

## UK Scraps DNA Testing for Asylum Seekers

A short-lived attempt by Great Britain to determine the nationality of asylum seekers was unceremoniously [dumped](#) after it became clear that the testing was of no scientific value.

In 2009, the Brits started a (supposedly) voluntary program to test the DNA of asylum seekers from certain African countries. The idea was to reduce fraudulent applications where the asylum seeker claimed to be from a country other than his own (for example, a Kenyan might claim to be from Somalia in order to increase the likelihood that he would receive asylum). From the beginning, scientists such as University of Leicester's [Alec Jeffreys](#) expressed serious doubts about whether DNA could really determine a person's country of origin. Said Mr. Jeffreys:

The [British] Borders Agency is clearly making huge and unwarranted assumptions about population structure in Africa; the extensive research needed to determine population structure and the ability or otherwise of DNA to pinpoint ethnic origin in this region simply has not been done. Even if it did work (which I doubt), assigning a person to a population does not establish nationality – people move! The whole proposal is naive and scientifically flawed.

Now it seems the government has ended the program and even shelved its plans to complete an internal review of the program's efficacy.

[caption id="" align="alignright" width="280" caption="Some British innovations are best kept on their side of the pond."]



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A second aspect of the program-- [isotope analysis](#)--has also been canned. Under this program, the government would analyze hair and nail samples to determine what chemical isotopes they contained. The government could then (supposedly) determine where the person had recently been. So for example, if a Somali woman had been living in Italy for the last five years, and then traveled to England to claim asylum, the government could use isotope analysis to show that the woman had not recently been to Somalia. It is unclear how accurate this analysis is, or how many asylum seekers lie about their country of origin.

## **The Asylumist | UK Scraps DNA Testing for Asylum Seekers**

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While isotope analysis might provide limited assistance in this regard, it seems to me an easier and cheaper approach is to determine whether the person is fluent in a language from the claimed country of origin. Of course, like isotopes and DNA, language fluency does not necessarily conform to national borders, but it is probably about as reliable--and much less expensive.

So what, then, is the lesson for us on this side of the Atlantic? I have not heard about proposals here to use DNA testing or isotope analysis. Given the lack of success in Great Britain, I imagine that we will not be adopting these methods anytime soon.