

Prime Minister Andy Burnham MP
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA



info@asylummatters.org

Dear Prime Minister,

Open Letter from 200+ Refugee Charities RE: Blueprint to fix the asylum system

Congratulations on your new role - we look forward to working with you.

Two years ago, we - as hundreds of migrants' rights charities, refugee support organisations, and crucially grassroots groups and individuals grounded firmly in our communities right across the UK and proud to welcome people seeking safety - wrote to your predecessor upon his entry to 10 Downing Street.

We [wrote to the last Prime Minister](#) recognising the utterly broken asylum system he was inheriting, and offering him a '[blueprint](#)' for overhauling and fixing it to deliver a fair and effective system. Unfortunately, opportunities to work meaningfully for positive change for people seeking sanctuary, public confidence and the public purse have been missed, some of the costly and needlessly cruel approaches brought in by the previous Government have been preserved, and new harmful policies pursued. Every successive effort to ramp up hostility towards refugees has failed to boost public confidence or political success for the Governments who have taken this approach, while the people we support suffer the consequences of these misguided bids for political gain. We have witnessed first hand the human cost.

So, two years on, we are writing to you, as organisations and community groups who have repeatedly stepped in to support people who have been targeted and brutalised by hostile policies that have benefited nobody. **We are now calling on your Government to take a new approach: protecting people seeking safety, rather than punishing them.**

The hostile approach to people seeking safety by successive governments means the asylum system today remains unnecessarily cruel, costly, ineffective and chaotic - with integration outcomes and community cohesion undermined. In the last month alone we have seen: the introduction of another piece of hostile anti-refugee legislation; the announcement of more demonstrably harmful asylum camps that cost five times more than dignified accommodation within communities; plans to expand the immigration detention estate whilst cheaper and more humane alternatives are overlooked; the revocation of the legal duty to provide support to otherwise destitute asylum seekers which will drive up homelessness and pressure on local authorities; and the announcement of a 'refugee tax', charging survivors of war and persecution £10,000 for the Home Office's inability to process claims quickly.



All of these assaults on asylum rights (and others outlined in the attached briefing), along with the dangerous rhetoric successive governments have used about people seeking safety, were political choices. Their consequences have already been devastating. Racist far-right agitators have been emboldened: we've witnessed escalating violence against refugees and racialised people and the erosion of community cohesion. Evidence-based solutions and international law have been dismissed in favour of gimmicks that waste taxpayers' money whilst damaging public confidence and the UK's international reputation. Refugees' efforts to integrate in their new communities have been undermined by counterproductive policy that denies them belonging. Most of all, the human cost and the myriad harms done to the people we support has been immense.

But you do not have to continue this failed approach.

As Prime Minister, we urge you to make different choices. You can implement policies that are more humane, cost-effective, and beneficial to all our communities - you can adopt the following blueprint to fix the broken asylum system.

Blueprint to fix the broken asylum system - cheaper, more effective, and more humane:

1. **Open safe routes** for [people seeking asylum to reach the UK](#) so that people are not forced to risk their lives in the Channel, including restoring [visa routes](#), [family reunion](#), and [rebuilding refugee resettlement](#);
2. **End the use of harmful rhetoric** from government aimed at people seeking asylum, which has contributed to a [febrile environment of racist violence on our streets and the emboldening of the far-right](#), and instead lead by example by promoting messages of compassion and welcome towards people seeking safety, and affirm their rights as set out in the Refugee Convention and international law;
3. **Abandon plans for 'earned settlement'** that would leave refugees and migrants in years of [limbo and uncertainty](#), setting back integration, creating barriers to sustained employment, reducing labour market participation and increasing the risk of exploitation; [reverse the changes to the 'Good Character' guidance](#) which effectively [ban refugees from ever securing citizenship](#); and **roll back on the new 'temporary refugee status'** that will see survivors of war and persecution threatened with deportation every 2.5 years - an [eye-wateringly expensive policy](#) that will make it near impossible for people to integrate with any certainty or stability;
4. **House people seeking asylum in communities, not camps** - close down existing camps at Wethersfield and Crowborough, and abandon plans for further camps which [cause unnecessary lasting harm at an eye-watering cost](#) to the taxpayer whilst [community-based accommodation is available and cheaper](#);
5. **Lift the ban on work for people seeking asylum** within six months of arrival so people who are able to work are granted the right to [rebuild their lives in dignity](#) and generate [£1.2 billion](#) to the UK economy;
6. **Drop the new Asylum and Immigration Bill**, [maintain judge-led appeal tribunals](#), and **scrap the proposed £10k 'refugee tax'** that will [punish refugees for the Home Office's failure](#) to process claims in a timely manner;
7. **Address the legal aid crisis**, and ensure that [everyone has access](#) to good quality legal advice;



8. **Increase the rate of asylum support** so people in the asylum system are not [trapped in poverty](#) and [driven into exploitation](#), and restore the legal duty to support otherwise destitute asylum seekers rather than increasing pressure on local authorities;
9. **Extend the move-on period to at least 56-days** in line with the Government's own pilot evaluation, to help [address refugee homelessness](#) and relieve pressure on local authorities, and [invest in ESOL provision and employment support](#) to aid with integration as recommended by the independent [Commission for the Integration of Refugees](#);
10. **End the use of immigration detention** which restricts people's freedom and liberty and causes immense harm to people's physical and mental health, and move towards [demonstrably cheaper](#) and more humane '[alternatives to detention](#)';
11. **Establish an independent public inquiry into the role of UK tax funds in escalating border violence**, deaths in the Channel and the [use of force](#) against [children](#), and improve transparency by publishing data on the number of deaths at the border and within the UK asylum system;
12. **End the criminalisation of people seeking asylum**, which has led to refugees fleeing war and persecution [dragged through the courts and imprisoned](#) under new offences that punish exploited and desperate people caught with their 'hand on the tiller' rather than targeting smugglers or human traffickers, and repeal in full the 2023 Illegal Migration Act and the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act;
13. **Commit to evidence-based policy-making** on immigration and asylum, informed by genuine collaboration and co-production with NGOs, local authorities and people with lived experience, rather than doubling down on performative cruelty that fails on its own terms.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these common-sense policies in more detail, and work with you on building a fairer and more effective asylum system.

Signed:

219 organisations & 289 individuals