

Could an integration-focused approach mitigate the mental health harms of the UK's current asylum system?

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What brought me into this area of work

- White British
 - Academic old-age psychiatrist
 - Started volunteer visiting at IRC in 2004
 - Started writing medico-legal reports (2500 at last count)
 - Joined Helen Bamber Foundation and became Medical Director
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- Both parents refugees who
 - Fled holocaust
 - Worked for BBC external services
 - Sheila's distant cousin

Asylum seekers and refugees' vulnerability to mental illness

- Pre-migration

- Torture and inhuman/degrading treatment
- Human trafficking
- War violence

- Peri-migration

- Hazardous journey
- Vulnerability to further ill-treatment/exploitation

- Post-migration

- Separation from country and family
- Immigration uncertainty
- Deskilling
- Destitution
- Alcohol and/or substance misuse and dependence
- Criminalization
- Lack of support network
- Rejection and disbelief
- 'Real' continuing persecution
- Difficulty accessing
 - Medical care
 - Legal protection

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The Commission on the Integration of Refugees was convened in 2022 by the Woolf Institute with the aim of improving the integration of refugees in the UK. Commissioners include refugees and former asylum seekers; security officials; lawyers; third-sector workers; clinicians; education and health experts; academics; faith and community leaders; politicians and policy makers from across the political spectrum. They worked together to overcome differences, build consensus, and to find common ground, driven by the evidence.

The Commission's flagship report, "**From Arrival to Integration: Building Communities for Refugees and for Britain**", was published on 20 March 2024 as is available to download here:

<https://refugeeintegrationuk.com/publications>

FIXING A “BROKEN” SYSTEM

- Almost everyone agrees that the UK’s asylum system is broken. It is **expensive, ineffective, and harmful**. There is a desperate need for new ideas on how to create a system that works effectively and enjoys public consent.
 - The Commission on the Integration of Refugees has undertaken the **most significant and detailed exploration of the UK asylum system in a generation**.
 - The Commission conducted and commissioned six pillars of research, which have formed the evidence base for this landmark study. We received evidence from more than 1,250 individuals and organisations, including refugees and asylum seekers, policymakers and politicians, local government and civil servants, third sector workers, academics, faith and community leaders, and many other stakeholders.
 - Between 2022 and 2023, the Commission commissioned and conducted a series of six interrelated research projects. Reports documenting this research are available on the Commission website are listed on the next slide. In addition, the Commission conducted numerous small group meetings with a variety of stakeholders and civil society actors. Individuals and organisations who gave evidence are listed at the end of this report.
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A FOCUS ON *INTEGRATION*

Based on the evidence collected, the Commission proposes that a new model should be based on a paradigm of *integration*. Not only will a new focus on integration deliver better outcomes for asylum seekers and refugees, but also for the UK as a whole – from contributing to tackling the housing crisis and homelessness to promoting economic flourishing via the untapped potential of many asylum seekers.

A coherent approach with local delivery

The key to achieving integration of asylum seekers is **through a coherent approach that is implemented with a much greater level of devolution and localisation**. While national planning and coordination are necessary, local authorities and communities need to be empowered for delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16 EVIDENCE-BASED PROPOSALS FOR REFORM

The following recommendations are addressed to the UK government. **They are designed to be mutually reinforcing and their impact will be greater if they are implemented together** rather than being taken as a set of options from which to choose. Some of them are directed at specific government departments or agencies, but the Commission envisages that a coordinated approach across Whitehall and with local integration partnerships will be necessary.

Recommendation 1 calls for a **“New Settlement” for refugees**.

- **Recommendation 1:** *Devolve asylum and refugee resettlement support systems in a “New Settlement for Refugees”. This calls for a whole system approach to put local integration partnerships in the driving seat of refugee integration.*
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RECOMMENDATION 1

A “NEW SETTLEMENT” FOR REFUGEES

Whole system approach with local integration partnerships at the core – combined authorities, devolved nations and local partnerships

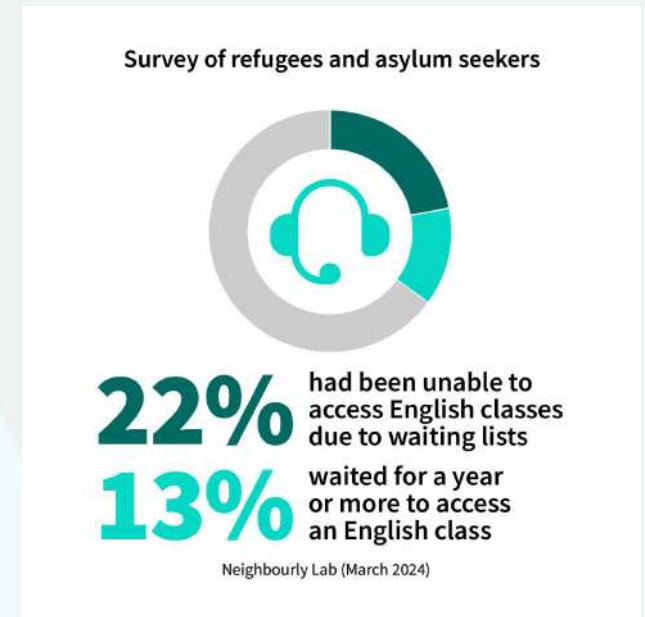
- Radical devolution of ASR systems to local level – ALL resources invested locally
 - New national statement of goals
 - Upgraded SMPs with oversight of the local
 - Strong governance and accountability – Minister, Independent Reviewer and APPG
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Recommendations 2-6 call for a **new and more community-oriented approach to the accommodation** of asylum seekers.

