



Viral emails protesting about financial assistance for “illegal immigrants/refugees living in Britain”

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Members may be contacted by constituents complaining that “illegal immigrants/refugees” in Britain receive significantly more financial assistance from the Government than UK pensioners, citing an email.

It alleges that “if you cross the British border illegally you get a job, a driver’s license, pension card, welfare, credit cards, subsidised rent or a loan to buy a house, free education and free healthcare.” It also suggests that “illegal immigrants/refugees living in Britain” are entitled to financial assistance worth up to £29,900 per year, in contrast to pensioners who, it says, receive only £6,000 a year in benefit. More recent mutations of the email do not include the former statements but still make claims about cash entitlements for the respective groups.

The House of Commons Library first became aware of the email in early 2010 but it has a much longer pedigree. It contains text from a protest email which has been circulating in Australia for some time now, but which may have originated in Canada. Versions also circulate in the United States, and elements even appear in protest emails as far afield as India. The UK version has been adapted, somewhat crudely, for a domestic audience by someone or some organisation unknown. The figures quoted bear no relation whatsoever to the situation in the United Kingdom.

As long ago as October 2007 the Refugee Council of Australia advised Australians to ignore an almost identical email to the one now circulating in the UK, describing it as “blatantly inaccurate and intended to create resentment towards refugees and fuel disharmony.” The Australian Department for Immigration and Citizenship has also attempted on more than one occasion to refute the claims in the email, but it continues to circulate, in various guises, and receives regular attention on talk-back radio shows and internet discussion forums.

This note gives details of the email, and looks at its origins. It also gives information on actual entitlements for immigrants and pensioners in the United Kingdom.

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1 The email

Different versions of the email are in circulation, but the usual version contains a series of statements in upper case, followed by a table purporting to compare entitlements for a “British old age pensioner” with those for “illegal immigrants/refugees living in Britain.” The following [example](#), from www.ukdebate.co.uk , is typical:

NOW YOU KNOW WHY PENSIONERS ARE UP IN ARMS

This is interesting!

Let me see if I understand all this

IF YOU CROSS THE NORTH KOREAN BORDER ILLEGALLY YOU GET 12 YEARS HARD LABOR.

IF YOU CROSS THE IRANIAN BORDER ILLEGALLY YOU ARE DETAINED INDEFINITELY.

IF YOU CROSS THE AFGHAN BORDER ILLEGALLY, YOU GET SHOT.

IF YOU CROSS THE SAUDI ARABIAN BORDER ILLEGALLY YOU WILL BE JAILED.

IF YOU CROSS THE CHINESE BORDER ILLEGALLY YOU MAY NEVER BE HEARD FROM AGAIN.

IF YOU CROSS THE VENEZUELAN BORDER ILLEGALLY YOU WILL BE BRANDED A SPY AND YOUR FATE WILL BE SEALED.

IF YOU CROSS THE CUBAN BORDER ILLEGALLY YOU WILL BE THROWN INTO POLITICAL PRISON TO ROT.

IF YOU CROSS THE BRITISH BOARDER ILLEGALLY YOU GET A JOB, A DRIVERS LICENSE, PENSION CARD, WELFARE, CREDIT CARDS, SUBSIDISED RENT OR A LOAN TO BUY A HOUSE, FREE EDUCATION AND FREE HEALTH CARE.

Are you aware of the following?

The British Government provides the following financial assistance: -

BENEFIT	BRITISH OLD AGE PENSIONER	ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES LIVING IN BRITAIN
Weekly allowance	£100	£250
Weekly spouse allowance	£25	£225
Additional weekly hardship allowance	£0;00	£100
TOTAL YEARLY BENEFIT	£6,000	£29,900

If I was a refugee, why would I look for work?

Please forward to all your contacts so that we can lobby for an increase in the aged pension.

After all, the average pensioner has paid taxes and contributed to the growth of this country

For the last 40 to 60 years.

The email does not mention any particular organisation or individual. Some versions do not include the statements in upper case. One [variant](#) includes the subheading “HUNG PARLIMENT - HANGING'S TOO GOOD FOR THEM.”

2 Analysis

The email has elements which are virtually identical to protest emails which have been circulating in other countries for a number of years. The statements in upper case often appear in a separate email. Further information is given below.

