

Small-Boats Emergency

Fixing the UK's Broken Asylum System

Dr Rakib Ehsan

Foreword by Rt Hon Sir Brandon Lewis CBE MP



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Foreword

The Rt Hon Sir Brandon Lewis CBE MP
Former Minister of State for Immigration

The ongoing small-boats emergency in the Channel is both damaging to local communities and costly to the taxpayer.

This forensic report by Policy Exchange makes clear that the economic and social costs of illegal migration are not only shockingly high, but unfairly distributed. The impact of illegal migration on the availability of housing and public services risks fuelling public resentment – especially in some of the most deprived and left-behind parts of the UK. We won an election pledging to level-up the UK – but are now spending more on hotels for illegal migrants than on homelessness!

It also exposes the fact that so many of those crossing the Channel are coming from safe countries, such as Albania or India – or from relatively unstable territories with traditionally high levels of extremist activity. This is a public security issue which is all too often overlooked in the nation's immigration and asylum debate.

This cannot be right. Of course, we should all take pride in the UK's rich history of rehoming some of the world's most persecuted peoples. In more recent times, our country has quite rightly helped to resettle significant numbers of Ukrainians fleeing Kremlin-led militarism and Hong Kongers escaping the totalitarianism of the Chinese communist regime. These are meaningful humanitarian interventions which show that the UK continues to treat its international moral obligations with the utmost seriousness.

But should our generosity and humanitarian spirit be directed towards healthy young men from safe countries illegally crossing the Channel? I think most of us know the answer to that question.

That is why I support Policy Exchange's recommendation that a safe and legal route, with a cap directly controlled by Parliament, should be established – thereby enhancing the degree of democratic accountability in the sphere of immigration and asylum policy. As the report says, we must also do more to galvanise community efforts, such as by expanding of the sponsorship model for Ukrainian refugees to other nationalities – so that the burden of supporting refugees is spread evenly, rather than falling on the poorest.

To work though, such a route must go hand in hand with robust measures to end the illegal Channel crossings. The Government's Illegal Migration Bill will deliver this – and it is vital it is not watered down. The power of judicial interventions – both foreign and domestic – which have

thwarted the Government's efforts to shore up the UK's asylum system and strengthen its border security must be curbed as a matter of urgency.

This excellent report by Policy Exchange demonstrates the high human and economic cost accruing every month that the small-boats emergency goes unchecked. There must be a radical resetting of the UK's immigration and asylum policy. Only then can an expansion of compassionate, controlled safe and legal routes can occur, one that enables local communities to integrate genuine refugees so they can make notable economic, social, and cultural contributions to our country.

Executive Summary

Home Office figures for 2022 revealed that a total of 45,755 people entered the UK on small boats via the English Channel – a number larger than the entire population of English towns such as Dover in Kent, Boston in Lincolnshire, and Kirkby in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley. In response to the ongoing small-boats emergency, the UK Government has introduced the Illegal Migration Bill (IMB) which has the aim of stopping this form of irregular migration – one of its five key pledges ahead of the next UK general election.

Policy Exchange has previously written extensively about the Small Boats emergency, including how to legislate effectively to prevent it and the moral case for doing so.¹ This report provides a comprehensive assessment of who is crossing the Channel, quantifies the public financial and non-financial costs of the small-boats emergency, demonstrates the failure of the UK's internal dispersal system – and sets out six practical suggestions on how things can be improved.

The report finds that in terms of small-boats Channel crossings:

- **66.03%** of the 45,755 people who crossed to the UK on small boats through the English Channel in 2022 were **males aged between 18 and 39 years** – (30,211 individuals). This is almost ten times more than the number of females who fall in the same age bracket (3,052 individuals).
- The number of small-boat arrivals of Albanian nationality rose sharply between 2020 and 2021 (**54 to 815 individuals**) and 2021 and 2022 (**815 to 12,301 individuals**) – near-identical increases of **1,409.26% and 1,409.33% respectively**.
- In both 2018 and 2019, not a single person registered as an Indian national arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel. From 2021 to 2022, the number of Indian nationals who crossed to the UK on small boats **increased by 919.4% - from 67 to 683 individuals**.

1. For more information: Ekins, R. (2022), 'There's nothing un-Christian about stopping the small boats', *The Telegraph*, 5 December. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/12/05/nothing-un-christian-stopping-small-boats/>, last accessed: 12 May 2023.

Ekins, R. and Laws, S. (2023), 'How to legislate about small boats', *Policy Exchange*, 11 February. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/how-to-legislate-about-small-boats/>, last accessed: 14 March 2023; Policy Exchange (2023), 'Stopping the Small Boats: a "Plan B" (A Policy Exchange proposal for addressing the crisis)', 16 February. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/stopping-the-small-boats-a-plan-b/>, last accessed: 12 May 2023. Goodhart, D. (2023), 'There is a practical answer to the refugee crisis', *UnHerd*, 5 May. Available at: <https://unherd.com/the-post/there-is-a-practical-answer-to-the-refugee-crisis/>, last accessed: 12 May 2023.

In terms of the public costs of the small-boats emergency:

- Using the asylum backlog figure at the end of 2022 (166,261), **the total estimated one-year cost of asylum-related spending** on hotel accommodation, standard asylum-related allowances, healthcare, and school places – along with the sustenance of the new bodies such as the Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC) and a technical unit specialising in asylum applications made by Albanian nationals – is in the region of **£3.5 billion**.
- The mid-point estimate of the one-year public spend on accommodating newcomers in hotels (**£2.2 billion**) is three and a half times higher than the **£630 million** government investment in 2022-23 to tackle homelessness in the UK.² It also exceeds the entirety of the government funding allocated for Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund (**£2.1 billion**).
- Using the asylum backlog figure at the end of 2022 of 166,261, if everyone involved was in receipt of the standard weekly asylum-related allowance provided by the UK Government, this would have an estimated one-week cost of nearly £7.5 million. The estimated one-year cost is **nearly £390 million**.
- Applying the healthcare-related spend per head for the general population, the estimated one-week expenditure based on the end-of-2022 asylum backlog figure of 166,261 people would be over **£13 million**. Over the course of a year, this rate of spending would add an estimated healthcare-related cost which is in the region of £700 million.
- Based on the Department for Education's expenditure per child, the estimated cost of providing asylum-connected places for one academic year of state-school enrolment – based on the end-of-2022 asylum backlog figure – is **over £186 million**.
- The estimated salary costs of the new Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC) are estimated at **£23.7 million** per year. The corresponding cost for the new unit dedicated to processing Albanian-national asylum applications is over **£13 million**.

The social costs on education, healthcare, and crime are also significant:

- Children living in established communities within local authorities such as Canterbury and Ashford in Kent have had to travel as far as 25 miles away from their home to attend classes due to migration-induced pressures on school places.
- There are safeguarding issues surrounding age verification, with Afghan asylum seeker Lawangeen Abdulrahimzai posing as a fourteen-year-old boy when he entered the UK in December 2019. Awarded a place at a secondary school, dental examinations ahead of his trial for the March 2022 murder of aspiring royal

2. Homeless Link (2022), 'Our verdict on the Autumn Budget: what will it mean for homelessness services?', 20 April. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/news/our-verdict-on-the-autumn-budget-what-will-it-mean-for-homelessness-services/>, last accessed: 14 March 2022.

marine Jordan Roberts found that Abdulrahimzai was in fact 21 years of age.

- Scientists at the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) have recently concluded that the sharp increase in cases of diphtheria in the UK and mainland Europe is primarily associated with incoming migrants – making the small-boats emergency a matter of health security.
- The small-boats emergency is placing considerable strain on social cohesion in hyper-deprived communities. Following social media material which suggested that an adult male asylum seeker approached a schoolgirl in the local authority of Knowsley, large-scale public disorder took place outside of the four-star Suites Hotel in the area which was accommodating newcomers.

Demonstrating the failures of the UK's internal dispersal system regarding asylum seekers:

- As of 31 December 2022, Labour-run **Knowsley** in Merseyside was providing asylum support in the form of dispersed accommodation to a total of **238 individuals**.³ The corresponding figure for Liberal Democrat-controlled **St Albans** in Hertfordshire was **29 individuals**.
- As of 31 December 2022, **99.13%** of asylum seekers in Scotland receiving support in the form of dispersed accommodation were supported by one local authority - **Glasgow City Council** (4,456 individuals). The corresponding figure for **City of Edinburgh** was **0.16%** - seven people.
- As of 31 December 2022, the combined number of people receiving asylum support in the form of dispersed accommodation from **Cardiff and Swansea councils (2,101)** comfortably exceeded the number receiving this support in the entirety of **South East England (1,735)**.
- As of 31 December 2022, **1,594 of the 1,853 asylum seekers** receiving support in the shape of dispersed accommodation in Northern Ireland were being supported by **Belfast City Council – 86.02%**.

The report makes six main recommendations:

1. The Government should prioritise legislation to **curb the power of judicial interventions** – both international and domestic – in the UK Government's immigration and asylum policy, as recommended in Policy Exchange's previous report, *How to Legislate About Small Boats*. This would include reducing the scope for both the European Court of Human Rights and the UK courts to block deportations.
2. Alongside the Illegal Migration Act, the Government **should**

3. Dispersed accommodation is longer-term accommodation managed by accommodation providers on behalf of the Home Office. Primarily self-catering accommodation, dispersed accommodation consists of a mix of bed-sits, self-contained accommodation, and maisonettes to house single adults, couples and families and rooms in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) for adults.

establish a new safe and legal route for refugees from any country, subject to an annual cap democratically determined by Government and Parliament on a yearly basis, and prioritising women and girls at major risk of sex-based violence in conflict zones and insecure displacement facilities. The level of the cap should be required to be proposed each year by Government in a statutory instrument and approved by Parliament under the affirmative procedure.

3. The Government should galvanise voluntary and community spirit to support **an expansion of the sponsorship model for Ukrainian refugees to cover other nationalities** – one that includes the mobilisation of volunteers to help refugees improve their English to facilitate social and economic integration.
4. **The anti-terror Prevent Duty** should be extended to the sphere of immigration and asylum via the UK Border Force and Immigration & Protection Directorate. This would include training personnel to better identify **radicalisation risks among those who illegally enter the UK.**
5. **The UK's internal dispersal system regarding asylum seekers should be fundamentally reformed** to ensure that relatively well-resourced local authorities make greater contributions in terms of providing asylum-related support.
6. **A separate strategy should be created in Northern Ireland** which focuses on asylum-related support and the integration of refugees – one which reduces pressures on the city of Belfast and supports the work of secular, apolitical, non-denominational third-sector organisations.

1. Introduction

The UK's ongoing small-boats emergency - illegal English Channel crossings on the south coast of England - has established itself as a fiercely-debated issue in British political and media discourse.

