

How many asylum seekers and refugees are there in Northern Ireland?



Asylum data is collected nationally by the Home Office; however, the Home Office does not publish Northern Ireland data. Organisations such as the Law Centre have long argued that regional data should be published. Access to data is essential for planning and monitoring. It is also important to counter scaremongering claims.

In the absence of any official data, the Law Centre has provided estimates based on information compiled from different sources including Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership, Home Office Official Immigration Statistics (UK wide), the Home Office NI Asylum Stakeholders Forum and the Refugee & Asylum Forum.

Terminology

- A person who has requested protection in the UK is an asylum seeker.
- If protection is granted, the asylum seeker becomes a refugee as do any family members.
- Refugee status is the most common grant of protection status; Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave to Remain are granted less frequently.
- Some refugees are eligible to apply for refugee family reunion. Dependent family members enter the UK to live with the refugee. They arrive with refugee status without going through the asylum process.

1. How many asylum applications are there in Northern Ireland each year?

There were almost 200 applications for asylum in Northern Ireland in the year ending August 2015.¹ This is less than 1% of the UK's asylum applications.²

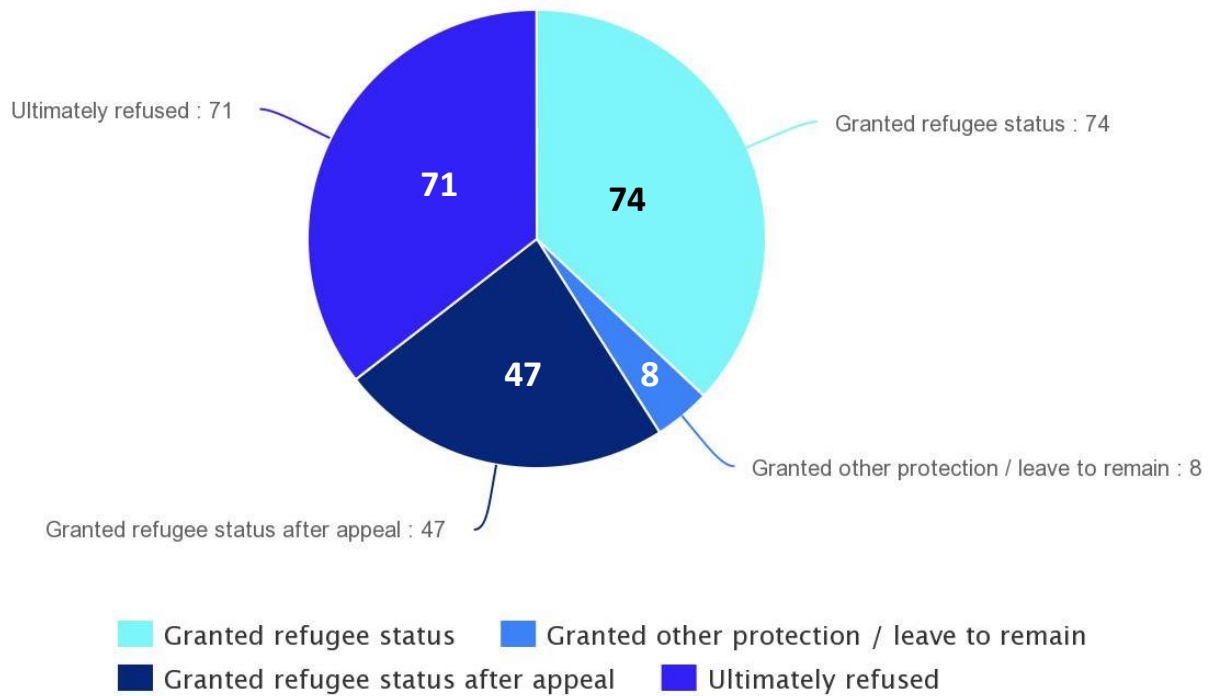
2. Where do asylum seekers come from?

Asylum seekers come from countries from around the globe that are experiencing war, conflict and human rights abuses. In Northern Ireland, asylum applicants are most commonly from China, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.³



3. What is the outcome of the 200 asylum applications in Northern Ireland?

We estimate:⁴



4. How many asylum seekers are currently living in Northern Ireland?

There were approximately 600 asylum seekers living in asylum support accommodation in August 2015.⁵ However, because some asylum seekers are not entitled to any support and therefore are not reflected in these figures, the total number is higher.

The majority of asylum seekers live in Belfast.

5. How many refugees are there in Northern Ireland?

We estimate there are 200 – 300 new refugees in Northern Ireland each year including family members.⁶

Some refugees choose to live in Northern Ireland permanently. Many move to GB to be closer to extended family members or existing communities. Some refugees return to their home country when it safe to do so.



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Notes

¹ This is the number of applications for asylum and therefore the figure does not include dependants. The large majority of asylum applications are single adults whereas approximately one fifth of applications are from families. Nationally, there is approximately one dependant for every four applicants.

² The UK received 25,020 asylum applications in the year ending March 2015.

³ See information compiled by NISMP: www.migrationni.org/demographic-trends

⁴ This is an estimated based on applying the national rates of acceptance/rejection for 2014 to the NI 200 figure www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/5657/Asylum_Statistics_Annual_Trends_Aug_2015.pdf. Of the 74 refused asylum applications, UK wide cohort data for 2014 allows us to estimate that 41% (30) refused asylum seekers are removed or make a voluntary return. What happens to the remaining 59% is unknown. We would imagine that many remain here in a “limbo” situation. The cohort data is published in the Oxford University Migration Observatory’s ‘Briefing: Migration to UK – Asylum 2015’: <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-uk-asylum>

⁵ The majority of asylum seekers – 492 – are in receipt of s.95 support, whereas the others receive s.98 or s.4. See Home Office Immigration Statistics Asylum Data Tables Volume 4: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2015-data-tables

⁶ This figure is based on the 129 applications that result in a grant of refugee status plus an estimated 40 applications for refugee family reunion plus an estimate of family members. The estimated refugee family reunion figure was provided by members of the Refugee & Asylum Forum.