2.1 Statements in upper case

The word “labor” in the first sentence may be a clue to the origins of the statements in upper case. A viral email circulating in the United States has exactly the same text as the first half of the email, but the last sentence states:

If you cross the U.S. border illegally you get a job, a drivers license, social security card, welfare, food stamps, credit cards, subsidized rent or a loan to buy a house, free education, free health care, a lobbyist in Washington and in many instances you can vote!¹

Versions also circulate in Canada, Australia and India.

The [Canadian version](#) states:

...if you cross the canadian border illegally you get a job, a drivers license, social security card, welfare, food stamps, credit cards, subsidized rent or a loan to buy a house, free education, free health care, a lobbyist in ottawa and in many instances you can vote.

The [Australian version](#) states:

...if you cross the AUSTRALIAN border illegally, you get a job, a driver's licence, a social security card, welfare benefits, welfare food stamps, credit cards, subsidized rent or a loan to buy a new house, free education, free health care, a lobbyist in Canberra and, in many instances, you can VOTE.

The version of the email circulating in [India](#), interestingly, gives a rather different perspective on the consequences of entering Britain illegally:

...If You Enter Britain Illegally You Will be Arrested, Prosecuted and Sent to Prison and Deported

If You Are a Pakistani or a Bangladeshi and Illegally Cross the Indian Border You Get - A Ration Card, Passport (1 or more), Haj Subsidy, A Drivers License, Voter Identity Card, Job Reservation, Special Privileges, Credit Cards, Subsidized Rent Or A Loan

¹ [‘We’ve All Seen ‘em, But Who Starts ‘em?’](#), *The Daily Censored*, 13 November 2009

To Buy A House, Free Education, Free Health Care, A Lobbyist in New Delhi, with a ready Television Channel & group of expert human rights activists, The Right to talk about Secularism, which was not heard of back home. And of course - Voting Rights!!

2.2 Entitlements for pensioners and “illegal immigrants/refugees”

An email which includes the same table (but giving amounts in dollars) has been circulating in Australia since at least 2007. The Australian website www.hoax-slayer.com (‘Debunking email hoaxes and exposing Internet scams since 2003’) gives an [analysis of the email](#) which quotes from responses from the Australian authorities to the Australian version of the email. Extracts are given below.² The Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship thought that the email might have originated in Canada.

Refugee Monthly Allowance From Australian Government Hoax

Outline

Protest emails claim that refugees receive a substantially higher monthly payment from the Australian government than do Australian pensioners.

Brief Analysis

The claims in these emails are totally false. Refugees in Australia do not receive higher government payments than pensioners or other Australian citizens. In fact, there is no separate rate of benefit payments for refugees.

Detailed analysis and references below example.

Scroll down to submit comments

Last updated: 10th May 2010

First published: 8th May 2008

Article written by Brett M. Christensen

[About Brett Christensen and Hoax-Slayer](#)

Example:(Submitted, May 2010)

Subject: Fw: Australian Pensions

Are you aware of the following?

The Australian Federal Government provides the following financial assistance:-

BENEFIT	AUSTRALIAN AGED PENSIONER	ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES LIVING IN AUSTRALIA
Weekly allowance	\$253.00	\$472.50
Weekly Spouse allowance	\$56.00	\$472.50
Additional weekly hardship	\$0.00	\$145.00

² Downloaded 12 August 2011

allowance		
TOTAL YEARLY BENEFIT	\$16,068.00	\$56,680.00

If I were a refugee, why would I look for work? Please forward to all your contacts so that we can lobby for an increase in the aged pension, and to put the welfare of Australian pensioners first, and then the welfare of refugees. After all, the average pensioner has paid taxes and contributed to the growth of this country for the last 40 to 60 years.....Kevin Rudd The Dud -- Pay Heed!!!!!!!!!!!!...The elections are this year. The people who put you in power can also remove you from power as easily. THE HONEYMOON IS OVER!!!!!!!!!!!!. Time for a reality check is here now!!!

Example:(Submitted, May 2008)

Subject: This is no joke... & only in Australia (the lucky country)!

This is interesting:

It is interesting that the federal government provides a single refugee with a monthly allowance of \$1,890.00 And each can also get an additional \$580.00 in social assistance for a total of \$2,470.00.

A single pensioner who, after contributing to the growth and development of Australia for 40 to 50 years, receives only a monthly maximum of \$1,012.00 in old age pension and Guaranteed Income Supplement.

Maybe our pensioners should apply as refugees!

Let's send this to all Australians so we can all be ticked off and maybe we can get the refugees cut back to \$1,012.00 and the pensioners up to \$2,470.00 and enjoy some of the money we were forced to submit to the Government over the last 40 or 50 years.

