

THE ISSUE

The British public is confused about the reasons people come to the UK, mixing up people seeking sanctuary from persecution with those who come to work and study.



WHAT CAN I DO?

Spend 10 minutes on the internet or in the library researching the different reasons that people come to the UK, such as to seek sanctuary, study or work.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Email your friends the link to the UN's online game 'Against all Odds' and find out with them what it is like for those who flee persecution.

THE SOLUTION

Use language carefully so that you use the right terms for people who come seeking sanctuary, and for other legitimate reasons such as to study or work.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Write to your local newspaper editor explaining the different reasons people come to the UK and the different terms that should be used. Ask them to update the editorial style guide for their newspaper.

69.7% SAID THAT INFORMATION THEY RECEIVED REGARDING MIGRATION DID NOT DISTINGUISH CLEARLY ENOUGH BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS, ECONOMIC MIGRANTS AND OTHER MIGRANT GROUPS.

CITIZEN ACTION TOOLKIT 2: Reasons to Come

People have been coming to Britain for thousands of years.

They have come from hundreds of countries, and for many different reasons. Some come for the scenery, some come to further their careers, but a vulnerable few come to seek sanctuary from persecution.

It is vital that we understand these differences, and help others to understand them too.

What will I find in this toolkit?

The issue	1
The solution	2
What can I do as an individual?	3
What can I do in my own community?	4
What can I do to change the world?	5
Resources	6

10 WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO SAVE SANCTUARY



CITIZENS
for sanctuary

Independent Asylum Commission
citizen

This toolkit is a supplement to the '10 Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary' booklet. You can download an electronic version or order copies of the full booklet at www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk.

THE ISSUE

The British public is confused about the reasons people come to the UK, mixing up people seeking sanctuary from persecution with those who come to work and study.

The Facts

"I don't understand the terminology – asylum seeker, refugee, economic migrant, illegal immigrant. All I know is that they are all bloody foreigners!"

Extract from Plymouth focus group.

66% of the British public agree that it is important for the UK to provide sanctuary to people fleeing persecution.

Links

Independent Asylum Commission – attitudinal research

www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/report1

Independent Asylum Commission opinion poll

www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/pages/reports/report1/7_OpinionPoll.pdf

Confusion and ignorance breed intolerance and misunderstanding.

When the Independent Asylum Commission conducted the most in-depth research into public attitudes to people seeking sanctuary ever undertaken, it was discovered that very few people really knew the difference between the variety of people who come to the UK and their motivations.

First of all we asked focus groups if they knew the difference between terms such as 'asylum seeker', 'economic migrant', 'refugee' and 'illegal immigrant'. The point of a focus group is to gain an understanding of what members of a society know and think about an issue – that is why ours were selected by a market research agency to reflect the demographic pattern in the UK. So we had the wealthy and the not so wealthy, the highly educated and uneducated, old and young, male and female – and we asked them all the same question.

And guess what? Not a single participant in any of the 16 focus groups across the country could accurately define all of the terms! Not one.

When we followed the focus groups with an opinion poll, we found something still more disturbing – the vast majority of people in the UK not only do not understand the difference between the different terms, but 71% think that information they receive is not clear about the distinctions between different groups of migrants. So clearly the media, politicians and others who communicate with the public on this issue have a lot to answer for!

Does this question of language really matter? So what if we describe Polish migrants as refugees, or people seeking sanctuary as 'illegal immigrants'?

Well, language matters enormously – as you will see from the first action in the '10 Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary' booklet. Understanding is also important – because the public responds differently to people fleeing persecution than to people who come to work, and because different moral and legal standards apply in each case.

We have an international obligation to provide sanctuary to people fleeing persecution that is more powerful than the economic and social considerations that influence the number of people we allow to come to the UK to work. For that reason alone it is important for the public to understand the different reasons why people come to the UK.

THE SOLUTION

Use language carefully so that you use the right terms for people who come seeking sanctuary, and for other legitimate reasons such as to study or work.

