

**FAIR AND
EFFECTIVE:**

**A VISION
FOR THE
ASYLUM
SYSTEM**

**REFUGEE
ACTION**

FOREWORD.

The world is witnessing the worst refugee crisis in human history. The response from much of the British public has been an outpouring of compassion. Since 2015 tens of thousands have volunteered, donated and raised their voice in support of those many miles away who desperately seek safety. As a result, the Government has dramatically increased the number of refugees it resettles in the UK, protecting some of the world's most vulnerable people.

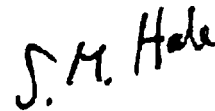
However, far less attention has been given to those who arrive in our country seeking asylum. These people also face the horror of conflict and persecution, yet the asylum system they rely on all too often fails them. Instead of safety and shelter, many are left hungry and homeless on our streets.

The UK is squandering the potential of those who want to build better lives as part of our society. Instead of supporting those who have faced danger and crossed continents to find sanctuary, the current asylum system stymies ambition, and, at worst, actively harms the people it is supposed to protect.

We believe the same energy and commitment shown by politicians and the public to support refugees overseas can come together once again to create an asylum system that is fair and effective, that treats people with respect and humanity and that honours Britain's proud history of refugee protection. We all benefit when society treats everyone with dignity.

In this document, we imagine what the UK could look like with a fair and effective asylum system. This system is built on four key pillars where those who have been forced to flee the homes they loved receive **compassion, a fair decision, essential support and help to rebuild their lives successfully.**

Our response to those seeking sanctuary when they reach our shores is a litmus test of Britain's humanity. To meet this test, we must build an asylum system shaped by the British values of justice and decency.



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**THOSE GOING
THROUGH THE
SYSTEM FEEL
WELCOMED.**

COMPASSION.

The UK is a safe haven for people fleeing conflict and persecution, where those seeking protection are informed and empowered to navigate the system.

Compassion is now at the heart of an asylum system that is focused on the need to protect the vulnerable. This supportive environment means that trust in the process has grown. Everyone has confidence in the new system.

People feel secure in a system that they now understand and feel able to navigate. The process for claiming asylum is clear and accessible. People have their rights fully explained to them from the moment they apply. They also have access to independent information on how the system works and what to expect from it. Any vulnerabilities and safeguarding needs, such as trauma due to torture, are identified at the outset and people are given the specialist support they require.

Those going through the asylum system feel welcomed and supported by the communities around them. Attitudes towards asylum have changed. People seeking asylum are not demonised. Nor are they treated like criminals. Detention is no longer built into the asylum system and time limits have been put on all detention. Community alternatives to detention are used by default. Furthermore, vulnerable people, such as women, children and those experiencing mental health problems, are never detained.

There are still problems and mistakes made that affect people within the system. However, the establishment of an independent complaints commission means people no longer worry about raising concerns as they trust this will not impact upon their asylum claim. This has also helped ensure that the system is responsive to the needs of those it supports.

FAIR DECISIONS.

People are given the best possible chance for a fair and timely decision.

The system now makes fair decisions that are right first time. Early access to high-quality legal advice and support that's easy to access and adequately resourced has become the norm, and is available from initial application to the very end of a person's asylum journey. This has proved vital to ensuring that people's legal representatives can spend the right amount of time on their case.

People know they will receive a timely, transparent decision on their claim and this certainty gives them the clarity and security they need. Applicants receive regular updates on the status of their claim, which they are now able to understand thanks to the direct casework support that they receive. The government has recognised that people cannot put their lives on hold indefinitely and grants those who have waited longer than a year for a decision on their claim the right to remain in the UK.

Decisions themselves are independent of political influence, based only on refugee protection law. The importance of asylum claims is reflected in increased resources. Staff making decisions receive high quality training and support to excel in their roles and ensure the right decision is reached.



**RIGHT
FIRST
TIME**



**PROVIDING
FINANCIAL
AND HOUSING
SUPPORT TO
THOSE IN
NEED.**

SUPPORT.

People have timely access to support that allows them to look after themselves and their families.

Providing financial and housing support to those in need is a core part of the system. This means that people seeking asylum have the stability and peace of mind they need to make their case clearly. Support is received quickly, preventing people from becoming destitute in the first place, and rates accurately reflect the amounts required to live with dignity.

Housing is safe and appropriate for individuals' needs, with suitable living conditions provided for families and the most vulnerable. Decisions to move people to accommodation across the country are based on each person's circumstances, as well as the availability of specialist services and amenities. This has reversed the historic trend of putting a disproportionate responsibility on some of the poorest areas of the country. Host communities are more engaged in dispersal arrangements, to everyone's benefit: investment is made in public services so we can meet greater demand.

Free English language teaching to all those claiming asylum has allowed people to make friends and interact with others whilst awaiting their decision, helping to improve integration across the country. The employment market has been strengthened by the inclusion of those seeking asylum, who can now work after waiting six months for a decision. Less people now require financial support, and the wellbeing of those waiting for a decision has markedly improved. The employment rate of refugees following a successful asylum claim has risen.

People can access education and healthcare regardless of their immigration status, and those who have been unable to secure refugee status know that schools and hospitals are safe spaces where they don't need to fear deportation.

HELP TO REBUILD LIVES.

People are given support to restart their lives once through the asylum system, whatever the outcome.

The asylum system is designed to ensure people are able to rebuild their lives at the end of the process. Whereas the first months after receiving refugee status used to be a time when many would fall into poverty and homelessness, refugees now consistently receive financial and housing support until they have full access to mainstream benefits where necessary.

Those who have been through the asylum system are offered support programmes along the same lines as those offered to people arriving through resettlement schemes, including a dedicated one-to-one caseworker. The government acknowledges that such support is an investment in Britain's future. Refugees are now better equipped with the tools they need to build their new lives, including finding work, educating themselves and their children, and reuniting with their families. This has vastly improved integration across the country, making a positive difference to individual refugees and also strengthening the communities they have joined.

Not everybody will be granted protection because not everybody will fulfil the legal definition of a refugee, even though they may have fled conflict or persecution. However, there has been a radical change in the perception of those who have had their asylum claim refused. They are treated as individuals who need support to address their immigration status. Living support is provided until people are either able to return to their home country or, for those who are unable to leave the country, granted leave to remain. Furthermore, an independent advice service to those considering voluntary return has been established where people are provided with information, time and support to make an informed choice about their next steps. Until they take these next steps, they are able to live in dignity.



THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM HAS BECOME **FAIR AND **EFFECTIVE**, AND THE COUNTRY LEADS THE WORLD IN RESPONDING TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE ARE PROUDLY UPHOLDING BRITAIN'S HISTORY OF REFUGEE PROTECTION.**

WHAT **ASYLUM** MEANS TO **ME.**

In 2018 we asked people seeking safety in the UK what they wanted from an asylum system.

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Asylum is receiving help from a stranger. It's having a safe place in a different country and having your human rights.

Fatima

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They need to address the time they leave you waiting. When they say it will be between three weeks and six months they should try to make the process work in that time, even if it's a negative decision, not just leave people in limbo.

Rose

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People who are seeking asylum, they already have lots of problems. They have left everything in their home country, whatever their problem is, they have worries, they are heartbroken. So why not help them? Why not be a bit quicker in the process? Give them their right, their human right, for their claim to be heard.

Sardasht

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It's the defence of my rights and liberties. It ensures a normal life and being a normal person.

Alexander

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It means safety for me and for my family. It's meant starting a new life for me and my family. Starting a new life from zero, but full of hope for the future.

Tristan