Conservative Party PM Rishi Sunak has stated that one of his government's five main objectives is passing new laws to stem the flow of small boats reaching the English south coast. According to recent French data, people smugglers made £183 million from small-boat crossings in 2022.⁴ Advancing the view that the UK's policing of the English Channel is "too fragmented," PM Sunak has pledged to create a new "Small Boats Operational Command" (SBOC) to bring together military and civilian teams, co-ordinating intelligence, interception, processing, and enforcement.⁵ It has been reported that this new unit will have a staff of at least 700 people. New air and maritime capabilities including new drones, boats, land-based radar, and cameras, will also be introduced under the SBOC.⁶

The current Conservative government, much like the last Labour government during the 2000s, has faced significant local opposition to moving asylum seekers into dedicated centres – including hotels. This has raised concerns over established communities being deprived of hotels that serve a vital social function, as well as the potentially negative impact this can have on the post-Covid local tourism economy. This has led to a government aim to transfer 10,000 people out of expensive hotel accommodation into low-cost sites like disused holiday parks and former student halls.⁷ To ease the asylum backlog which soared to over 166,000 people by the end of 2022, the Home Office announced that in the region of 12,000 asylum seekers to the UK would be considered for refugee status without face-to-face interviews.⁸ With the interviews being replaced with a form and a questionnaire, the approach has been questioned from a security perspective. Such interviews provide an opportunity for the authorities to assess an individual and to at least go some way towards determining whether the asylum claimant is being honest and transparent about their personal background and life experiences.

With the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the public costs of irregular migration risk fuelling resentment and undermining social cohesion – especially in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. In his April 2023 speech at Policy Exchange, immigration minister Robert Jenrick offered the view that "excessive uncontrolled migration threatens to cannibalise the compassion that marks out the British people" and that those arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel tended

4. Dathan, M. (2023), 'People smugglers made £183m after bumper year in Channel', *The Times*, 27 January. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/people-smugglers-made-183m-after-bumper-year-in-channel-9c5gb0n9y>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
5. Casciani, D. (2022), 'Rishi Sunak's migration plan raises big questions', *BBC News*, 13 December. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63965141>, last accessed: 12 March 2022.
6. GOV.UK (2023), 'Leadership of small boats operations returns to the Home Office', 31 January. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leadership-of-small-boats-operations-returns-to-the-home-office>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
7. Hymas, C. (2023), 'Home Office considers giving councils more money to move migrants out of hotels', *The Telegraph*, 24 February. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/02/24/home-office-considers-giving-councils-money-move-migrants-hotels/>, last accessed: 24 March 2023.
8. Easton, M. (2023), 'Asylum claims for 12,000 to be considered without face-to-face interview', *BBC News*, 23 February. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64736123>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

to “have completely different lifestyles and values to those in the UK”.⁹ A total of 45,755 people entered the UK on small boats via the English Channel last year – which, according to the 2021 Census, is a number larger than the entire population of English towns such as Dover in Kent, Boston in Lincolnshire, and Kirkby in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley (where public disorder outside a hotel accommodating asylum seekers resulted in a total of fifteen arrests made by Merseyside Police).¹⁰ The government’s Illegal Migration Bill aims to strengthen existing laws in order to criminalise illegal entry into the UK and raise the threshold for claims of modern slavery which can delay and prevent removal. According to Home Office modelling, up to 80,000 people could arrive to the UK’s shores on small boats via the English Channel for 2023.¹¹

Along with the significant blurring of the line between genuine refugees fleeing conflict and persecution and illegal economic migrants (with a notable portion originating from countries which are relatively stable and not at war), there are serious questions to be asked over the fairness and proportionality of the UK’s internal dispersal system for asylum seekers. With relatively-deprived authorities and regions disproportionately bearing the brunt of rehoming asylum seekers – set against the UK’s ongoing cost-of-living crisis – the failing dispersal system is a matter of social justice. As it stands, the rehoming of asylum seekers is anything but a shared national endeavour, instead being one where comparatively affluent and well-resourced local authorities – including those with traditionally liberal attitudes on matters of immigration and asylum policy – do the bare minimum, often opting out entirely of relocation schemes. Therefore, there are two critical parts to the problem – concerns over the integrity of some asylum claims and grievances over the internal dispersal of claimants.

The report is as follows. After this introductory section, there is a deep-dive into the demographic characteristics of those who have entered the UK via the English Channel on small boats, along with a broader review of which groups are heavily represented when it comes to this form of irregular migration. There is also a focus on three different nationalities: Albanians, Indians, and Georgians.

After, an overview of the significant estimated costs relating to the UK’s asylum backlog and the ongoing small-boats emergency will be provided. As well as considering publicly-known costs surrounding hotel-related temporary ‘initial’ accommodation, this part of the report will include sections surrounding the provision of asylum-related housing and allowances, the administrative costs of processing asylum claims, and the creation of new units such as the Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC). Asylum-related costs associated with education and healthcare will also be considered, along with the oft-speculated relationship between asylum-connected backgrounds and criminal activity. This is followed by an overview of the UK’s asylum-seeker dispersal system and demonstrating its failings in terms of the disproportionate social and economic impact the ongoing small-boats emergency is having on left-behind communities

9. Syal, R. (2023), “Values and lifestyles’ of small boat refugees threaten social cohesion, says Jenrick”, *The Guardian*, 25 April. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/25/values-and-lifestyles-of-small-boat-refugees-threaten-social-cohesion-says-jenrick>, last accessed: 26 April 2023.

10. BBC News (2023), ‘Knowsley: Fifteen arrests over clash outside asylum seeker hotel’, 11 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-64611823>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

11. Cecil, N. (2023), ‘80,000 people could arrive in UK by ‘small boats’ in 2023 despite new crackdown, admits Suella Braverman’, *London Evening Standard*, 8 March. Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/rishi-sunak-small-boats-plan-refugee-convention-un-agency-b1065568.html>, last accessed: 15 April 2023.

which suffer from multiple forms of deprivation. This includes a case study on the Knowsley disorder at the four-star Suites Hotel, along with case studies which focus on Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Throughout the report, local case studies show how the effects of the national small-boats emergency, against the backdrop of the country's cost-of-living crisis, are being acutely felt in relatively-deprived local authorities - which in turn places considerable strain on community cohesion and public order. The report, after providing its concluding thoughts, ends with a set of policy recommendations which is designed to foster a fairer and more sustainable socio-political and socio-economic settlement when it comes to the integrity of the UK's asylum system and the relocation of newcomers. This represents a compromise based on the concept of 'compassionate control' – one which encourages the UK government to respect its international duties regarding refugees whilst adopting a hard-headed approach on matters of security and cohesion.

2. The Demographic Characteristics of Small-Boats Channel Crossers

A total of 45,755 people were detected arriving by small boats via the English Channel in 2022.¹² This represented a 60.4% rise from the 2021 figure of 28,526. Over half of the 2022 arrivals – 51.35% - entered the UK in the three months of August, September, and October. The month of August 2022 saw the highest number of small-boat arrivals of any month since data had been collected – 8,631, a figure which comfortably outstrips entire villages and civil parishes across the UK. To put this in perspective, this exceeded the total number of people who arrived by small boats to the UK for the whole of 2020 – 8,466.

Figure 1: Small-Boat Arrivals to the UK (2018-2022)

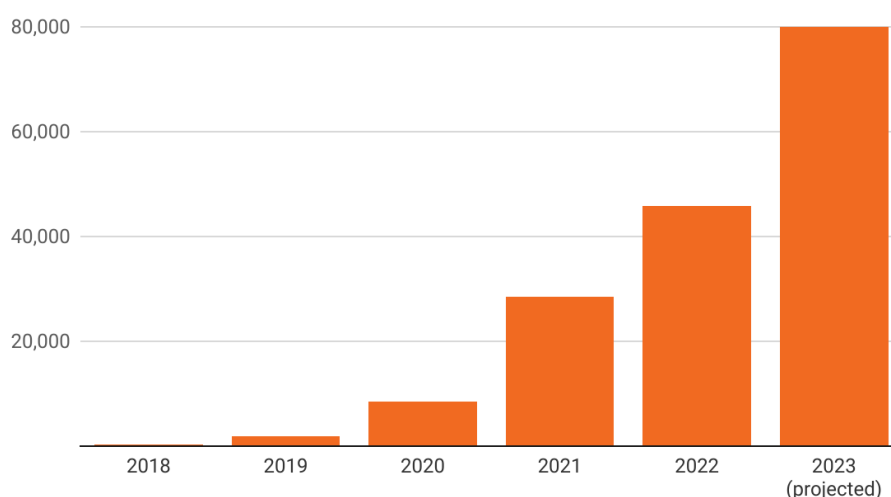


Figure 1 presents an overview of the number of people who have arrived by small boats to the UK for the following years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022. From 2018 to 2022, there has been a 15,202.7% increase in the number of people who have arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel (299 to 45,755). The number of people who arrived in the UK on small boats through the English Channel in 2022, 45,755, exceeds the overall total for the previous four years (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021) – 39,134. The highest number of people arriving to the UK on small boats via the English Channel in one day was recorded on 22nd August 2022, with 1,295 individuals crossing across a total of 27 boats.¹³ This is

12. GOV.UK [Home Office], 'Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2022', 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

13. GOV. UK [Ministry of Defence] (2023), 'Monthly number of migrants detected in small boats - 1 August to 31 August 2022', 1 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-monthly-data/monthly-number-of-migrants-detected-in-small-boats-1-august-to-31-august-2022>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

nearly 1,000 more people than those who crossed the English Channel to the UK on small boats for the whole of 2018. The chart includes a possible maximum figure of 80,000 for 2023, based on the Home Office's own modelling.

