



Refugee Education UK

Asylum statement: Impact on education

“Restoring Order and Control” and its potential impact on education for forcibly displaced children and young people in the UK

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Introduction

While the Government's asylum reforms aim to restore order and confidence in the system and expand safe and legal pathways, they also risk reducing access to and thriving in education for refugee and asylum-seeking children and youth. Education is often treated as peripheral to asylum policy, yet it is in fact central to long-term stability, integration, and economic contribution. For young people who have experienced displacement and trauma, education provides a critical foundation for recovery, imagining a successful future, and laying a foundation for meaningful participation in British society.

However, changes to enforcement, removals, and status reassessment processes, intended to enhance deterrence and compliance, will also generate significant uncertainty for families seeking safety and exacerbate barriers to integration, including in education. This instability will constrain students' capacity to engage with education and access the effective support services, such as SEND and mental health, that underpin engagement, long-term stability and contribution to society. In addition, the proposed changes risk generating significant new administrative burdens for central government, local authorities, and schools, stretching already constrained budgets and undermining the efficient delivery of education provision. Together, these issues risk compromising the Government's aim of encouraging a switch from protection to work and study pathways, and making refugees and asylum seekers more dependent on support.

REUK welcomes the Government's commitment to carefully consider "the appropriate pathways for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, asylum-seeking families with children, and other vulnerable asylum seekers." This report seeks to support that ambition by identifying where the proposed reforms may inadvertently create barriers to education and integration. Drawing on our expertise as the leading organisation on refugee education in the UK, we have identified cross-cutting issues and five specific areas where the proposed changes may create avoidable barriers for learners, schools, and local authorities. Without mitigation, these risks threaten to disrupt educational trajectories, undermine attempts to expand study and work pathways, and weaken the vital role education plays in recovery, integration, and long-term contribution.

Specific harm to education

After reviewing the asylum policy statement, we have identified 5 key proposals that will have an adverse impact on education for refugee and asylum seeking youth if they were to be implemented as written. Here, we highlight these negative impacts and make suggestions for amendments to reduce or mitigate the harm they could cause both to the education of refugee and asylum seeking youth, and the schools, colleges, and the broader education ecosystem that do the daily work of supporting these students in difficult circumstances.

- 1 Renewal of status every 30 months for recognised refugees
- 2 Lack of clarity on education and work route
- 3 Enhanced enforcement and removals
- 4 Move to larger scale accommodation
- 5 Expected increase in movement to reduce hotel accommodation

1. Renewal of status every 30 months for recognised refugees

- **Many courses require a visa that covers the full duration of study.** With only 30 months confirmed leave to remain, refugee students are prevented from enrolling on most higher-level FE and HE programmes. REUK¹ has already highlighted the challenge that many refugees and asylum seekers face when trying to pursue degree apprenticeships, particularly when they are close to the current 5 year limit on their visas. The wording in adult education and funding guidelines is also complex and has led to students being denied access to funded courses. We expect a 30-month visa limit will only limit access further.
- **Apprenticeship funding rules will prevent refugees from accessing meaningful opportunities.** The funding rules explicitly preclude providers from funding apprentices where their immigration status will expire before the end of the programme. This has already been a barrier to those with refugee status enrolling onto suitable apprenticeships and will be worsened with the proposed shortened length of status.
- **Refugees may be locked out of meaningful education opportunities due to Adult Skills Fund rules.** Courses at FE colleges for adults, funded through the Adult Skills Fund, provide a lifeline for learners to progress on to higher education routes through a variety of BTECs, Access to HE Diplomas and English language qualifications. Current rules rely on the provider's discretion to enrol learners when their immigration status is up for renewal. The uncertainty of 30-month status renewals will lead to learners being turned away from courses.
- More frequent status reassessments **increase the Home Office's administrative burden and require new mechanisms for notifying education providers of status changes.** The backlog of asylum cases has been widely reported and at the end of September 2025², there were still 62,171 cases (relating to 80,841 people) that had still not received an initial decision. If 30-month assessments are prioritised, the initial decision backlog could grow significantly, disrupting access to education for many more children and young people with precarious statuses. In addition, REUK³ has observed that schools and colleges sometimes delay or reject enrolment of students whose temporary protection will soon be reassessed because they are unsure of whether they can enrol them, particularly when courses are attached to funding. We expect this issue to become more prevalent under the current proposals.
- **Shorter leave to remain creates uncertainty around eligibility for student finance.** It is not clear whether students with refugee status will continue to be eligible for student finance for undergraduate studies if there is a risk they will face removal during the course of their study programmes.