Please forward to every Australian to expose what our elected politicians are doing - to the over-taxed Australian.

Detailed Analysis

According to these widely circulated protest emails, a refugee who arrives in Australia receives a considerably

Claims that refugees in Australia get substantially higher government payments than pensioners are completely unfounded

higher monthly benefit payment from the Australian government than do aged pensioners who have lived and worked in the country for years before retirement. The message has caused a great deal of anger and resentment among recipients and has been discussed at length on various talk-back radio shows and in letters to the editor in newspapers across the country.

However, the information in the message is total nonsense and in no way

reflects the real level of entitlements for refugees or pensioners.

A September 2007 [media release](#) from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) notes:

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has refuted false claims circulating on the internet that refugees settling in Australia receive more in benefit payments than Australian pensioners.

'The figures quoted in the email bear no resemblance to income-support payments to pensioners, or to payments to refugees settling in Australia,' DIAC spokesman Sandi Logan said today.

'The text and figures in the email appear to have originated in Canadian emails, websites and internet chatrooms. We suspect that the email circulating here has been cut and pasted from these sources.

'In Australia, refugees granted permanent visas may gain access to benefits on the same basis and at the same rates as other Australian permanent residents.

'Refugees with temporary visas do not have access to the full range of benefits - they are only eligible for Centrelink Special Benefits on the same basis and rates as other Australian residents.

'There is no separate rate of benefit payments for refugees.'

Mr Logan said refugees received no cash payments under Australia's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy.

In 2009, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) again [attempted to refute the claims](#) in these emails by posting the following letter to various Australian newspapers:

*Letter to the Editor - Atherton Tablelander
02 September 2009*

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) totally rejects the false claims that refugees permanently settling in Australia receive more in benefit payments than Australian pensioners (Pensioners deserve fair go, 01/09/2009).

The figures quoted, which have been circulating in a hoax email, bear no resemblance to income-support payments to pensioners, or to payments to asylum seekers and refugees settling in Australia.

The text and figures in the email appear to have originated in Canadian emails, websites and internet chatrooms. We suspect that the email circulating here has been cut and pasted from these sources.

In Australia, refugees granted permanent visas may gain access to benefits on the same basis and at the same rates as other Australian permanent residents.

There is no separate rate of benefit payments for refugees. Refugees

receive no cash payments under Australia's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy.

DIAC helps eligible refugees with English-language lessons and settling-in assistance including basic goods to start a household, subsidies for rent and utilities for their first four weeks in the country.

We would strongly encourage anyone who receives an email claiming asylum seekers or refugees are treated more favourably than Australian permanent residents to hit the delete button and ignore these scurrilous claims.

*Sandi Logan
National Communications Manager,
Department of Immigration and Citizenship*

2 September 2009

In March 2010, The Refugee Council of Australia also updated information on its website dismissing the messages as a hoax. It [notes](#):

The Refugee Council of Australia has called on Australians to ignore hoax emails which continue to be circulated nationally and which claim that refugees receive higher social security payments than pensioners. The emails are blatantly inaccurate and intended to create resentment towards refugees and fuel disharmony.

A refugee who has permanent residency in Australia receives exactly the same social security benefit as any Australian-born person in the same circumstances. Refugees apply for social security through Centrelink like everyone else and are assessed for the different payment options in the same way as everyone else.

There are no separate Centrelink allowances that one can receive simply by virtue of being a refugee, nor do refugees receive cash payments under either the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) or the Settlement Grants Program (SGP). The IHSS provides settlement support to eligible refugees and assists them in securing basic necessities such as accommodation, utilities, clothing and medical care. The SGP provides funding to organisations to help new arrivals settle in Australia.

The misinformation in these viral emails has also [been further distributed](#) by at least one talk-back radio host who apparently did not bother to take the time to check the facts before sprouting such nonsense over the airways.

Moreover, the message is not even home-grown. In fact it is a mutant sibling of a [protest email](#) that has circulated in both Canada and the United States. And the claims in the message are as equally false in those countries as they are in Australia.

Thus, forwarding this misinformation will serve only to create unnecessary anger among Australian citizens and unwarranted resentment of refugees. If you receive this message, please do not pass it on to others and please let the sender know that the information it contains is untrue.