Figure 2: Small-Boat Arrivals to the UK (2022) - By Nationality

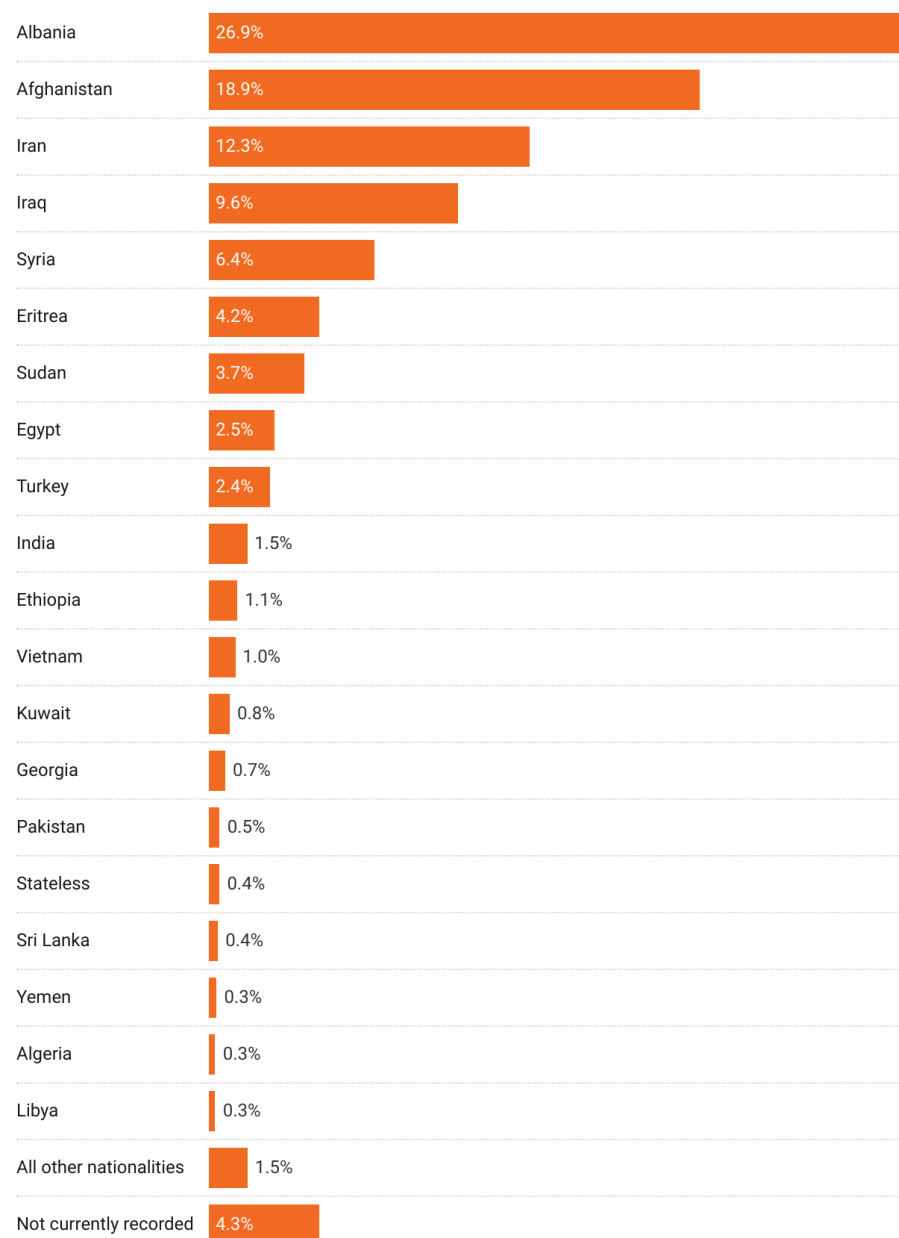


Figure 2 shows the percentage breakdowns, based on nationality, for the 45,755 individuals who crossed the English Channel and arrived in the UK on small boats. The modal category in the analysis is Albania, with over a quarter – 26.88% - of those who crossed the English Channel on small boats in 2022 being of Albanian nationality.¹⁴ This represents a total of 12,301 people. Albania is followed by Afghanistan (18.87%; 8,633 people), Iran (12.33%; 5,642), Iraq (9.57%; 4,377), and Syria (6.37%; 2,916). For the top 20 known nationalities of those who crossed

14. GOV.UK [Home Office], 'Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2022', 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

the English Channel and arrived in the UK on small boats, three are in the Indian subcontinent – India (1.49%; 683), Pakistan (0.45%; 207), and Sri Lanka (0.38%; 176).¹⁵ In the analysis, 0.44% of people are stateless – 203 individuals. Turkey is in the top 10 nationalities in the analysis, with 2.35% of people who arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel having Turkish nationality – a total of 1,076 individuals.¹⁶ The reality is that a notable portion of people arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel do not originate from countries at war and riven by military conflict.

2.1: Albanian Nationals

Much of the national debate surrounding illegal economic migration and the integrity of the UK’s asylum system has centred on small-boats crossers who originate from Albania – which was the most common nationality among those who arrived in the UK on small boats in 2022. One of the critical problems of the ongoing small-boats crisis is cross-country people-smuggling networks which involve clandestine Albanian-origin enterprises rooted in northern France and the UK.

Figure 3: Small-Boat Arrivals to the UK (2018-2022) - Albanian Nationality

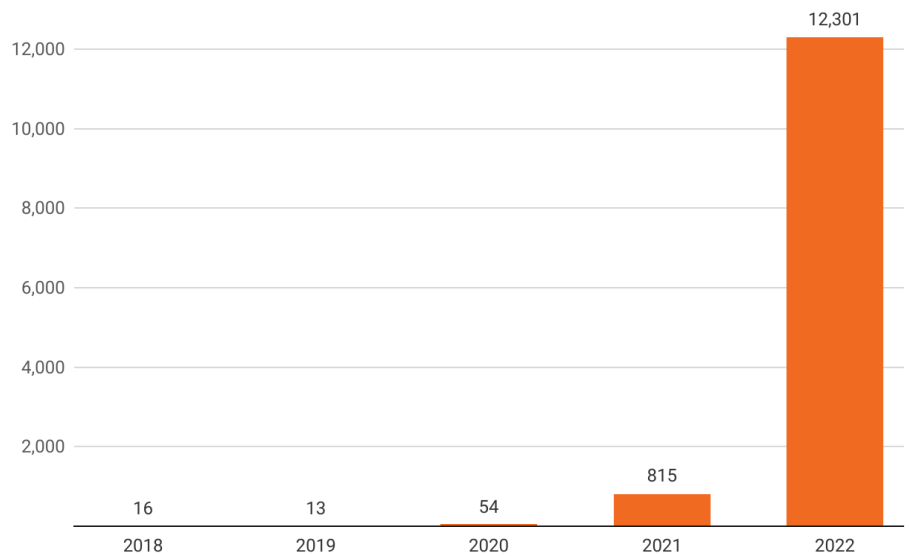


Figure 3 shows the number of people categorised as having Albanian nationality have arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel in five separate years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.¹⁷ In the three earliest years, the number of people of Albanian nationality who crossed the English Channel and arrived in the UK on small boats were in double figures – 16 in 2018, 13 in 2019, and 54 in 2020. The data shows an explosion in the number of arrivals of Albanian nationality from 2020 to 2021 (54 to 815 individuals) and 2021 to 2022 (815 to 12,301 individuals) – near-identical increases of 1,409.26% and 1,409.33% respectively. The increase from 2019 to 2022 – 13 to 12,301 individuals – is 94,523%.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

The south-eastern country in the Balkans is a relatively peaceful country – especially when compared to some of the other conflict-ridden countries in the list of main nationalities for those who have arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel. Indeed, Albania has not experienced conflict since the 1997 civil war. Sparked by the failure of pyramid schemes as the ex-communist country transitioned towards a market economy, the government was toppled – with more than 2,000 people being killed during the six-month-long civil war.

Freedom House concluded that it is now a country which has a record of competitive electoral processes - with the latest parliamentary elections being “generally well administered”.¹⁸ Freedom House is also of the view that religious freedom and freedom of assembly is generally respected in Albania.¹⁹ While Albania scores 67 out of 100 on the Freedom House’s Global Freedom index (which focuses on political rights and civil liberties), Afghanistan and Iran only score 10 and 14 out of 100 respectively. Those who cross the English Channel and arrive in the UK on small boats are originating from countries which are far from uniform in terms of the provision of political freedom and civil rights.

Albania – which has not experienced for more than a quarter of a century and provides a constitutional right for its citizens to freely express one’s faith (or non-belief) – would not be conventionally identified, in global terms, as a ‘high-risk’ country when it comes to state-sponsored violence and group-based persecution.

2.2: Indian Nationals

A recent development regarding the ongoing crisis is the upsurge in Indian nationals who are arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel. The second-most populous country in the world is widely considered to be a democratic and strategically important partner for the UK in the post-Brexit international system – especially when it comes to security co-operation in the Indo-Pacific region. This is one of the five pillars of the UK-India ‘Roadmap 2030’, which also envisages deeper links between the two countries over cyber-related threats. An integral part of the Conservatives’ post-Brexit foreign-policy identity is the bolstering of trading, defence, and educational ties with India. While migration arrangements with India have been the subject of disagreement within the Conservative Party in recent times, with home secretary Suella Braverman identifying Indian nationals as the largest group that overstay their visa.²⁰ However, a new route for younger professionals from the UK and India to work in each other’s countries was recently announced by foreign secretary James Cleverly, who recently referred to India as the “world’s largest democracy”.²¹

18. Freedom House (2023), ‘Freedom in the World 2023: Albania’. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2023>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

19. Ibid.

20. Syal, R. (2022), ‘Suella Braverman speaks out against likely UK trade deal with India’, *The Guardian*, 6 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/oct/06/suella-braverman-speaks-out-against-likely-uk-trade-deal-with-india>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

21. GOV. UK (2022), ‘Press Release: Foreign Secretary James Cleverly travels to India’. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-james-cleverly-travels-to-india>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

Figure 4: Small-Boat Arrivals to the UK (2018-2022) - Indian Nationality

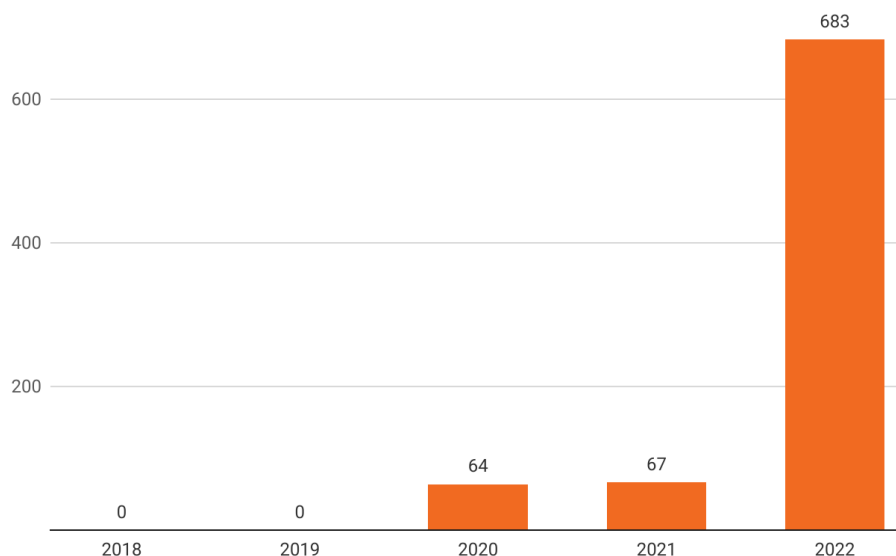


Figure 4 shows the number of people categorised as having Indian nationality have arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel in five separate years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.²² In the years of 2018 and 2019, not a single person registered as an Indian national arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel. In 2020 and 2021, this rose to 64 and 67 individuals respectively. From 2021 to 2022, the number of Indian nationals who crossed the English Channel and reached the UK on small boats increased by 919.4% - from 67 to 683 individuals.

In early February, it was reported that Indian nationals represented the third-largest cohort of migrants who were crossing the English Channel and arriving to the UK on small boats.²³ Recent Home Office Data shows that Indian nationals are now the second-largest cohort, with 675 individuals arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel between 1 January and 31 March 2023 (18% of all arrivals for that period).²⁴ While there are multiple immigration routes available to Indian nationals who wish to study and work in the UK, there are incentives to enter the UK on small boats via the English Channel. It has been reported that a source at the Home Office suggested that a section of the Indian nationals are students exploiting a loophole that allows them to attend UK universities at lower prices – being able to study for a degree and pay domestic fees (which are currently capped at £9,250 per year) while their applications for asylum are processed.²⁵ According to the British Council, the average undergraduate fee for an international student is £22,000 per year. The Times also reported that according to a Border Force source, the small-boats route to the UK was a cheaper alternative and more likely to guarantee entry than applying for a student visa.²⁶ It has also been suggested that recent visa-free arrangements between India and Serbia had facilitated the journey of Indian nationals who eventually arrived in the UK on small boats through the English Channel.