- **Uncertainty undermines long-term integration, planning and stability.** A 2025 study from University College London⁴ highlights how uncertainty associated with long waiting times causes significant mental health challenges, especially for young people, and notes how access to education can alleviate such symptoms. At REUK we see the debilitating impact of poor mental health on young people and how it inhibits educational progress, even when they express high ambition. We believe the increased uncertainty associated with more regular status reassessment will exacerbate this problem and undermine the government's aim of encouraging those under protection into work and study routes.
- **Short-term visas make securing accommodation during study more difficult, creating stress that negatively affects learning.** The Chartered Institute of Housing⁵ notes that many refugees and other migrants with limited leave to remain have faced discrimination in the housing sector, with landlords reportedly refusing to consider applications from those whose claims are close to renewal. At REUK we believe this situation will only get worse under a 30-month renewal schedule, and will be particularly challenging for those looking for accommodation if they relocate to pursue higher education.

Recommendations:

- Allow longer-term protection visas for families with school-aged children.
- Make a simple procedure for transferring to a student visa for those with an offer to study on further and higher education courses that are over 30 months long.
- Ensure student visas for individuals with forced migration backgrounds give protection in cases where students have breaks from study and for a period of time after graduating to allow time to seek work or further study.

2. Lack of clarity on education and work route

- **There is a tension between a goal of encouraging asylum seekers into education and work, but also creating a system that restricts access.** The barriers outlined above, which result from a policy that emphasises reducing so-called “pull factors”, only make it more difficult to transition into education and work. The University of Oxford⁶ highlights the social and psychological benefits of allowing asylum seekers to work, and Refugee Action⁷ have shown that two thirds of business leaders are supportive of hiring asylum seekers. At REUK we feel that a narrow focus on pull factors will undermine access to quality education and work, causing asylum seekers to become more dependent on government support.
- **Ensuring FE and ESOL provision are recognised as part of an education route is critical for enabling accessibility and avoids locking people out of opportunities.** At REUK⁸ we have observed that these kinds of courses are often the primary route into higher education and work for refugees and asylum seekers. They allow students to develop language ability, content knowledge, and soft skills that prepare them to participate meaningfully and safely in the workforce. Study routes that only focus on access to higher education for highly-educated English speakers exclude many students with high potential and who can become work-ready and take positive steps towards self-sufficiency with access to foundation and vocational courses.
- There is a risk that those on **foundation-level courses ineligible for study visas are pushed into low-skilled work to maintain status**, limiting potential. In a push to reduce reliance on government support, we are concerned that promising young students might be pressured into transitioning quickly to paid work, even if it is low-skill and low pay. The threat of destitution could also play a role in refugees and asylum seekers abandoning study and entering the workforce. At REUK we believe that a variety of study options should be available to refugee and asylum-seeking youth so that they have time to prepare knowledge and skills to access good quality, non-exploitative forms of employment.
- **Need for clear guidance for companies and displaced people on transitioning between visas**, ensuring no gaps in protection that could lead to heightened risk or homelessness. Many organisations that support asylum seekers have reported the heightened risk of homelessness due to the 28-day rule after receiving refugee status, with the Centre for Homelessness Impact⁹ reporting a 223% increase in the three months from June-September 2023. There should be careful consideration around how financial and other kinds of support is withdrawn as people transition to different visa routes.

Recommendations:

- Require zero or nominal application fee for individuals, education providers, and employers
- Ensure access to home fees and student finance.
- Ensure access to foundation level, ESOL and vocational courses are included in pathways to work and study visas.
- Allow a suitable transition time between visa statuses with access to financial safety-nets to avoid befallen irregularity or homelessness, or other difficulties that might occur due to a changing levels or scope of support.