2.3 Parliamentary Library of Australia research paper

The Parliamentary Library of Australia has produced a Research Paper, [Australian Government Assistance to refugees: fact versus fiction](#)³, in light of the attention given to the email in Australia. The introduction to the Research Paper states:

In recent years a series of emails have been widely circulated throughout Australia claiming to describe the social security entitlements of refugees compared with those of other Australian residents. A common claim in these emails is that refugees in Australia receive higher social security benefits than age pensioners. Some also suggest that refugees receive free gifts such as houses. Claims of this kind are erroneous and appear to have caused some confusion in the community. They are often brought to the attention of senators and members by their constituents.

The paper describes the current situation in Australia with regard to refugee entitlements to social security and other assistance “in order to clarify this issue.”

The concluding section of the Research Paper emphasises:

There is no truth to claims made in emails circulated throughout Australia that refugees are entitled to higher benefits than other social security recipients. Refugees have the same entitlements as all other permanent residents—they do not receive special refugee payments or special rates of payment.

3 Actual entitlements for people from abroad and UK pensioners

“Illegal immigrants” are people who have entered the UK unlawfully, or who have stayed here for longer than they were allowed without making another application. They do not have the right to work. Since they are in the UK without legal status, they are liable to be removed if they come to the attention of immigration authorities.

People who require leave to enter or remain in the UK, but who do not have it, are “persons subject to immigration control” within the meaning of [section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#) and as such are not eligible for most social security benefits.

Until recently, immigration status did not affect eligibility for those benefits which depend on National Insurance contributions, such as contribution-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and contributory Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Other work-related benefits including Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Sick Pay and Industrial Injuries benefits were also payable regardless of immigration status. However, as a result of measures in the *Welfare Reform Act 2012* eligibility for these benefits is now restricted to those who are entitled to work in the UK.

“Refugees” – ie asylum seekers whose application for asylum has been successful – are able to claim social security benefits and tax credits on the same basis as UK nationals, but again may find it difficult to gain entitlement to contributory benefits since these depend upon the person having a sufficient contribution record.

A concise statement of the general principles of benefit entitlement for people from abroad is given in the following PQ response:

³ By Luke Buckmaster and Jonathon Guppy; last updated 11 November 2014

Contributory benefits, such as contribution-based jobseeker's allowance, are payable to anyone who satisfies the contribution and other conditions for the benefit, regardless of nationality.

However, all migrants must satisfy the Habitual Residence Test before they are eligible to claim means tested benefits. The test has two elements: a legal right to reside and an objective assessment of factual habitual residence. Economically inactive EEA nationals and their family members cannot claim income-related benefits. People coming from outside the European Economic Area are subject to immigration control and they generally have an immigration status that allows no recourse to public funds and so would not be eligible for income-related benefits.⁴

Further information on the rules on access to benefits and tax credits for people coming to the UK from abroad is given in Library briefing SN06847, [People from abroad: what benefits can they claim?](#)

3.1 Actual amounts payable

The amounts that the viral e-mail claims are payable to 'illegal immigrants/refugees' bear no relation to any UK out-of-work benefit rates. The current personal allowance rates of the main working-age non-contributory out-of-work benefits are as follows:

Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based) / Income Support / Employment and Support Allowance (income-related)

	2014-15	2015-16
	per week	per week
Single under 25/lone parent under 18	£57.35	£57.90
Single person aged 25+ / Lone parent aged 18+	£72.40	£73.10
Couple (both over 18)	£113.70	£114.85

People in receipt of out-of-work benefits may also receive Housing Benefit, but the e-mail makes no explicit mention of assistance with housing costs.

The full Category A Retirement Pension will be £115.95 a week from April 2015. Pensioners whose total income – including their Retirement Pension – is less than the Pension Credit Guarantee Credit may be able to get their income "topped-up" to that level. The Pension Credit Guarantee Credit for a single pensioner will be £151.20 a week in 2015-16, and £230.85 for a couple, but further additions may be payable for disability and/or carers.

Basic State Pension and Pension Credit rates

	2014-15	2015-16
	per week	per week
Basic State Pension (cat A) single person	£113.10	£115.95
Basic State Pension (cat A) couple	£180.90	£185.45
Pension Credit minimum guarantee – single person	£148.53	£151.20
Pension Credit minimum guarantee – couple	£226.50	£230.85

⁴ [HC Deb 17 Jan 2013 c867W | PQ 137333](#)

Asylum seekers – i.e. persons awaiting a decision on an asylum application – are not entitled to any mainstream non-contributory social security benefits such as income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income Support and Housing Benefit. Instead, they may be eligible for accommodation and/or financial [support from the UK Border Agency](#).