- **Recommendation 2:** *Develop a comprehensive Resettlement Scheme drawing on best practice and experience from recent and current programmes, including the Ukraine Family Scheme, Homes for Ukraine, the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), and the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS).*
 - **Recommendation 3:** *Deliver housing through local integration partnerships, led by local authorities, to ensure that central government and independent sector resources are invested in the expansion of accommodation in communities, some of which would be reserved for refugees and asylum seekers. This would be beneficial to the whole population in need of housing, as well as to refugees and asylum seekers.*
 - **Recommendation 4:** *Extend the transition period for asylum seekers to “move on” after being given leave to remain as refugees from 28 days to 56 days.*
 - **Recommendation 5:** *Only use detention as a last resort and as a precursor to rapid removal where genuine absconding and/or security risks cannot otherwise be managed. Case-management alternatives offer better value for money, have been demonstrated to work, and are more humane. Children should not be detained under any circumstances.*
 - **Recommendation 6:** *Avoid moving refugees and asylum seekers to different accommodation (after their initial placement) without their consent, unless there are exceptional circumstances, as this will impede their meaningful integration.*
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Recommendations 7-10 call for a **fresh approach to education and English language provision** for refugees and asylum seekers.

- **Recommendation 7:** *Provide refugees and asylum seekers with access, free of charge, to English language provision from day one after they arrive in the UK, with local integration partnerships empowered to commission language provision to suit local needs.*
- **Recommendation 8:** *Enable all refugee and asylum-seeking children to access mainstream education immediately, no matter when they arrive in the school year. Schools and colleges should be incentivised to provide appropriate education and support.*
- **Recommendation 9:** *Provide language access/assistance to all refugees and asylum seekers for the initial six-month period after arrival.*
- **Recommendation 10:** *Ensure that appropriate pathways are in place for refugees and asylum seekers to meet their full educational potential by recognising qualifications and providing access to further and higher education.*



Data from the qualitative survey of current refugees and asylum seekers conducted by Neighbourly Lab (N = 755)

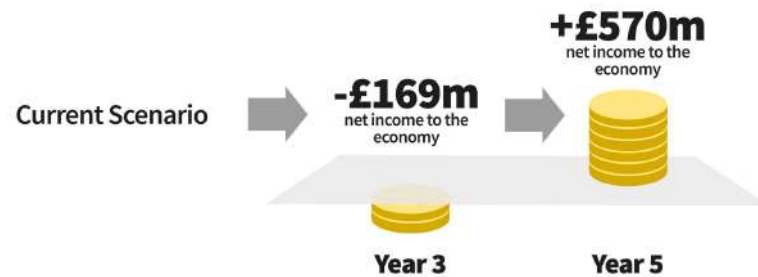
Recommendations 14-15 concern **strengthening the prospects for social inclusion.**

- **Recommendation 14:** *Provide a “Welcome to the UK” pack for all refugees and asylum seekers upon arrival, learning from and building on existing examples.*
 - **Recommendation 15:** *Establish more Welcome Hubs, bringing together the local community, local government, and civil society.*
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Recommendation 16 calls for **a new approach to physical and mental health.**

- **Recommendation 16:** *Carry out Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (through collaboration between the NHS executive and civil society (including charities, faith groups, and diaspora organisations) to increase understanding of the composition and needs of local refugees and asylum seekers. Findings should inform the planning, development, and offering of relevant, inclusive, and responsive care systems that improve health and address health inequalities.*
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Economic Benefit of Changes Proposed by the Commission



Proposed Scenario

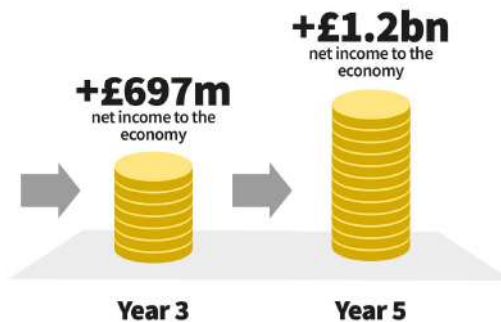
Processing applications within six months (and people being able to work from six months)



Employment support from six months



Free English classes from arrival



FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Our recommendations are underpinned by a financial model developed by the London School of Economics (LSE), which found that they would yield a **net economic benefit to the country of at least £1.2 billion within five years.** (Full details in the [report](#)).

SUMMARY

An Integrated Approach to Refugee Integration

- At the heart of our recommendations is a **new settlement for refugees delivered through local integration partnerships**. These would put **devolved governments, regional and local authorities, and communities in control of resources and delivery** in order to create the best possible conditions for integration. **The national government would play a coordinating role, including setting overall numbers.**
 - The solutions we are proposing would not only be more effective than the current system, but **cheaper, more coherent**, more in tune with the **values of compassion and fairness** that so many people manifest towards asylum seekers, and **capable of delivering long-term economic benefits and positive social outcomes** both for refugees and wider British society.
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