22. GOV.UK [Home Office], 'Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2022', 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

23. Dathan, M. (2023), 'Indians now third-biggest cohort of Channel migrants', *The Times*, 2 February. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/surge-in-indian-migrants-crossing-channel-in-small-boats-linked-to-student-visas-935flhr67>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

24. GOV.UK [Home Office], 'Statistics relating to the Illegal Migration Bill', 25 April. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-relating-to-the-illegal-migration-bill/statistics-relating-to-the-illegal-migration-bill#:~:text=Between%201%20January%20and%2031%20March%202023%20the%20most%20common,Indians%20\(675%2C%2018%25\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-relating-to-the-illegal-migration-bill/statistics-relating-to-the-illegal-migration-bill#:~:text=Between%201%20January%20and%2031%20March%202023%20the%20most%20common,Indians%20(675%2C%2018%25)), last accessed: 28 April 2023.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

2.3: Georgian Nationals

An overlooked cohort of Channel migrants arriving to the UK on small boats are people of Georgian nationality. A transcontinental country at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, Georgia shares a *de jure* 894-kilometre border with Russia. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Georgia has made considerable economic reforms and upgrades in terms of its social infrastructure. According to the Index of Economic Freedom, Georgia is categorised as having a “moderately free” economy – the 35th freest out of the 176 national economies ranked.²⁷ The country has experienced some political instability in recent times (partly driven by rising tensions over the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict), with Freedom House reporting that “oligarchic influence affects the country’s political affairs, policy decisions, and media environment”.²⁸ However, it ultimately concludes that Georgia “holds regular and competitive elections” and is categorised as a ‘free’ country when it comes to internet freedom (which measures obstacles to access, limits on online content, and violation of user rights).

Figure 5: Small-Boat Arrivals to the UK (2018-2022) - Georgian Nationality

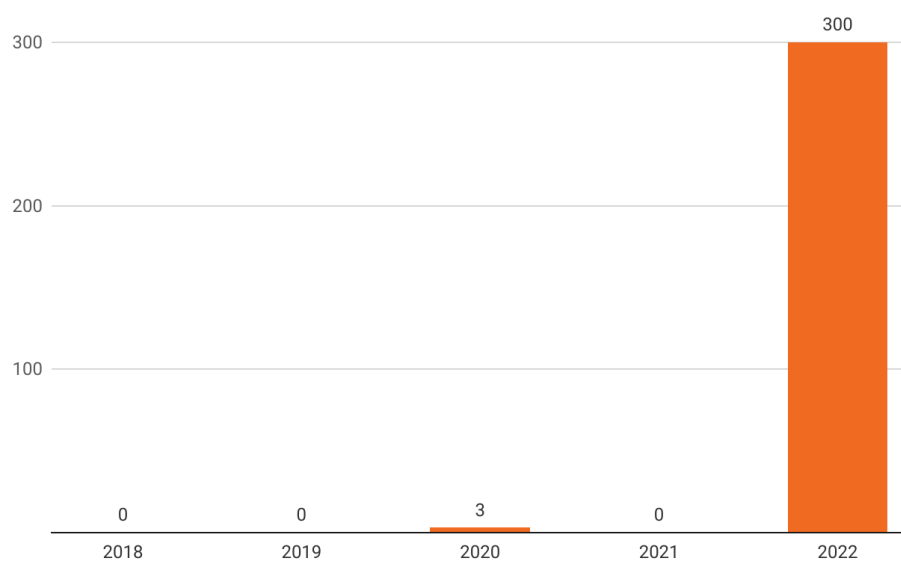


Figure 5 shows the number of people categorised as having Georgian nationality have arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel in five separate years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.²⁹ In the years of 2018, 2019, and 2021, not a single person registered as a Georgian national arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel. In 2020, three individuals of Georgian nationality were recorded as arriving in the UK through this method. In 2022, there was an upsurge in the number of Georgian nationals who crossed the English Channel and reached the UK on small boats – 300 people. There are legitimate security concerns surrounding the sudden and out-of-the-ordinary surge in Georgian nationals crossing the English Channel on small boats and arriving in the UK. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russian president Vladimir

27. The Heritage Foundation (2023), '2023 Index of Economic Freedom'. Available at: <https://www.heritage.org/index/ranking>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

28. Freedom House (2023), 'Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia'. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2023>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

29. GOV.UK [Home Office], 'Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2022', 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

Putin has sought to mobilise sympathetic pro-Kremlin forces in ex-Soviet nation-states, as well as potentially exporting ‘agents of influence’ to neighbouring Georgia. Natia Seskuria, founder and Director of the Georgia-based Regional Institute for Security Studies (RISS), has raised the possibility of Russian spies entering Georgia under the false pretence of ‘fleeing’ the Kremlin’s militarism and authoritarian rule.³⁰ These are international dynamics to consider when exploring the potential security risks associated with the small-boats crisis - which in 2022 incorporated a surge in Georgian nationals arriving to the UK from a former Soviet Republic which appears vulnerable to Kremlin-orchestrated espionage.

2.4: The Small Boats - Age and Sex Characteristics

Along with the questions being raised over the integrity of asylum claims based on nationality and country of origin, there are concerns over lopsided sex- and age-based ratios associated with those who have crossed the English Channel on small boats and arrived in the UK. In a House of Commons statement on 7th March 2023 regarding the Illegal Migration Bill, home secretary Suella Braverman flagged the fact that most small-boat Channel migrants are males under the age of 40. It is important to note that younger men and boys have historically been targeted under genocidal activities and ethnic cleansing measures, as well as being subjected to forced conscription by authoritarian regimes. However, the sex-based composition of irregular migration gives rise to concerns that illegal Channel crossings which predominantly incorporate younger male migrants that can take on physically demanding journeys, have overwhelmed a now-broken asylum system which fails to prioritise women and girls at major risk of sex-based violence in conflict-ridden foreign territories. Since 2018, males have vastly outnumbered females in every year when it comes to those who crossed the English Channel and arrived in the UK on small boats. In 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, the percentage of small-boat migrants who were recorded as male were 91.30%, 84.32%, 87.21% and 87.25% respectively.³¹

Table 1: Age and sex breakdowns for individuals who crossed the English Channel and arrived in the UK on small boats in 2022

	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Under 18 years	5,371	1,551	195	7,117
18-24 years	14,748	937	101	15,786
25-39 years	15,463	2,115	100	17,678
40 years and above	2,643	547	23	3,213
Not currently recorded	-	-	-	1,961
TOTAL	38,225	5,150	419	45,755

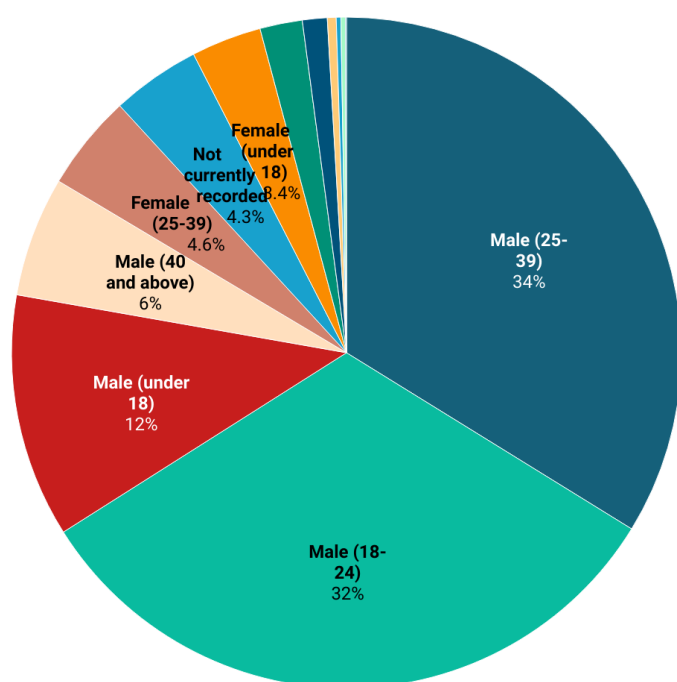
30. Corfe, O. (2023), ‘Putin’s spies are mobilising across Europe and they could be about to spark a new war’, *The Express*, 9 March. Available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1744326/russia-spies-migration-eastern-europe-putin-spt>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

31. GOV.UK [Home Office], ‘Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2022’, 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

Table 1 presents an overview of the age and sex breakdowns for those who arrived in the UK via the English Channel on small boats in 2022.³² Out of the 45,755 people who crossed the English Channel on small boats and arrived in the UK over the course of 2022, more than four in five - 38,225 individuals - were recorded as male: 83.54%. Only 11.26% - 5,150 individuals - were registered as female (with the categories 'unknown' and 'not currently recorded' comprising the missing data). Around two in three of the 45,755 individuals who arrived in the UK on small boats via the English Channel in 2022 were males aged between 18 and 39 years – 66.03% (30,211 individuals). This comfortably exceeds the entire total of people who crossed the English Channel on small boats and arrived in the UK in 2021 (28,526 individuals). For the age bracket of 18-39 years, 6.67% of the 45,755 people who crossed the small boats and arrived in the UK via the English Channel in 2022 were female.

Figure 6: Age and sex breakdown for 2022 small-boats migrants arriving in the UK

■ Male (25-39) (34%)
 ■ Male (18-24) (32%)
 ■ Male (under 18) (12%)
 ■ Male (40 and above) (6%)
■ Female (25-39) (4.6%)
 ■ Not currently recorded (4.3%)
 ■ Female (under 18) (3.4%)
■ Female (18-24) (2%)
 ■ Female (40 and above) (1.2%)
 ■ Unknown (under 18) (0.4%)
■ Unknown (18-24) (0.2%)
 ■ Unknown (25-39) (0.2%)
 ■ Unknown (40 and above) (0.1%)



32. Ibid.

3. The Public Costs of the Small-Boats Emergency

People-smuggling networks continue to make handsome profits from the facilitation of illegal Channel crossings into the UK – with recent French data suggesting that in the region of £183 million was made by such criminal enterprises over the course of 2022. Meanwhile, the UK’s small boats crisis is responsible for mounting public costs in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis.