Cash support for asylum seekers is less generous than social security benefits. From 6 April 2015, [asylum support rates](#) will be as follows:

	Weekly payment
Married couple or couple in civil partnership	£72.52
Lone parent aged 18 or over	£43.94
Single person aged 18 or over	£36.95
Aged 16 to 18	£39.80
Aged under 16	£52.96

With the exception of the rate for single persons aged 18 and over, asylum support rates have not changed since April 2011.

The Government had intended to introduce a standard rate of asylum support per person, regardless of age – £36.95 a week per adult or child – with effect from 6 April 2015, but it changed its mind before the amending regulations came into effect. Further regulations were laid before Parliament on 27 March 2015 to provide that 2015-16 asylum support rates for most categories of claimant would remain unchanged.⁵ Only the rate for single persons aged 18 and over will change from April 2015 – from £36.62 a week to £36.95.

Further information can be found in the Library briefing [Asylum support: accommodation and financial support for asylum seekers](#).

In the fourth quarter of 2014, just under 30,000 destitute asylum seekers were receiving cash support and/or temporary accommodation from the UK Border Agency under section 95 of the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*. 26,350 persons were in dispersed accommodation, and 3,403 were receiving subsistence only. The numbers receiving support are far lower than a decade ago – over 80,000 asylum seekers were receiving section 95 support in the fourth quarter of 2003 – but since 2012 the numbers have increased from a low of just under 20,000 recipients.⁶

4 Responses to Freedom of Information requests

The UK Government has not made any public statement in response to the viral email, but on 23 September 2011 the Department for Work and Pensions gave the following [response](#) to a Freedom of Information request about the information in the email:

Freedom of Information request 2049/2011

Received 14 July 2011

Published 23 September 2011

⁵ [The Asylum Support \(Amendment No.2\) Regulations 2015; SI 2015/944](#)

⁶ [Home Office Immigration statistics, October to December 2014](#), Table as_16

Information request

"I have today received the attached information...I would like to know if these assertions are correct and if so how they can be justified?"

The British Government provides the following financial assistance: -

- BRITISH OLD AGED PENSIONER (bearing in mind they worked hard and paid their Income Tax and National Insurance contributions to the British government all their working life) Weekly allowance: **£106.00**
- IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES LIVING IN BRITAIN (No Income Tax and National Insurance contribution whatsoever) Weekly allowance: **£250.00**
- BRITISH OLD AGED PENSIONER Weekly Spouse allowance: **£25.00**
- ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES LIVING IN BRITAIN Weekly Spouse allowance: **£225.00**
- BRITISH OLD AGED PENSIONER Additional weekly hardship allowance **£0.00**
- ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES LIVING IN BRITAIN Additional weekly hardship allowance **£100.00**

A British old age pensioner is no less hard up than an illegal immigrant/refugee yet receives nothing

- BRITISH OLD AGED PENSIONER TOTAL YEARLY BENEFIT **£6,000**
- ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES LIVING IN BRITAIN TOTAL YEARLY BENEFIT: **£29,900**"

DWP response

I should first clarify that illegal immigrants are by definition unable to claim or qualify for any benefits whatsoever as they are usually living in the UK unknown to the relevant authorities.

There is no standard benefit that asylum seekers can receive in the way suggested by the information you have received. Since 3 April 2000, asylum seekers who require assistance are offered support by way of a cash allowance for living expenses and in some cases, accommodation. This scheme is administered by the Home Office's Asylum Support Service. The weekly asylum support rates from April 2011 are £36.62 for a single person and £72.52 for a couple over age 18.

The United Kingdom is a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. As a consequence we must fully honour our obligation to consider all applications for asylum made in this country or at our ports. In order to qualify for asylum a person must be outside his or her country of nationality and have a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

In the event of an asylum seeker being granted refugee status, they are subject to the same rules of entitlement to benefit, and rates of benefit, as United Kingdom citizens.

According to the website WhatDoTheyKnow.com, a similar [FOI request to the Prime Minister's Office](#) received the following [response on 26 March 2012](#) from the [Head of Knowledge and Management at the Cabinet Office](#):

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that the information you requested is not held by the Cabinet Office. You may be able to obtain more information by contacting the Department for Work & Pensions via their website...⁷

⁷ The letter published on the WhatDoTheyKnow.com website has the FOI Reference number FOI316376