3. Enhanced enforcement and removals

- **Increased levels of enforcement presents a risk that data from educational institutions will be used for enforcement** rather than for tracking and improving educational outcomes. Under the previous government, it was found¹⁰ that although the DfE had agreed data on nationality and country of origin would only be used for educational purposes following a public outcry, this data had actually been passed to the Home Office for immigration enforcement, leading to legal action. REUK are concerned that the current proposals may create pressure for student data to be used for the purposes of control and removal of refugee and asylum seeking students and their families.
- In addition to this, **the lack of a centralised system for monitoring educational progress of refugee/asylum-seeking children creates uncertainty** over how school-level data will be managed, which will increase administrative burden on LEAs. A centralised system that employs the principle of data minimisation to ensure only relevant data is collected to contribute to improving educational outcomes would help track progress and highlight areas for effective intervention. Such a system would also help in sharing information between LEAs when students and families are moved.
- **There is an increased likelihood of absconding and reluctance to enrol due to fear of detection and removal**, alongside rising mistrust in school/college reporting practices. The Refugee Council¹¹ noted that across its programmes there was an increased number of young people who disappeared as they approached the age 18 following the announcement of the Rwanda Policy. REUK anticipates that similar observations will be made as a result of the current asylum proposal, particularly among unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who may fear having asylum claims being rejected once they leave care.
- For many years there has been concern over **the lack of understanding of the educational entitlements for UASCs whose claims are rejected before turning 18**. The asylum statement has made a commitment to finding appropriate pathways for UASCs, and it is imperative that this vulnerable group are able to maintain access to education when they approach and experience changes in immigration status. Schools and colleges also need assurances that these students can enrol and remain on courses once they turn 18, and that they won't fall foul of the law by continuing to offer them educational opportunities. It is the view of REUK that UASCs be considered under legislation for other care leavers to simplify and add clarity to their access to education and expected support, regardless of immigration status.

Recommendations:

- Ring fence education data exclusively for educational purposes, not enforcement
- Create a centralised system for sharing education data for students refugee and asylum seeking students
- Fund interventions that support students to understand their rights as they approach 18 years old and make plans for their education in the future.
- Provide better guidance about the educational entitlements of UASCs when they turn 18, highlighting the obligation for local authorities to support them until the age of 21 (or 25 if in education) with a pathway plan and assurances they will not be deported.
- Consult HE and FE providers and UCAS to develop simplified systems for assessing right to study and fee status of refugee and asylum seeking applicants.

4. Move to larger-scale accommodation

- Movement to larger group accommodation for families will **cause sudden large increases in the number of students** (potentially hundreds of children) in a local area. This will cause an acute pressure on LEAs due to school-place capacity, and could amount to a violation of sections 14 and 19 of the Education Act 1996. Education establishments may have to assess the educational attainment and support needs of large groups of students at once, which may not be possible, leaving students with periods of time at school without necessary support. It can also be challenging to manage groups joining programmes, such as ESOL courses, mid-term, creating extra work for teachers to support students catching up.
- Large sites are often **geographically isolated, making it difficult and costly to secure school places and transport children**. Children in the same family may also be split across multiple schools, which might be difficult for parents to manage, with multiple school uniforms, different transport required, and multiple school relationships. Where accommodation is far removed from local schools there may also be some ambiguity over which schools students should be placed in and disagreement within Local Authority areas if some schools take on more students than others.
- **Converted accommodation (e.g., former military bases) may lack suitable learning environments**. This includes quiet study areas and reliable access to ICT resources. Where families are housed together in small quarters, it might not be possible for several students to have desk space at the same time to do homework. It is also uncertain whether older, more remote buildings will have suitable internet connectivity for large numbers of people connecting to online study resources, typically at the same time of day (late afternoon and early evening). Recent research from the No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) and the Good Faiths Partnership¹² highlight the issues of sub-standard asylum accommodation in the UK, including poor maintenance, lack of privacy, and extended stays in accommodation that was designed to be temporary. Here at REUK we are concerned that such conditions will not be conducive to creating a positive study environment.
- **Children risk being isolated and left without education for extended periods**, with limited opportunities for integration, language development, or social connection. Movement to large accommodation sites can delay access to schools and colleges as LEAs manage multiple new places simultaneously. Housing children and young people in accommodation isolated from local communities reduces their ability to make friends with English-speaking peers, which REUK has observed is fundamental for improving engagement and attainment in education. Finally, housing families in grouped accommodation is likely to cause stigma and further isolation for students who are placed there.

Recommendations:

- Require Home Office representatives to assess local education capacity, including travel distance, in partnership with local authorities before opening asylum accommodation.
- Seek opportunities for housing families with school-age children within communities rather than larger group accommodation.
- Develop catch-up curricula for schools to support integration of refugee and asylum seeking students into an education level appropriate to their age.



