in a few industries in the UK such as food processing and agriculture or apply to set up their own business.

Non-EU citizens have to get a special visa and a work permit from the Home Office before they can legally work in the UK. A new five tier points system is being introduced in the UK for non EU migrant workers from 2008. This has been designed to ensure that only those with the skills most in need will gain entry to work in the UK.

## **Where do economic migrants come from?**

Most economic migrants coming to the UK and Coventry come from within the European Union just as UK citizens can work elsewhere in the EU. Some economic migrants, including people who are highly skilled, come from outside the UK including South Asia and Africa.

## **How many people are we talking about?**

In 2006 net immigration to the UK was estimated to be 191,000 with 400,000 people leaving and 591,000 arriving in the UK for a year or more. This compares to a figure of 244,000 for net migration in 2004 (the highest year recorded). More than a third of all migrants to the UK were students.

Between May 2004 and June 2006, around 427,000 workers successfully applied for work in the UK from the then eight European Union accession states (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia). This represents a lot less than 1% of the UK population.

In 2006/07 6,230 people from the European Union registered for a national insurance number in Coventry. People from Poland accounted for three quarters of the registrations along with other people from the new accession states.

The number of people seeking asylum in the UK has reduced considerably recently. In 2007 there were 23,430 asylum applications in the UK compared to 84,130 in 2002. The number of asylum seekers has also reduced in Coventry and is now estimated to be some 550 people (asylum seekers and their families).

## Myths about asylum seekers and economic migrants

***Myth: Economic migrants are coming to the UK to live off our benefits system and are a drain on the public purse***

Truth: EU migrants are entitled to live and work in the UK but are not entitled to all of the UK's benefits and are only able to claim income related benefits once they have worked legally in the UK for a full year. Reciprocal arrangements for health care exist between EU countries so that EU citizens, including people from the UK, can benefit from these when visiting, living and working or retiring abroad in other EU countries. After working in the UK for a period of time, many migrants from EU countries return to live in their country of origin.

Migrant workers pay tax and are helping UK businesses and the economy to grow. Some economic migrants are people working to deliver vital services in the UK such as care workers, teachers, doctors and nurses. Most people who are economic migrants are younger and healthier than the UK population as a whole and so need less health care.

***Myth: Britain is a soft touch and this attracts asylum seekers***

Truth: Research shows that asylum seekers do not usually choose the country to which they are taken and they do not know what support they will get when they arrive there. Some people are put straight into removal centres and detained on arrival in the UK and all asylum seekers remain liable to be detained. Once here, as long as they claim asylum, people are allowed to stay in the UK while their case is heard.

Around three quarters of people who claim asylum are refused. Following this refusal some people will be deported and a few will go back voluntarily, but most are too frightened to return voluntarily and may remain here supported by friends. Often countries refuse to take people back who have left to claim asylum, leaving these people effectively stateless, with no rights and no means of support

***Myth: Asylum seekers get more than our pensioners***

Truth: Asylum seekers do not have the right to work in the UK. A single asylum seeker over 25 years old receives an allowance of £42.16 a week (April 2008 figures) - less than half the amount a pensioner gets and nearly 30% below the poverty line. Couples and single asylum seekers under 25 get even less per person. Other countries including Ireland, Denmark and Belgium give better financial support to asylum seekers

***Myth: Economic migrants are taking all our jobs and causing unemployment***

Truth: Despite recent increases in the number of economic migrants, unemployment in the UK remains close to its lowest level for 30 years and job vacancies are at historically high levels. Economic migrants mainly fill low skilled, low paid vacancies in jobs that local workers do not want to do in industries such as agriculture and fishing, catering and hospitality.

***Myth: I have been waiting for a move to a new home for two years and asylum seekers and new migrants to the city have jumped the queue***

Truth: It is not the council's responsibility to find homes for asylum seekers. This is done by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) who have a contract with registered social landlords and private landlords to provide accommodation - often using property which is hard to let and that other people do not want. Although refugees are entitled to be housed by their local council they do not get any preferential treatment. Priority for housing is based solely on housing need and not nationality.

