

Ruling frees asylum seekers to work

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A landmark legal ruling has paved the way for thousands of asylum seekers in the UK to be allowed to work. The High Court has ruled that current laws preventing an Eritrean asylum seeker from taking a job are incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Last night legal experts said the test case would have major ramifications for others seeking asylum.

The Eritrean man, called Tekle, who cannot be returned to his home country because it is considered too dangerous, has been in the UK for seven years while his case is considered. Thousands of asylum seekers from other countries also considered too dangerous to return to - including Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Zimbabwe - are in a similar position.

The ruling has no bearing on the 300,000-plus asylum seekers whose applications are being fast-tracked because they do not come from countries considered no-go areas. But Caroline Slocock, chief executive of the Refugee Legal Centre, said the ruling would affect a significant category who found themselves destitute and in limbo. 'We expect it to be in the thousands,' she said.

Mr Justice Blake ruled that a blanket ban was 'unlawfully over-broad and unjustifiably detrimental to claimants who have had to wait as long as this claimant has'. He said the Home Office's policy breached article 8 of the convention, which guarantees the 'right to respect for private and family life'.

The ruling comes as the former Tory leader, Iain Duncan Smith, prepares to publish a report tomorrow suggesting that failed asylum seekers should be given the right to work here if they cannot return home.