The cost of rehoming newcomers in hotels has dominated the national political discourse on the small-boats emergency. With estimated daily costs being in the region of £5-7 million, the annual cost of housing newcomers which incorporate illegal Channel migrants would be in the region of £1.8-2.6 billion. The lower end of this estimate, £1.8 billion, exceeds the £1.7 billion awarded to projects through Round 1 of the Levelling Up Fund in October 2021 (a further £2.1 billion was awarded during Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund in January 2023).³³

While the UK Government has never publicly confirmed the number of hotels involved, BBC News recently reported that a government source had informed it that the state was using 395 to accommodate more than 51,000 asylum seekers - at a cost of more than £6 million a day.³⁴ Of those hotels, 363 were in England, 20 in Northern Ireland, 10 in Scotland and two in Wales.³⁵ But even with the promise of relocating asylum seekers from hotels to low-cost forms of accommodation such as disused military bases, holiday camps, student halls, and ferries, it is likely that hotel-related costs will continue to remain stubbornly high due to the steady stream of new small-boat arrivals into the UK. It is also worth noting – as case studies later in the report demonstrate – that these alternative forms of asylum-related accommodation bring their own issues.

Beyond the costs of housing newcomers in hotels – including four-star accommodation such as the Suites Hotel in Knowsley and the Great Hallingbury Manor in Bishop’s Stortford – there are other forms of state spending and wider impacts on public services which are not negligible by any stretch of the imagination. This includes the creation of the Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC), a formation of a new unit which is specifically dedicated to handling asylum applications submitted by Albanian nationals and employing additional caseworkers to alleviate the pressures of the industrial-scale asylum backlog. The small-boats crisis is also having an impact in the sphere of education, placing pressures on state-funded school places which are resulting in domestic pupils from

33. GOV.UK (2023), ‘Landmark Levelling Up Fund to spark transformational change across the UK’, 18 January. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-levelling-up-fund-to-spark-transformational-change-across-the-uk>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

34. Sandford, D. and May, C. (2023), ‘Private firms profiting from UK asylum hotels’, BBC News, 20 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64991234>, last accessed: 22 March 2023.

35. Ibid.

established communities being bussed to different towns and cities for their schooling.

While it is true that most of those crossing to the UK on small boats via the English Channel are younger, able-bodied, generally healthy males, there are healthcare-related costs associated with the setting up of medical facilities at migrant processing centres (such as those that provide vaccines to contain outbreaks of illnesses such as diphtheria).³⁶ While it is vitally important to stress that such outcomes are anything but commonplace, there are also the costs of criminal activity and public disorder which can flow from failed asylum policies. The multi-faceted nature of the public costs of the small-boats crisis, which tend to be overlooked due to the understandable focus on hotel accommodation, is deserving of greater attention.

It is worth noting that this report is certainly not of the view that none of this spending should be taking place so long as the emergency continues. For example, expanding the pool of caseworkers will inevitably result in additional costs, but is required in order to address the UK's colossal asylum backlog as a matter of urgency. Rather, the purpose of this section of the report is to highlight the risk of ever-spiralling public costs as a result of the UK's dysfunctional asylum system and the ongoing small-boats emergency on the English south coast.

3.1: Standard cash support for asylum seekers

According to the UK Government website, asylum seekers are entitled to £45.00 for each person in their household – helping to pay for items such as food, clothing, and toiletries.³⁷ This allowance is loaded onto a debit card (ASPEN card) on a weekly basis. This drops down to £9.10 per person if their accommodation provides meals (but this applies for a small minority of asylum seekers). An asylum seeker can apply for a one-off £300 maternity payment if her unborn baby is due in 8 weeks or less, or if the baby is under 6 weeks old. If someone has been refused asylum, there is still the option of applying for a one-off £250 maternity payment under the conditions previously stated.

Table 2a: Estimated one-week, one-month, and one-year costs of the provision of the weekly £45 asylum support allowance (based on end-of-2022 asylum backlog)

	Weekly cost of £45 standard allowance (£)	Monthly cost of £45 standard allowance	Annual cost of £45 standard allowance
Asylum Backlog at the end of 2022 (166,261)	7,481,745	32,420,895	389,050,740

36. Grammaticas, D. and Snowdon, K. (2022), 'Diphtheria cases rising among asylum seekers', *BBC News*, 27 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63771091>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

37. GOV.UK: Asylum Support: <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get#:~:text=If%20you've%20been%20refused-for%20food%2C%20clothing%20and%20toiletries>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

Table 2b: Estimated one-week, one-month, and one-year costs of the provision of the weekly £45 asylum support allowance (based on number of small-boats arrivals for 2022)

	Weekly cost of £45 standard allowance (£)	Monthly cost of £45 standard allowance	Annual cost of £45 standard allowance
Number of Small Boats Arrivals in 2022 (45,755)	2,058,975	8,922,225	107,066,700

Using the asylum backlog figure at the end of 2022, if everyone involved in the backlog was in receipt of the £45 weekly allowance, this would have an estimated weekly cost of £7,481,745. This rate of spending would increase to £32,420,895 over the course of a month. If maintained for an entire year, the estimated cost for the UK Government would be £389,050,740. Applying this calculation for the number of people who crossed to the UK on small boats via the English Channel (45,755), the estimated one-week cost for the weekly £45 cash allowance would be £2,058,975 – rising to £8,922,225 for a month and £107,066,700 for an entire year.

Figure 7: Estimated costs of £45 weekly asylum allowance provision to small-boats migrants

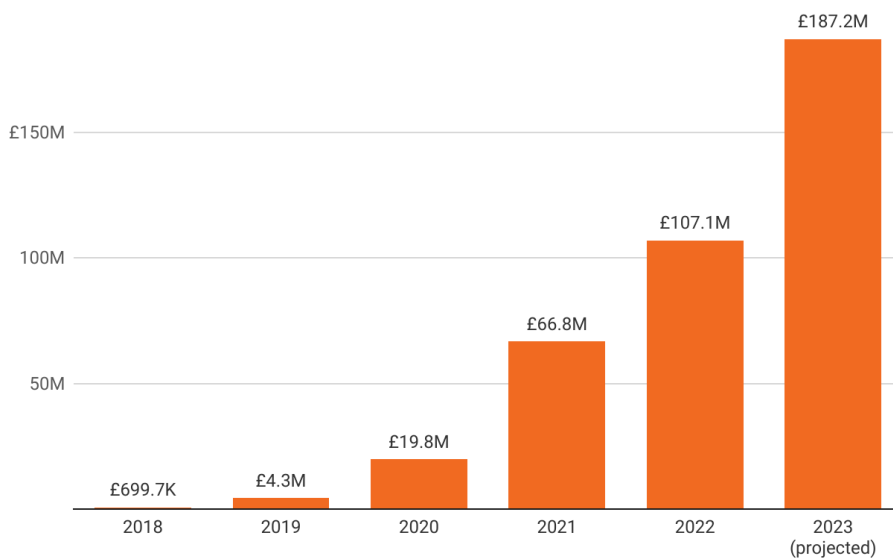


Figure 7 presents an overview of estimated year-on-year costs of providing the asylum-related weekly allowance of £45 (based on the number of people who crossed to the UK on small boats via the English Channel).³⁸

The estimated cost of this form of asylum support for 2018 is just under £700,000. This rises to the estimated cost of £4.3 million for 2019 and increases to £19.8 million for 2020. The estimated cost from 2020 to 2021 more than trebles to £66.8 million. The estimated cost for 2022 breaks the £100 million barrier - £107.1 million. The projected figure for

38. The calculations are not cumulative (direct calculations based on the number of small-boats arrivals for that particular year). This is the case for similar analyses in this section of the report.

2023 – based on the Home Office’s modelling which suggests that the number of small-boats migrants arriving in the UK this year could reach as high as 80,000 – is £187.2 million.

3.2: Administrative costs and the creation of new units

Promising to stop small boats reaching the shores of the English south coast and making it one of his government’s five key pledges, PM Rishi Sunak announced the creation of a new 700-personnel Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC) which draws on both military and civilian expertise, as well as the formation of a 400-strong unit dedicated to the processing of Albanian-national asylum applications. It has also been promised that the asylum backlog will be cleared by the end of 2023. At the end of 2022, there were 166,261 cases in the asylum backlog (including those awaiting an initial decision and ‘pending further review’).

As of December 2022, a compartmentalisation of the Home Office’s employees based on job grading position and public information on salaries suggests that the following is a reasonably accurate representation of its overall workforce³⁹:

Table 3: Home Office organisational structure and salary grades

	Number of Employees	Percentage of Workforce (%)	Minimum Salary (£)	Maximum Salary (£)	Salary Midpoint (£)
Assistant Officer	9,009	21.84	21,661.00	22,459.00	22,060.00
Executive Officer	16,751	40.60	25,137.00	27,478.00	26,307.50
Senior Executive Officer	10,856	26.31	38,232.00	43,965.00	41,098.50
Grade 6/7	4,308	10.44	54,679.00	73,604.00	64,141.50
Senior Civil Service	333	0.81	73,000.00	117,800.00	95,400.00
TOTAL	41,257				

With the leadership of small-boats operations returning to the Home Office through the creation of the Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC), the following projected one-year expenditure for the SBOC in terms of staffing costs – based on the organisational structure of the Home Office, the ‘salary midpoints’ for various job grading positions, and the assumption that the SBOC will have a total of 700 personnel, is as follows:

39. GOV.UK (2023), ‘Workforce management information, 2022’, 27 January 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workforce-management-information-2022>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

Table 4: Estimated Salary Cost of Small Boats Operational Command (based on organisational structure and salary grading system of the Home Office)

	Number of Employees	Percentage of Workforce (%)	Salary Average (£)	Salary Cost (£) ⁴⁰
Assistant Officer	153	21.84	22,060.00	3,375,180.00
Executive Officer	284	40.60	26,307.50	7,471,330.00
Senior Executive Officer	184	26.31	£41,098.50	7,562,124.00
Grade 6/7	73	10.44	64,141.50	4,682,329.50
Senior Civil Service	6	0.81	95,400.00	572,400.00
TOTAL	700			23,663,363.50

If the Small Boats Operational Command reflects the organisational structure and estimated salary averages for the Home Office at large, based on being staffed with 700 personnel, the SBOC will have an **estimated one-year overall salary cost of £23,663,363.50**.

Table 5: Estimated Salary Cost of the new unit dedicated to processing asylum applications submitted by Albanian nationals

	Number of Employees	Percentage of Workforce (%)	Salary Average (£)	Salary Cost (£)
Technical Specialist	300	75.00	32,000.00	9,600,000.00
Senior Executive Officer	100	25.00	41,098.50	4,109,850.00
Total	400			13,709,850.00

The Home Office's new 400-strong technical unit which is dedicated to the processing of asylum applications submitted by Albanian citizens is also likely to have a seven-figure staffing cost over the course of one year. Operating on the assumption that 75% of this unit are technical specialists (who have expert knowledge on Albanian-origin applications beyond a general caseworker and are paid an average salary of £32,000.00 per annum),⁴¹ with 25% being senior executive officers (with the assumed average salary of £41,098.50 per annum), it will have an **estimated one-year overall salary cost of £13,709,850**.⁴²

The UK Government's pledge to wipe out the asylum backlog by the end of 2023 will require a significant upscaling of its caseworker capacity when it comes to the processing of asylum applications (which, at the end of 2022, stood at 166,261 cases).