5. Expected increase in movement to reduce hotel accommodation

- Increased movement of school-age refugees and asylum seekers **delays learning and increases the administrative burden of schools and colleges.** Frequent moves cause repeated school changes, loss of learning time, and ongoing reassessment of academic level and English proficiency, adding strain to already stretched school resources. As previously noted, the lack of a centralised database that is used to track educational progress for displaced learners makes it difficult to share information between LEAs when a family is moved. Schools are therefore responsible for compiling their own reports against benchmarks that might not be congruent between regionally devolved education systems.
- **Variation in services between LAs disrupts access to SEND, mental health, and wellbeing support.** Systems and processes between local authority areas differ, and it is difficult for families to understand support systems that may differ significantly, both in terms of structure and values around special educational needs, from their countries of origin. Repeating the process of navigating services available, being referred and assessed with each move can cause significant delays to receiving essential support for learning. In 2024, the Public Law Project¹⁴ reported that some schools would not accept SEN children without an EHCP, which in some cases took up to a year. These children are therefore much more vulnerable to facing missed schooling, which would be exacerbated by a policy of increased movement and dispersal.
- **There should be clarity over exemptions from dispersal,** which could be exercised when moving families and young people in education out of temporary accommodation. Current guidelines¹⁵ state that “requests for accommodation in a particular location because the individual’s children are attending school in the area should normally be refused”, unless a family has a child in a major examination year and have been enrolled in the same school for a significant part of the previous school year. At REUK, we have noted the profound disruption that dispersal has to educational progress and would welcome clear rules on when a family can and cannot be moved to provide certainty in educational continuity.
- **Being moved leads to increased costs for refugee and asylum-seeking families to access education.** Having to replace uniforms and learning materials after each move is a significant cost for families that may already be facing destitution. Schools often follow different curricula and timetables, and so moving schools might mean replacing resources that have already been bought, such as text books that align with requirements for different examination boards.

Recommendations:

- Require LEAs to notify receiving areas of dispersals and create a system for sharing student progress and support needs to improve continuity of support if a family is dispersed.
- Work with DfE and MHCLG to set thresholds for when it is reasonable for a family or individual to be dispersed, and how this can be arranged to ensure continuity of specific support services.
- Use guidance from the National Transfer Scheme¹⁶ and apply this to other groups of students (not just UASCs) to guide appropriate decision making about dispersal.



Cross-cutting issues

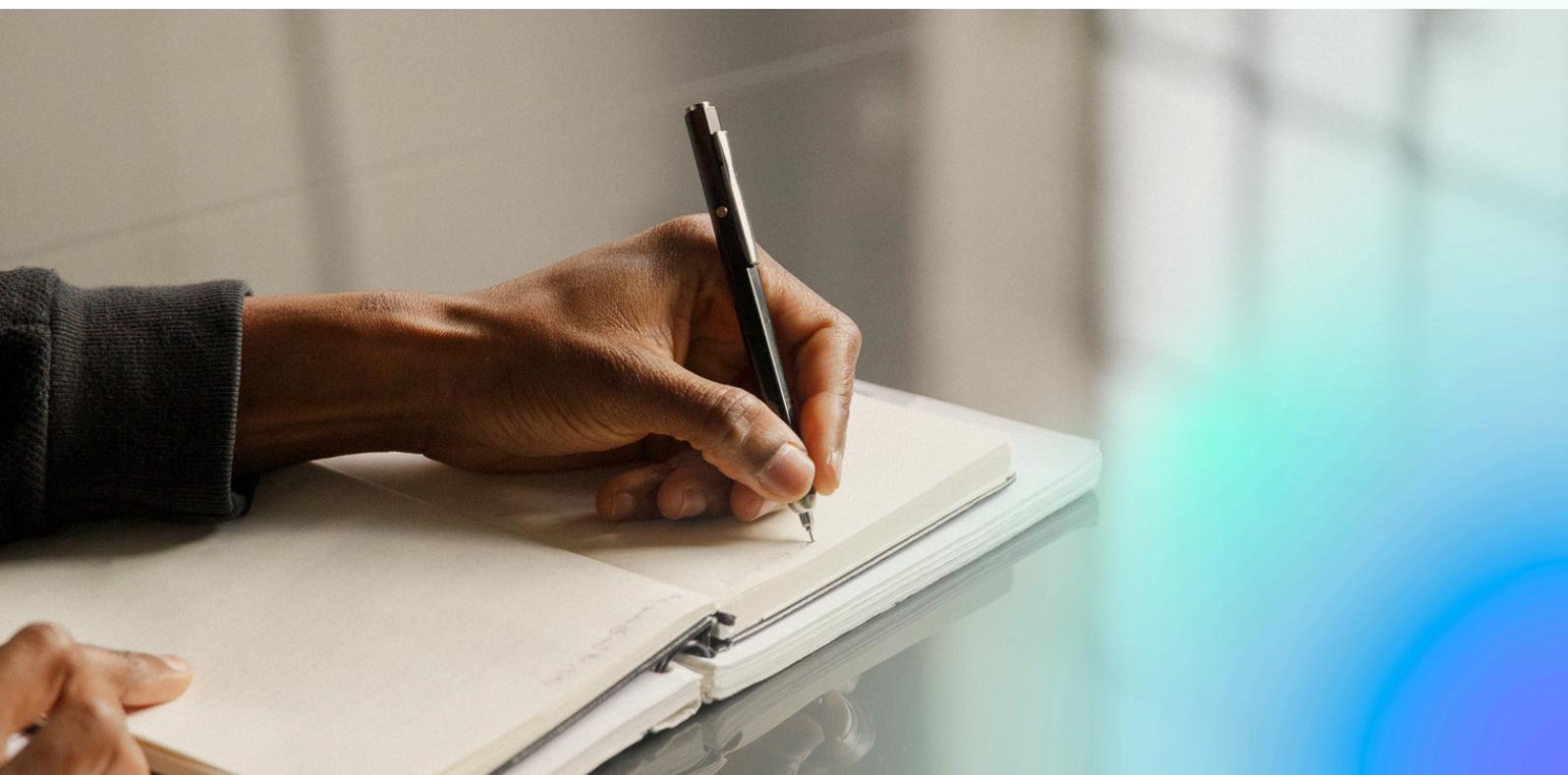
Additional barriers to integration and making a meaningful contribution to British communities push families into survival mode. Shorter leave to remain, more frequent status redetermination assessments, and being relocated more frequently through dispersal policies gives an increased sense of being temporary. This causes refugees and asylum seekers to focus on addressing more immediate needs, such as basic survival and achieving a feeling of safety and security. This reduces the capacity of families and individuals to make plans for education and make personal investments towards future livelihoods.