The Facts

“Politicians, journalists and those engaging in public debate on this issue should understand the general confusion of terms such as ‘asylum seeker’, ‘economic migrant’ and ‘irregular migrant’, and, before making a contribution, understand how their words are likely to be received and interpreted by the public. Great care must be taken to be precise in the language used.”

Independent Asylum Commission, *Saving Sanctuary report*.

Links

For information on the plight of long term undocumented migrants, see:

www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk

Using language we can all understand

Is all this advice about language just political correctness gone mad?

When the Independent Asylum Commission published its recommendations the Sun newspaper reported the suggestion that people should use ‘person seeking sanctuary’ rather than ‘asylum seeker’ alongside a list of politically correct terms such as ‘waste operations executive’ instead of dustman (see the first action in the ‘10 Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary’ booklet for more on this).

The difference between our recommendations and ‘waste operations executive’ is that that term is more difficult for the public to understand than ‘dustman’, whereas ‘person seeking sanctuary’ is easier for the public to understand than ‘asylum seeker’ – which more people associate with mental illness than with people fleeing persecution.

So there is a difference between using language that is clear and that the public is able to understand, and using terms that few people understand. Here is a list of simple definitions of what these phrases *really* mean.

Migrant – Any one, or anything, that moves from one area of the world to another. Birds migrate south in winter. And the pioneers in early American history migrated Westwards across the plains. It is a neutral term.

Immigrant – A person who migrates in to another country. This could be the person who comes to Britain, and wants to live and work here.

Economic migrant – This relates to anyone who has chosen to move country legally and legitimately to take up a job.

Person seeking sanctuary – a person who is fleeing violence, tyranny or persecution in their country of origin. Just like Jews escaping the Nazis in the 1930s, or the Zimbabweans fleeing Mugabe today.

Refugee – someone who has been granted sanctuary.

Irregular or undocumented migrant – people who have come to the UK for a host of reasons - to study, to work, to visit, or to seek sanctuary – but who have either overstayed their visa or been denied the sanctuary they have sought, but remain in the country without permission.

WHAT CAN I DO?

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internet or in the
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The Facts

The situations in different countries can change from day-to-day. Take an interest in current affairs and you will better understand people's plight.

Links

The CIA holds detailed overviews of all the countries in the world, which are a good place to start. See:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

The Human Rights TV has an archive of testimonies collected by the Independent

Asylum Commission:

www.humanrightstv.com

Do your homework!

The list above is very brief, and will not give you full understanding of what these terms mean, and how they have evolved. If you do your own research, then you will begin to see how the language that we use has come to influence the views we have of these people. And remember: they are *first and foremost* people. Not criminals or aliens or foreigners. **People.**

10 minutes of research online or in the library would tell you that people seeking sanctuary are fleeing from some of the most insidious forms of persecution. 2 minutes of research would tell you that they are women fleeing execution by rocks for the crime of adultery. A further minute would tell you of the Sudanese boy trying to escape government-sponsored murder in Darfur. You may then be directed to the story of a man who has contributed to his community for decades, but who now fears brutal reprisals because the state-media uncovered that he is secretly gay. And there would still be time to read of the cramped, squalid and often fatal journeys that bring them here, with little more than the clothes on their backs, seeking a better life.

And then, I bet, you'd want to spend another 10 minutes some other time looking at how these people's stories are far removed from the very different stories of those people who have come to this country to work and to study. Who, as economic migrants, have come here to make use of our world-class institutions and professions, and who want to contribute to the plurality and growth of this country – both economically and culturally.

And while you're out and about reading books and scanning web-pages for all these facts and figures, why not have a look some opinions, too. There are some incredibly hard-working charities and support groups that can give you a deep insight into the importance of our concern for people in this situation. There are also some incredibly hard-working newspapers and political movements that would have you believe that every foreigner in Britain is a benefit-scrounging, dog-eating, would-be-suicide-bomber. It would be wrong to ever underestimate the power of their rhetoric, or the reach of their inculcation. But if you are armed with the truth, you shall soon see the sharp poison of their lies, and the shallow pools of their understanding.

