



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.

The email 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.

The email 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 Govenment 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 DRIVERS LICENCE, 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 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), Haz Subsidy, A Drivers License, Voter Identity

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

Card, Job Reservation, Special Privileges, Credit Cards, Subsidized Rent Or A Loan To Buy A House, Free Education, Free Health Care, A Lobbyist in New Delhi, with a ready Television Channel and 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. 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

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.

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 social security benefits, except those which depend on National Insurance contributions, such as contribution-based JSA. However, it is highly unlikely that a person in the UK without legal status will have a sufficient NI contribution record to gain entitlement to contributory benefits.

“Refugees” – i.e. 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 may find it difficult to gain entitlement to contributory benefits since these depend upon the person having a sufficient contribution record.

The figures in the final column of the table in the email bear no relation to any UK out-of-work benefit rates. The current rate of income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, for example, is £67.50 a week for a single person aged 25 or over, or £105.95 for a couple. People in receipt of out-of-work benefits may also receive Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, but the table does not mention assistance with housing costs.

Asylum seekers – i.e. persons waiting for a decision on an asylum application - are not entitled to mainstream non-contributory social security benefits including 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; for example, a single person aged 18 or over currently receives £36.62 a week and a couple £72.52 a week.

Further information on entitlement to benefits for people coming to the UK from abroad can be found in Library Research Paper 08/65, [Impacts of Immigration](#).

The full Category A Retirement Pension is currently £102.15 a week. 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 is £137.35 a week, and £209.70 for a couple, but further additions may be payable for disability and/or carers.