According to the Institute for Government, a caseworker makes on average four decisions a month when it comes to asylum applications, which in turn provides an average of 48 cases decisions a year.⁴³ In order to clear the backlog of 166,261 cases in the space of one year, operating on the assumption that one caseworker processing asylum applications and make 48 decisions over the course of one year, a total of 3,463.77 caseworkers will be required (rounded to 3,464 individuals). Operating on the basis that the average salary for an asylum-related caseworker is

41. Glassdoor website - salary information for Home Office roles (technical specialists): https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/Salary/Home-Office-Technical-Specialist-Salaries-E489914_D_KO12,32.htm, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

42. A similar estimated cost was calculated based on the 400-person unit reflecting the organisational structure and salary grading system for the Home Office: **£13,512,088**.

43. Sasse, T., Clyne, R. and Savur, S. (2023), 'Asylum backlog', 24 February. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/article/explainer/asylum-backlog>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

40. Salary costs rounded up/down to the nearest pound.

£27,201.00 and makes an average of 48 case decisions in one year, **the 3,464 caseworkers required to clear an asylum backlog of 166,261 cases by the end of 2023 would cost £94,224,264 in terms of overall salary cost.**

The UK government has entertained the possibility of streamlining the asylum application process. When pledging to wipe out the asylum backlog, PM Rishi Sunak has sought to allay such concerns by arguing that productivity will be tripled by removing paperwork and streamlining asylum interviews. There is also the legitimate concern that the speeding up of processing risks poorer decisions and more successful appeals – which is not the desirable outcome for the UK Government. The recruitment and training of new staff will also take time and resources. In a radical move which aims to reduce the asylum backlog which PM Rishi Sunak has pledged to wipe out by the end of 2023, some 12,000 asylum seekers to the UK are to be considered for refugee status without face-to-face interviews. A 10-page English-language questionnaire will decide the cases of people from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, and Yemen who applied before July 2022. While the Home Office has justified the move on the grounds that these five nationalities already have relatively high asylum-claim acceptance rates, there is the argument that this is a liberalisation of asylum processing checks which prioritises political objectives over security considerations.

3.3: Housing Costs and Pressures

Much of the political and media discourse regarding the UK's small-boats emergency on the English south coast centres on the matter of housing. Asylum-related accommodation includes both shorter-term, hotel-style 'initial accommodation' and longer-term 'dispersed accommodation' in the shape of flats and houses. While placements in 'initial accommodation' should only be a few weeks, there have been reports of asylum seekers being housed in higher-cost hotels for as long as fifteen months.⁴⁴ A report published in July 2022 by the Refugee Council flagged the issue of asylum seekers having extended stays in so-called 'temporary accommodation'.⁴⁵ At the end of 2021, 2,876 asylum seekers had spent at least six months in hotel rooms, with a further 378 being in hotel rooms for at least a full year.⁴⁶ As well as being incredibly costly to the British taxpayer, being positioned in initial accommodation for such lengthy periods can have a negative impact on the health and well-being of asylum seekers who are faced with much uncertainty.

In a more general sense, housing is consistently one of the higher-ranking concerns among the British public – with it regularly featuring in the top three spots for YouGov's polling tracker which asks British adults what they believe are the most important issues facing the country.⁴⁷ Publishing a report in February 2023, Centre for Cities concluded that Britain has a "severe housing crisis" – that compared to the average European country, Britain has a backlog of 4.3 million homes that are missing from the national housing market.⁴⁸ The housing crisis is especially severe in the prosperous

44. Tingle, R. (2022), 'EXCLUSIVE: Asylum seekers reveal how they have been staying in £100-a-night taxpayer-funded hotels for as long as 15 MONTHS and taking £5 an hour cash-in-hand jobs to boost £8 a week government 'pocket money' despite not being allowed to work', *The Daily Mail*, 1 December. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/immigration/article-11485291/Asylum-seekers-staying-taxpayer-funded-hotels-long-15-MONTHS.html>, last accessed: 1 May 2023.

45. The Refugee Council (2022), 'Lives On Hold: Experiences of people living in hotel asylum accommodation. A follow-up report'. July. Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Lives-on-hold-research-report-July-2022.pdf>, last accessed: 1 May 2023.

46. *Ibid.*

47. YouGov polling tracker – 'the most important issues facing the country'. Available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/trackers/the-most-important-issues-facing-the-country>, last accessed: 26 March 2023.

48. Watling, S. and Breach, A. (2023), 'The house-building crisis: The UK's 4 million missing homes', *Centre for Cities*, 22 February. Available at: <https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/The-house-building-crisis-February-2023.pdf>, last accessed: 26 March 2023.

Greater South East of England (which contributes towards major regional disparities when it comes to accommodating asylum seekers under the UK's internal dispersal system). Rehoming asylum seekers in relatively-deprived areas with a lack of affordable family-friendly housing – with newcomers being relocated to four-star hotel accommodation in some cases – can strain community cohesion and give rise to anti-establishment sentiments.

The hotel-related costs of accommodating asylum seekers have been a major talking point in the context of the UK's small-boats emergency, with the reported government expenditure on this being in the region of £5-7 million a day. The lower estimate of the one-year public spend on accommodating newcomers in hotels (£1.825 billion) is nearly three times higher than the £630 million government investment in 2022-23 to tackle homelessness in the UK.⁴⁹ The higher estimate of the one-year public spend on accommodating newcomers in hotels (£2.555 billion) comfortably exceeds the entirety of the government funding allocated for Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund (£2.1 billion). Partly due to the scarcity of housing and lower-cost accommodation in London and the South East of England, the UK Government has openly stated that asylum seekers should not expect to be rehomed in these two regions.⁵⁰ This is highly likely to perpetuate long-standing regional disparities when it comes to supporting asylum seekers in the shape of dispersed accommodation. While the UK Government plans to reduce the costs of accommodating asylum seekers by rehoming newcomers in lower-cost facilities such as airfields, disused holiday parks and ferries, former student halls and barges, these processes are not without controversy.

One example is the Home Office's planned relocation of asylum seekers to a former RAF base in Braintree, Essex – MDP Wethersfield. While there is no longer an RAF presence, it is used as a Ministry of Defence Police base (MPD) for various activities such as training activities.⁵¹ It has been reported in the local media that military families living at the historic air base have been told to relocate from their homes for asylum seekers to be accommodated at the site – with some of the service families reportedly including children with disabilities.⁵² The planned relocation of 1,500 asylum seekers to MDP Wethersfield is opposed by Conservative-controlled Braintree District Council, with council leader Graham Butland stating that the council had expressed its strong view to the Home Office that it considers Wethersfield airfield “to be an unsuitable site, given the lack of capacity in local services, its isolated location, the size of the site and the fact that the scale of the development proposed could have a significant adverse impact upon the local community”.⁵³ According to BBC News, MDP Wethersfield is not currently served by a bus route and is roughly ten miles away from the nearest railway station – Braintree. While local residents have raised security-related concerns over the plans, it has also been mentioned by those living in the area that relocation to a location as geographically isolated as MDP Wethersfield would be unfair on the asylum seekers involved.⁵⁴

49. Homeless Link (2022), 'Our verdict on the Autumn Budget: what will it mean for homelessness services?', 20 April. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/news/our-verdict-on-the-autumn-budget-what-will-it-mean-for-homelessness-services/>, last accessed: 14 March 2022.
50. GOV.UK: Asylum Support: <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get#:~:text=If%20you've%20been%20refused,for%20food%2C%20clothing%20and%20toiletries>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.
51. BBC News (2023), 'Braintree Council considers legal action over RAF base migrants', 22 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-65023922>, last accessed: 26 March 2023.
52. Parry, M. and Willis, A. (2023), 'Military families forced to leave their homes in Braintree as asylum seekers due to replace them', Essex Live, 23 March. Available at: <https://www.essexlive.news/news/essex-news/military-families-forced-leave-homes-8281845>, last accessed: 26 March 2023.
53. BBC News (2023), 'Braintree Council considers legal action over RAF base migrants', 22 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-65023922>, last accessed: 26 March 2023.
54. Birchley, E. (2023), 'Essex locals resent government plan to house asylum seeking men at MoD facility', Sky News, 25 March. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/essex-locals-resent-government-plan-to-house-asylum-seeking-men-at-mod-facility-12842362>, last accessed: 26 March 2023.

To reduce the costs of providing hotel accommodation to newcomers, the Home Office has also planned to house up to 2,000 asylum seekers at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire. The former RAF station located six miles away from the city of Lincoln falls under West Lindsey District Council which considers the site to be inappropriate for housing asylum seekers – arguing that the plan would put at risk a £300 million regeneration project.⁵⁵ Under the new local plan, there would be a ‘re-development’ of RAF Scampton – with the scheme including a museum, new homes, entertainment venues, preservation of historic buildings and the retention of the runway.⁵⁶ The Conservative local party has argued that housing asylum seekers at the location would put its status as a world-renowned heritage site at risk – with RAF Scampton, built in 1936, once being the home of the Number 617 Squadron (commonly known as “The Dambusters” as a result of targeting German dams during Operation Chastise in WWII).⁵⁷ There was a heavy police presence at recent protests based on the RAF Scampton controversy, with police officers at one point having to form a cordon between demonstrators against the asylum-relocation plans and counter-protesters.⁵⁸

There has been a concerted effort by the UK Government to diversify the accommodation provided to asylum seekers. A recent development has been the announcement that asylum seekers will be housed in barges in efforts to reduce accommodation-related costs associated with the ongoing small-boats emergency. This includes the Bibby Stockholm accommodation barge – a 222-room, three-storey vessel which will reportedly house 500 male asylum seekers once positioned in Portland Port (off the coastal town of Weymouth in Dorset).⁵⁹ Having docked at Falmouth in Cornwall for an inspection and refitting work, Home Office has described this accommodation as “basic” – containing healthcare provision, catering facilities and around-the-clock security (at a reported cost of £20,000 a day).⁶⁰ The Home Office has stated that it expects the facility to be operational for at least 18 months. Based on the reported daily operational cost of £20,000, this would have an estimated cost in the region of £11 million. The plan, however, is facing resistance from the Conservative-run Dorset Council and local Tory MP Richard Drax (who are considering legal action).⁶¹ Concerns have been raised by local politicians, such as the mayor of Portland Peter Roper, over the barge’s potential impact on Dorset’s wider tourism industry.⁶²

3.4: School place costs and children’s social care pressures

The ongoing small-boats crisis is also creating additional financial pressures on the UK’s school system - especially in local authorities which are disproportionately bearing the brunt of providing state-funded education to schoolchildren who are incorporated in asylum claims. The similar problem has taken hold in inner-city neighbourhoods in the United States, with public schools in New York City struggling to cope with an influx of