***Myth: Asylum seekers have no right to be here and we get more than our fair share of refugees***

Truth: Since Britain signed up to the 1951 United Nations convention, anyone has a right to apply for leave to stay here. The Human Rights Act also gives protection to people who are suffering from human rights abuses in their country. This means we have a legal and moral obligation to provide refuge to people who fear for their lives.

The UK hosts a small fraction of the world's refugees and most refugees find a home in a neighbouring country. The vast majority of refugees are sheltering in the developing world. At the end of 2006, two countries, Pakistan and Iran were hosting one in five (20%) of all the world's refugees between them, more than all of Europe (18%), and Africa was host to a quarter (25%). The UK is home to about 3% of the world's refugees, fewer than Germany (6%) and the USA (8.5%).

***Myth: Thousands of asylum seekers and new economic migrants have come to Britain causing more crime and forming intimidating groups on our streets***

Truth: Asylum seekers have their finger prints taken and are issued with an Asylum Registration Card which makes it easier to monitor them. There is no statistical evidence to suggest that asylum seekers or people who are economic migrants are causing more crime; in fact they are often victims of race related crimes and acts of violence. Different groups of people may gather together outside to meet because there are no community areas for them to use and their accommodation is cramped.

## People coming to Coventry: some true life stories

**Louise** is from the Cameroon. She fled with her husband in 2004, leaving her three children with her mother. At first their asylum application case was refused and it was a whole year before that decision was overturned and they were given permission to stay. They were then at last able to arrange for their children to join them. They now live happily in Coventry. For over two years Louise has been working as a teaching assistant and her husband is an accountant for a charity.

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**Adil** is 26 and from Chad. He was imprisoned and tortured in his home country for opposing the Government but managed to escape and eventually arrived in England in 2002. While his asylum claim was being processed he was housed in Coventry. However, he was refused refugee status, evicted and told to go back home. He was too frightened to do that so he worked illegally to survive. In 2005 he was caught in a raid on the factory where he worked, detained and sent back to Chad. At the airport in Chad he was severely beaten and sent straight back to Britain. He is now back in Coventry and spent three months in hospital as a result of the beating. In March 2008 the Home Office had not made a decision about his future.

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**Tariq** was 17 when he came to the UK looking for safety after his parents were killed in Afghanistan. He walked for a year, through Iran, Turkey, Greece, Italy and France, working during his journey where he could. Tariq decided to come to England because he likes the language and says it's easy to learn. In Coventry Tariq has studied courses in English and retail. Now Tariq has turned 18, the Home Office is looking at his case for asylum

**Robert**, from Canada, is studying for an MSc in environmental disasters at Coventry University – coming to the university because it was highly recommended. Robert has found Coventry relaxed and an economical place to live and study – he’s found you can go just about anywhere without a car. Robert has found that the university works really hard to accommodate international students and their needs and feels quite pampered

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**Akram**, from Libya is studying for an MSc in control engineering at Coventry University. Akram feels comfortable in Coventry, which helps him to do well in his course. Friendly locals and a lot of international students have given Akram a good insight into other cultures; he has joined the Islamic Society and enjoyed the Ramadan celebrations and visiting Arabic restaurants near the university.

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**Nicola** came to Coventry from Slovakia with her family. Nicola likes Coventry. She misses her friends from Slovakia but has made new friends here – first at Barrs Hill School and now at City College. She didn’t like living in Slovakia because her family are gypsies and she felt hated there. “But here in Coventry” she says “everyone is friendly. I love Coventry.”

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**Paul** came from Poland in 2006 to work in England. He had heard that there were plenty of jobs in Coventry. He stayed with friends and found work with an employment agency. The agency work was all short term and so he never knew when he would be laid off. Paul is a hard worker and eventually he was offered a permanent job. He now rents his own flat and is planning to get married in the summer.

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