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Asylum applicants from seven more countries will have no right of appeal in the UK if their claims are refused and certified as 'clearly unfounded', the Home Office announced today.

As part of the continuing drive to cut abuse of the asylum system the seven countries are being added to the list of safe countries. Failed applicants from these countries - Brazil, Equador, Bolivia, South Africa, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh – will be fast-tracked through Oakington Reception Centre. The proposed expansion brings the number of safe countries to 24.

Announcing the change, Home Office Minister Beverley Hughes said:

"This is part of our continuing drive to stop the widespread abuse of our asylum system. The countries that we are adding to the list today are generally safe - individuals from these countries are not routinely fleeing for their lives and do not routinely need our protection under the Geneva convention.

"Introducing the list of safe countries in November last year dramatically cut numbers of asylum applications from nationals of the EU accession states and we are already seeing claims drop off from the seven countries we added in April this year.

"The expansion of the safe country list is one of a number of steps we are taking to tackle abuse of the system. We have strengthened our borders, introduced tougher offences for people trafficking and clamped down on illegal working. These measures are beginning to bite and we have seen a significant reduction in asylum claims. However, we are not complacent and are considering further measures including new legislation to create a single tier of appeal and tackle those who deliberately destroy their documents in order to make fraudulent claims."

"The UK is committed to providing a safe haven to those who need it but determined to tackle abuse of the system."

The draft order for the new countries was laid today and will be debated in both Houses of Parliament. It will apply to claims made on or after the date that it comes into force.

Notes to Editors:

1. The list of safe countries from where asylum claims will have no right of appeal in the UK if their claims are refused was announced on 7 October (PN 267/2002). The ten countries were Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.
2. The addition of seven countries to the list of safe countries was announced on 6th February 2003 (PN 036/2003). The countries were Albania, Bulgaria, Jamaica, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania and Serbia + Montenegro (previously the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia).
3. The legislation which created the safe country provisions is the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, which received Royal Assent on 7 November 2002 (Home Office press notice 294/02).