55. Constable, O. and PA Media (2023), ‘RAF Scampton: Council in Home Office legal battle over airfield asylum site’, *BBC News*, 1 April. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-65148233>, last accessed: 27 April 2023.
56. Culbertson, A. (2023), ‘Conservative-led council says Home Office plan to move asylum seekers to RAF base puts £300m regeneration project at risk’, *Sky News*, 13 April. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/conservative-led-council-says-home-office-plan-to-move-asylum-seekers-to-raf-base-puts-300m-regeneration-project-at-risk-12856521>, last accessed: 27 April 2023.
57. Kenyon, M. (2023), ‘District uses local plan to try and stop placement of asylum seekers at RAF Scampton’, *Local Government Chronicle*, 14 April. Available at: <https://www.lgcplus.com/services/housing/district-uses-local-plan-try-and-stop-placement-of-asylum-seekers-at-raf-scampton-14-04-2023/#:~:text=The%20council%20had%20planned%20to,the%20617%20squadron%2C%20the%20Dambusters.>, last accessed: 27 April 2023.
58. BBC News (2023), ‘Heavy police presence at RAF Scampton asylum protests’, 24 April. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-65359578>, last accessed: 27 April 2023.
59. Robinson, J. (2023), ‘Bibby Stockholm: Barge set to house asylum seekers arrives in UK waters’, *Sky News*, 9 May. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/bibby-stockholm-berge-set-to-be-used-to-house-asylum-seekers-arrives-in-uk-waters-12876849>, last accessed: 12 May 2023.
60. Ibid.
61. Culbertson, A. and Brown, F. (2023), ‘Home Office confirms plan to house asylum seekers in giant barge in Dorset’, *Sky News*, 5 April. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/home-office-to-unveil-plan-to-house-asylum-seekers-in-giant-berge-in-dorset-12850342>, last accessed: 12 May 2023.
62. Wilcock, D. (2023), ‘I’d rather be homeless than live on a barge’: Migrants threaten to disappear onto the streets rather than live on a 500-bed ‘flotel’ amid backlash at plan to dock vessel in Dorset - as half of Britons say it’s ‘acceptable’ housing for asylum seekers’, *The Daily Mail*, 6 April. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11945147/Backlash-against-migrant-berge-middle-holiday-hotspot-Dorset.html>, last accessed: 12 May 2023.

migrant children which are part of the 20,000 illegal migrants from Latin America who have been relocated to the city between August and October 2022.⁶³ This influx is largely the result of a political move by Republican governors in southern states such as Texas and Georgia, who have transferred migrants who arrive in the US through the US-Mexico border to so-called Democrat-controlled ‘sanctuary cities’. This led to Mayor Eric Adams declaring a state of emergency as a total of 5,500 school-age Latin American migrants enrolled in the city’s public-school system. As well as concerns over the exhausting of public resources to cope with the influx of school-age migrants, there have been parental worries that in order to accommodate newcomers, there has been a ‘watering-down’ of complex subjects.

While it is difficult to provide an exact financial figure for the impact of the ongoing small-boats crisis on education-related spending (largely because the Department for Education [DfE] does not collect data on the number of asylum seekers enrolled at state-funded schools, as stated in a Freedom of Information response provided by the DfE), it has been calculated that it spends in the region of £7,460 per child a year when it comes to state-funded school provision.⁶⁴ Local authorities (LAs) have a duty to provide full-time education for all children of compulsory school age resident in that LA, as outlined in Section 14 of the Education Act 1996.⁶⁵ Refugee and asylum seeker children aged 5-16 years have the same entitlement to full-time education as other children in the UK. A recent study by the London School of Economics (LSE) suggested that in the region of 15% of asylum seekers arriving in the UK were children.⁶⁶

While it is likely that a portion of those arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel are aged below 5 years of age, the available data and national media report suggest it is an insignificant one in terms of numbers. There are also cases of asylum seekers being over the age of 16 but being enrolled at a state-funded secondary school. This includes Afghan asylum seeker Lawangeen Abdulrahimzai, who entered the UK posing as a fourteen-year-old and was granted permission to stay in December 2019, before murdering aspiring Royal Marine Jordan Roberts during a row in Bournemouth, Dorset on 12th March 2022.⁶⁷ Abdulrahimzai, who has been convicted in Serbia for killing two people and in Italy for drug-dealing offences, has an asylum system rejected by the Norwegian government weeks before arriving in the UK. Having been placed with a female foster carer and awarded a place at a local secondary school, subsequent tests carried out on his teeth ahead of the trial over the killing of Roberts revealed that he was in fact 21 years old. There are parallels to be struck with an episode in Ipswich back in 2018 where an asylum seeker, believed to be from Iran and placed in a Year 11 secondary school class after claiming he was 15 years of age, was then treated as an adult following an age assessment by the local authority.⁶⁸

To provide an approximation of the potential financial impact of the small-boats crisis in terms of education-related spending, if the 15% figure stated in the aforementioned LSE study provides is applied to the

63. Hammer, A. (2022), ‘NYC public schools are buckling under influx of 5,500 illegal migrant children – with one school seeing student numbers ‘rocket by 20%’ - as teachers struggle to cope and parents complain lessons are being dumbed-down’, *The Daily Mail*, 12 October. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11307309/NYC-public-schools-buckling-influx-5-500-illegal-migrant-children.html>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

64. GOV.UK (2023), ‘Financial year 2022-23: School funding statistics’. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-funding-statistics>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

65. Legislation.gov.uk – Education Act 1996. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

66. Pintor, I. (2022), ‘The UK asylum backlog and increased use of immigration detention are negatively impacting children’s welfare’, *LSE British Politics & Policy*, 21 November. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-uk-asylum-backlog-and-increased-use-of-immigration-detention-are-negatively-impacting-childrens-welfare/>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

67. Bolton, W., Evans, M. and Hymas, C. (2023), ‘Murderer posed as child to gain asylum and kill aspiring Royal Marine’, *The Telegraph*, 23 January. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/01/23/afghan-asylum-seeker-murdered-aspiring-royal-marine/>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

68. Sky News (2018), ‘Asylum seeker who claimed to be 15 and joined school is an adult’, 24 November. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/asylum-seeker-who-claimed-to-be-15-and-joined-school-is-an-adult-11561810>, last accessed: 23 April 2023.

45,755 people who arrived in the UK on small boats in 2022, this would provide a figure of 6,863 children. Taking into consideration the fact that a small portion may be below the age of five years, but also the possibility of some overage asylum seekers being enrolled at state-funded schools, the figure of 6,863 is an appropriate figure to use to calculate the cost of asylum-related school places. This figure, multiplied by £7,460 (which is the reported DfE expenditure per child), provides a total of £51,199,845 for one academic year of state-school enrolment.

Figure 8: Estimated costs of state-school provision for small-boats migrants

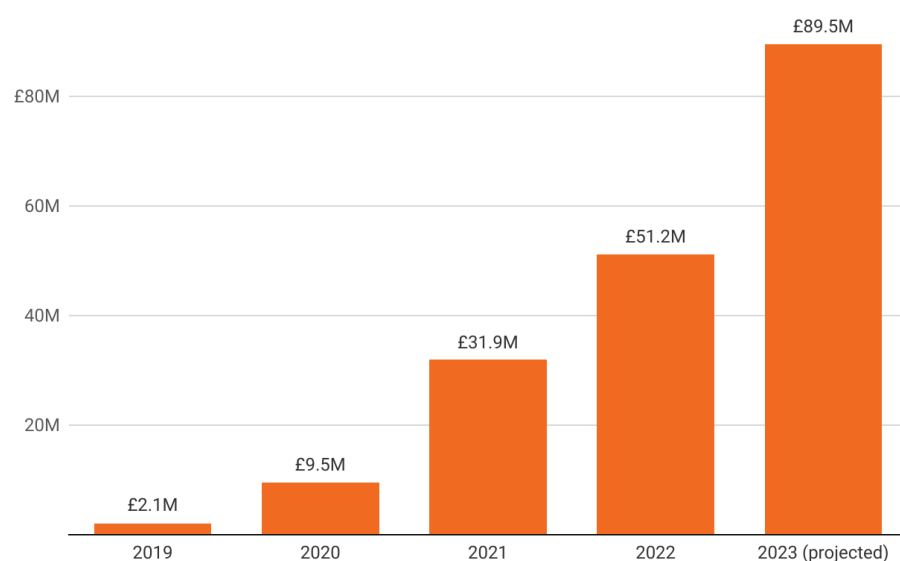


Figure 8 presents an overview of the estimated costs of providing state-funded school places to school-age people who arrived in the UK on small boats. Estimated costs are provided for four separate years: 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. This calculation is based on the 15% figure provided in the LSE study (estimated portion of asylum seekers arriving in the UK which are children), the total number of people arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel for each year, and the reported spend of £7,460 per school child by the Department for Education. In 2019, the estimated cost of the state provision of school places for small-boats migrants was just over £2 million. This rises to over £9.5 million for 2020, above £31.9 million for 2021, with the £50 million mark being breached for the 2022 estimated cost - £51,199,845. The projected estimated cost for 2023 – based on Home Office’s modelling which suggests that the total of small-boats migrants arriving in the UK via the English Channel could be as high as 80,000 and the assumption that 15% would be of school age – is £89.52 million. If the end-of-2022 asylum backlog figure was to be used (166,261) with the 15% school-age proportion being applied, the estimated one-year cost of providing school places would be £186,046,059.

The surge in small-boats migration to the English south coast has, similarly to parts of New York City dealing with the significant relocation

of Latin American migrants who entered the US through the southern border with Mexico, has contributed to severe school-place shortages in certain local authorities. In November 2022, it was reported by The Telegraph that families in Kent had been told there were no school places for 11- and 13-year-olds in Canterbury and Ashford “because of the “unexpected” and “unplanned” arrival of migrant children in the two areas.” In some cases, pupils from established local communities in the two local authorities were bussed as far as 25 miles away from their home to attend school. All of Kent’s local authorities – including Ashford Borough Council and Canterbury City Council – warned the Home Office that services in Kent were at “breaking point” because of the rise in local demand for school places and the cost-of-living crisis being compounded by the small-boats surge on the English south coast. From 30th September 2022 to 31st December 2022, the number of people receiving an official form of asylum-related support in Ashford surged from 3 to 232 people. During this period, some 250 migrants with children were moved into Ashford’s central Holiday Inn by the Home Office without, as local politicians claimed, appropriate consultation.