TOP TIP: KNOWLEDGE IS POWER. A WELL-ARGUED AND RESEARCHED POSITION HAS FAR MORE POWER THAN AN ANGRY RANT. THE FACTS ARE ON YOUR SIDE; USE THEM!

WHAT CAN I DO?

Email your friends the link to the UN's online game 'Against all Odds' and find out with them what it is like for those who flee persecution.

The Facts

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the UN Refugee Agency. It is also the guardian of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees.

It helps over 34 million people across the world – most of them in the developing world.

Links

For more information on the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, see:

<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/3c0762ea4.html>

To play the UN's Against All Odds, see:

<http://www.playagainstallodds.com/>

Learning through playing... computer games?

If you are wondering how to get your friends and colleagues to better understand what it is like for people who flee persecution, then just send them the link to this game.

Against All Odds (www.playagainstallodds.com) is a straightforward computer game that you can download for free from the internet. It puts you in the shoes (or more likely, bare-feet) of someone fleeing persecution. From the terror they faced at home, through the harrowing journey they took to flee the border, to the arrival in a foreign country and trying to make a new life.

It was made by a professional games developer and so is fun as well as informative.

It is a real eye-opener – and we think it will open the eyes of many of your friends. So send them a link to the site, and ask them about it when you next see them.

You have the power to change people's minds with the click of the mouse. Why not start today by sending it to your email contacts and facebook friends?



WHAT CAN I DO?

Write to your local newspaper editor explaining the different reasons people come to the UK and the different terms that should be used. Ask them to update the editorial style guide for their newspaper.

The Facts

71% of the British public think that the information they receive is not clear about the distinctions between different groups of migrants.

One in three of the British public think that their local newspaper is an important source of information on sanctuary.

Links

Daily Telegraph style guide:
www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/about-us/style-book/1435286/Telegraph-Style-Book-Banned-words.html

Find a list of local newspapers and contact details here:
<http://www.mediauk.com/newspapers>

Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

Time to think about how you can take your message even further. If you have been moved by the research you have done, and if your friends have been motivated, too, why not take it to the next level?

Local newspapers are a great place to target. Local newspapers are likely to have a style guide and, in some cases, a list of banned words that their journalists are forbidden from using – see the amusing Daily Telegraph example in the links section. Meet with your local newspaper editor to talk about the importance of using language responsibly and ask them to update their style guide accordingly.

If you have done your research, and understand the issues, this need not be too hard. If you have encouraged your friends to do the same, then you can move forward with more strength. And if you can show how the issues you have unearthed relate to your local area, then the local papers are going to be very keen to speak with you.

Think about the newspaper editor's self interest. They want to write a hard-hitting story with local interest that taps into issues that your locality has, before now, ignored. But you don't just want a one-off article that highlights the language issues but goes no further. You want a commitment from the editor that they will change their *style-guide* so that the term 'asylum seeker' is always replaced with 'person seeking sanctuary', and is no longer confused with economic or irregular migrant.

This would form a lasting change to the way in which opinions are formed and perspectives are gained. Local papers are often far less biased than national papers, so simple changes like these will be easier to achieve. If they are resistant at first, why not suggest they try it for a month or two, and then meet with the editor again to see what issues have been raised, and try to convince them of the benefit of moving forward with your proposals.

If you need support or advice about this action, then contact carina.crawford-rolt@cof.org.uk and we will help you prepare.

TOP TIP: READ THE TOOLKIT THAT ACCOMPANIES THE FIRST ACTION IN THE '10 WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO SAVE SANCTUARY' BOOKLET FOR MORE TIPS.

Resources

Title

Text

Please let us know how you get on with these actions. We will collate all of the results from across the country and add them to our website so we can see all the change we have accomplished.

If you need advice or support, please contact carina.crawford-rolt@cof.org.uk.

Good luck!