

Stranded refugees denied UK asylum face 'life in limbo'

Charity says many think of suicide or opt to become stateless

by Mark Townsend
Home Affairs Editor

Almost half of the refused asylum seekers who are unable to leave the UK have considered committing suicide, according to new research that criticises government rules for forcing individuals into destitution and a life in limbo.

Interviews with asylum seekers refused permission to remain, but who cannot go home because they lack a passport, their nationality is disputed or there is no viable route back to their country, also found that half have considered or are applying for statelessness.

The British Red Cross charity said such individuals should be allowed temporary leave to remain and work if they meet Home Office requirements, sparing people from years living in penury.

The charity said it knew of cases where women in this situation had resorted to paying for a place to sleep with sex. It warned that those stuck in such limbo frequently suffer periods of homelessness alongside mental health issues, and that survival depended on the goodwill of friends and charities.

Analysis by the *Guardian* revealed that Britain is one of the worst destinations in western Europe for people seeking asylum. Based on interviews with 15 people, the British Red Cross report found chronic stress, insomnia, anxiety and depression, with one refused asylum seeker from Sudan, a victim of torture,

describing that he self-harms by banging his head against the wall.

No conclusive figures exist on the numbers of people who cannot leave the UK, although a freedom of information response from the Home Office reveals that 1,096 people lodged an application for statelessness in the UK after being refused asylum, following the introduction of new guidance in April 2013.

Mike Adamson, chief executive of the British Red Cross, said: "Having no permission to be in the UK but no way home means being stuck in a permanent state of limbo and often living hand to mouth. Some of the individuals interviewed ... have been in this situation for years. We believe this is inhumane and this kind of status should only ever be temporary."

Refused asylum seekers can struggle to obtain the documents required to leave the country with factors including their embassy refusing to see them if they cannot prove their nationality.

Enaya, 37, came to the UK five years ago with her husband and baby daughter. Her husband was stopped at the airport and returned to Palestine, where he was arrested and killed. Enaya and her daughter were refused asylum, but lack the documents to leave despite many attempts to obtain a passport. She is considering applying for statelessness.

Walid, 44, has been in the UK for more than 17 years, having fled war in Algeria, and is unable to return home because he has no passport and the Algerian embassy will not recognise him. Walid is homeless and has had two heart attacks since arriving in the UK.

The UK government provides modest financial support to refused asylum seekers who are taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK, known as section 4. In 2015, 63 people were granted section 4 support for such cases.

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