



## Asylum

*This country has a proud record of granting safe refuge to those fleeing torture, war and oppression. We should continue to provide sanctuary for these people, while dealing swiftly and efficiently with those who try to cheat the system. Our proud record has been undermined by the Government's failure to create an asylum system that is firm but fair. Labour's posturing on asylum to please public opinion has created a culture of rejection in which real life and death matters have become a political football. Nearly a quarter of all asylum decisions are overturned on appeal. Labour recently had a backlog of half a million cases and had to create a new agency just to deal with them. Faced by long delays and not being allowed to work, many asylum seekers are destitute and forced to rely on tiny state handouts, which turns public opinion against them. It is time to take the politics out of asylum and create a system that is firm but fair.*

**Allow asylum seekers to work.** Asylum seekers are not allowed to work (apart from exceptional circumstances after a year) while their claim is being processed, despite the fact it can take years. They are forced to live on state handouts, even though many are skilled people. It also fuels anger among some sections of the public. We would allow asylum seekers to work two months after making an application and benefits would only be paid if they could not find work. This would reduce spending on benefits, increase tax revenue, help integration, lower community tensions and greatly reduce dependence on welfare and social housing.

**Give responsibility to an independent agency.** It is time to take the politics out of asylum. The Liberal Democrats would take responsibility away from the Home Office and give it to a Canadian-style independent agency, making decisions free from political considerations. Currently, a quarter of decisions are overturned on appeal. In Canada, it is less than 1%. We would fast-track asylum claims which are obviously well-founded and front load resources into making high quality initial decisions.

**Increase European cooperation.** We would push for EU-wide cooperation on asylum to help share the burden proportionally between member states.

**End deportation of homosexual asylum seekers.** The Liberal Democrats will end the deportation of asylum seekers to countries where they face imprisonment, torture or execution because of their sexual orientation or gender identification. Unlike Labour, we realise that persecution based on sexual orientation is a valid reason to claim asylum if people are from some countries in the world, like Nigeria.