A sense of being temporary increases disengagement from education. Children and young people may feel that there is no point pursuing education if they think it is unlikely they will be able to stay and feel welcome in the UK. They are therefore at a greater risk of exposure to low-paid and/or exploitative work to survive and criminal gangs that offer a sense of belonging and community. As an organisation we face a challenge of supporting refugee and asylum seeking youth to build hope and aspiration in education through our Student Engagement and Progression (StEP) project. We see directly how the effects of marginalisation cause refugee and asylum seeking children and youth to explore bases for identity development outside of educational opportunities. We anticipate the problem of sustaining engagement in learning to worsen under the proposed changes.

The increasingly transient existence of being an asylum seeker compounds material poverty. More frequent relocation disrupts access to support services, such as charities, advice lines, and food banks. Limited facilities and capacity to bulk buy and store groceries and commodities in temporary accommodation leads to higher day-to-day expenses. Increased social isolation also reduces access to support networks, which exacerbates deprivation. Research from Edge Hill University¹⁶ highlights the ways in which current policy arrangements in the UK lead to enforced destitution, which is only set to worsen under the proposed policy changes. As an organisation, we have found that such material poverty undermines efforts for our beneficiaries to engage meaningfully in education and employ this to work towards self-sufficiency.

Worsening mental health adds a further challenge to accessing and thriving in education. Repeated status assessments cause stress and uncertainty. Reduced opportunities to build support networks due to being moved more regularly reduces opportunities to alleviate challenging emotions and improve wellbeing. Research from the University of Birmingham¹⁷ and University College London¹⁸ have already documented worsening physical and mental health outcomes as waiting time for status determination and uncertainty increases. At REUK, we have observed that engagement with education is more effective when students have a firmer sense of wellbeing, and we are concerned that achieving this will be more challenging under the proposed changes.

Pressure on the education system will markedly increase, especially under the more restrictive funding environment. Previous cuts to educational support services, particularly ESOL funding¹⁹, and in the number of specialist teams working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCs)²⁰ in local authorities, have already led to reduced support for learners. The increased uncertainty that the asylum statement creates in the lives of these learners and their families will create a greater burden for schools and colleges. Through our work, REUK has seen how educational establishments are a front line service for a variety of support issues that are faced by forcibly displaced students and their families. This will increasingly become the case under the current proposals as refugees and asylum seekers will become more isolated from the surrounding community, creating an acute issue for schools and colleges as primary sources of support when existing services are already being forced to close.





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Refugee Education UK

Refugee Education UK (REUK) is a UK charity working towards a world where all young refugees can access education, thrive in education, and use that education to create a hopeful, brighter future. Our direct programme work supports children and young people to get into school, from primary to university, and to thrive academically and in their wellbeing. Alongside our direct work, REUK provides training, resources and bespoke support to education institutions across the country and carries out research to build evidence on issues related to refugee education.

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