Along with the migration-induced pressures on school places, there are concerns over the strain on children’s social care services. Back in February 2019, a report by the Local Government Association (LGA) revealed that spending on care and support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) had almost doubled in the four years leading up to publication – from £77 million to £152 million.⁶⁹ Kent County Council stopped accepting UASC in June 2021 due to being “significantly overwhelmed”, declaring that it would not restart this form of acceptance until “sufficient transfers” of UASC in its care were made to other local authorities.⁷⁰ In August 2021, Croydon Borough Council in south London warned of social worker layoffs if the UK government did not address its intake of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).⁷¹ During the summer of 2022, the UK Government sought to help councils relocate UASC from temporary hotel accommodation to longer-term care by offering local authorities £6,000 per child for the first three months after relocation (and £143 a day after the three-month period to support any unaccompanied children).⁷² Under this government scheme, the amount of money that would be provided to a local council for one unaccompanied asylum-seeking child over the course of a full year would be in the region of £45,000. For the year ending June 2022, there were 4,896 asylum applications belonging to UASC.⁷³

3.5: Healthcare Provision

The British Medical Association (BMA) clearly states that refugees and asylum seekers with an active application or appeal are fully entitled to free NHS care (warning doctors that it is not their role to determine who is entitled to treatment).⁷⁴ Asylum support includes free prescriptions to medicine, free dental care, free eyesight tests and assistance with buying glasses.⁷⁵

69. Weale, S. (2019), ‘Cost of care for asylum-seeking children ‘doubles in four years’, *The Guardian*, 21 February. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/21/cost-of-care-for-asylum-seeking-children-doubles-in-four-years>, last accessed: 2 April 2023.
70. Preston, R. (2021), ‘Cost of supporting asylum-seeking children could force ‘unsafe’ agency social worker layoffs, council warns’, *Community Care*, August 18. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/08/18/cost-supporting-asylum-seeking-children-force-unsafe-agency-social-worker-layoffs-council-warns/>, last accessed: 2 April 2023.
71. Ibid.
72. Eichler, W. (2022), ‘Councils offered £6,000 to house asylum-seeking children’, *Local Gov*, 25 August. Available at: <https://www.localgov.co.uk/Councils-offered-6000-to-house-asylum-seeking-children/54739>, last accessed: 2 April 2023.
73. GOV. UK [Home Office] (2022), ‘How many people do we grant asylum or protection to?’, 23 September. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-june-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#:~:text=Children%20\(under%20the%20age%20of,pandemic%20\(3%2C775%20in%202019\).](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-june-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#:~:text=Children%20(under%20the%20age%20of,pandemic%20(3%2C775%20in%202019).), last accessed: 5 April 2023.
74. British Medical Association (2022), ‘Refugees’ and asylum seekers’ entitlement to NHS care’, 13 April. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-entitlement-to-nhs-care>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.
75. GOV.UK: Asylum Support: <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get#:~:text=If%20you've%20been%20refused,for%20food%2C%20clothing%20and%20toiletries>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

Considering most of the people who crossed to the UK on small boats through the English Channel in 2022 were younger, able-bodied men, it would be reasonable to suggest that this group of ‘irregular migrants’ would cost less per head than the wider general population. However, it is worth noting that some asylum seekers may have specific mental health needs, compared to much of the UK’s general population, if they have directly experienced conflict. According to the Mental Health Foundation, “asylum seekers and refugees face unique and complex challenges related to their mental health” and “are often at greater risk of developing mental health problems”.⁷⁶ Contributing factors to poor mental health include “experiencing psychological trauma, continuous uncertainty, barriers to support, and discrimination before, during and after migration”.⁷⁷ Traditionally, asylum seekers and refugees are more likely to experience poor mental health than the local population⁷⁸ – with the Royal College of Psychiatrists reporting that common mental illnesses in displaced adults include PTSD (31%), depression (31%), anxiety disorders (11%), and psychosis (1.5%).⁷⁹ It is also worth noting that compared to the established domestic population, asylum seekers are also more likely to depend on language support when accessing healthcare services. The British Medical Association states that NHS providers have “certain obligations to reduce inequalities between patients accessing services, which may apply to language interpretation needs”.⁸⁰ There is huge demand and pressures on mental health services nationally. A report published by the NHS Confederation and the Centre for Mental Health in December 2022 revealed a 16 per cent increase in people using NHS mental health services in past 12 months, with a 30 per cent rise in use in under-18s.⁸¹

In the context of health and well-being, it is important not to overlook the recent outbreaks of diphtheria among asylum seekers - a highly contagious infection that affects the nose, throat and sometimes cause ulcers on the skin.⁸² Diphtheria is a very rare infection in England due to the success of the routine immunisation programme that was introduced during the Second World War in 1942. In 1940, more than 41,000 cases with 3,283 deaths were notified in the UK.⁸³ Over the past decade, the number of diphtheria cases in England has increased from an average of 2 to 11 cases per year (except for 2020).⁸⁴ In 2021, there were 10 cases of diphtheria in the UK.⁸⁵

Since 1 June 2022, there has been a notable increase in cases of diphtheria (due to toxigenic *C. diphtheriae* reported among asylum seekers in Europe).⁸⁶ As of 26 September 2022, 92 cases of diphtheria among migrants had been reported for the year by seven European countries – the UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Norway, and Switzerland.⁸⁷ Scientists at the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) have recently concluded that the sharp increase in cases of diphtheria in the UK and mainland Europe is primarily associated with incoming migrants.⁸⁸

The first confirmed asylum-related case in the UK for 2022 was identified in February in the South East region, with a further 49 confirmed cases

76. Mental Health Foundation – Refugee and asylum seekers: statistics: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/refugees-asylum-seekers-statistics>
77. Royal College of Psychiatrists – Asylum seeker and refugee mental health: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/international/humanitarian-resources/asylum-seeker-and-refugee-mental-health>
78. Tribe, R. (2002), ‘Mental health of refugees and asylum seekers’, *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 8, 240–247.
79. Royal College of Psychiatrists – Asylum seeker and refugee mental health: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/international/humanitarian-resources/asylum-seeker-and-refugee-mental-health>
80. British Medical Association [BMA] (2022), ‘Managing language barriers for refugees and asylum seekers’, 13 April. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/managing-language-barriers-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>, last accessed: 24 March 2023.
81. NHS Confederation (2022), ‘NHS mental health services are under unsustainable pressure health service leaders warn’, 2 December. Available at: <https://www.nhs-confed.org/news/nhs-mental-health-services-are-under-unsustainable-pressure-health-service-leaders-warn>, last accessed: 25 April 2023.
82. Grammaticas, D. and Snowdon, K. (2022), ‘Diphtheria cases rising among asylum seekers’, *BBC News*, 27 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63771091>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
83. GOV.UK [UK Health Security Agency] (2013), ‘Diphtheria: the green book, chapter 15’, 19 April. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diphtheria-the-green-book-chapter-15>, last accessed: 24 March 2023.
84. GOV.UK [UK Health Security Agency] (2023), ‘Diphtheria: cases among asylum seekers in England, health protection report (data to 25 November 2022)’, 14 March. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diphtheria-cases-among-asylum-seekers-in-england-2022/diphtheria-cases-among-asylum-seekers-in-england-2022#main-points>, last accessed: 24 March 2023.
85. Ibid.
86. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2022), ‘Increase of reported diphtheria cases among migrants in Europe due to *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*, 2022’, 6 October. Available at: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/increase-reported-diphtheria-cases-among-migrants-europe-due-corynebacterium>, last accessed: 24 March 2023.
87. Ibid.
88. Parnaby, L. (2023), ‘Small boats crossings ‘linked to sharp increase in diphtheria cases in the UK’, *The Independent*, 12 April. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/europe-england-afghan-paris-b2318809.html?utm_source=POLITICO_EU&utm_campaign=2cf248a10b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_04_13_05_21&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-2cf248a10b-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D, last accessed: 20 April 2023.

being reported as of 25 November 2022 (including 18 cases in October and 27 cases in November).⁸⁹ As of 23 April 2023, 74 cases of diphtheria have been identified in asylum seekers with recent arrival in the UK, with the majority of these cases having been detected between October to December 2022.⁹⁰ Cases are predominantly young males aged 14 to 25 years, with 54 of the 74 cases – 73% - reported in the South East region.⁹¹

A briefing note published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) in November 2022 concluded that while most asylum seekers with diphtheria are likely to have acquired their infection in their country of origin (including Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and Iraq) or during their journey to the UK across Europe, “the extended lengths of stay at the initial reception centres in recent weeks means that transmission in these settings cannot be ruled out”.⁹² It has been reported that a small-boats migrant died after being held at Manston processing centre in Kent and contracting the disease.⁹³ Health authorities have been working with Home Office to provide vaccinations and antibiotics at the facility to contain the diphtheria outbreak.⁹⁴ While diphtheria represents the greatest public health risk in relation to the small-boats emergency, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has issued a number of infectious disease notifications associated with asylum seeker accommodation across the country over the past two years, including: shigella, group A Streptococcus, MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus), varicella zoster virus, scabies, and tuberculosis.⁹⁵ The current scale of the challenge for larger reception centres in South East England is a cause for concern, with the UKHSA reporting that conditions at such facilities “are not supportive of robust control measures” and that “medical services on site are constrained”.⁹⁶ The November 2022 briefing note states that “individual assessment of all new arrivals on these sites is not possible”.⁹⁷

In 2021, healthcare-related spending in the UK equated to £4,188 per person.⁹⁸ If this estimated weekly spend was applied to the end-of-2022 asylum backlog figure of 166,261 people, this would provide a total one-week cost of £13,390,405. Over the course of a year, this rate of spending would add an estimated healthcare-related cost of **nearly £700 million (£696,301,068)**. If the same calculation is applied for the 45,755 people who crossed to the UK in small boats during 2022, the estimated one-week healthcare-related spend would be £3,685,037. Over the course of one year, this would be an estimated added cost of £191,621,940.

89. GOV.UK [UK Health Security Agency] (2023), 'Diphtheria: cases among asylum seekers in England, health protection report (data to 25 November 2022)', 14 March. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diphtheria-cases-among-asylum-seekers-in-england-2022/diphtheria-cases-among-asylum-seekers-in-england-2022#main-points>, last accessed: 24 March 2023.
90. GOV.UK [UK Health Security Agency] (2023), 'Diphtheria: cases among asylum seekers in England, weekly data tables', 25 April. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diphtheria-cases-among-asylum-seekers-in-england-2022/diphtheria-cases-among-asylum-seekers-in-england-weekly-data-tables>, last accessed: 26 April 2023.
91. Ibid.
92. UK Health Security Agency (2022), 'Recommendations to control cases of diphtheria amongst asylum seekers and refugees in England', 11 November. Available at: <https://www.frimley.icb.nhs.uk/doclink/11-11-22-letter-20221111bn089ukhsarecommendations-to-control-cases-of-diphtheria-amongst-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-in-englandv01-00/eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiOiJCbG9iGciOiJlUzI1NiJ9.eyJzdWwiOiIxMS0xMS0yMi1sZXROZlRlMjAyMjE0MTFibjA4OXVraHhncmVjb21tZW5kYXRpb25zLXRyLWVnbnRyb2wtY2FzZXMTb2YtZGll-waHRoZXJpYS1hbW9uZ3NOLWFZeVWx1bS1zZ-VVYrZXJzLWVlZC1yZWZ1Z2Vlcy1pb1l1bmdsY-VW5kdjAxLTAwliwiaWF0IjoxNjcxNzEwNzZlCjE-HAI0jE2NzE3OTcxOTN9.7E2VndLYjNPXkXII4Y-DIBvdyquUlpQJhsOO11i3w8>, last accessed: 25 April 2023.
93. Giles, P. (2022), 'Manston migrant's death may have been caused by diphtheria - Home Office', *BBC News*, 26 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63766770>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.
94. The Guardian (2022), 'Asylum seekers at Manston site to receive diphtheria jabs after cases rise', 12 November. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/12/manston-asylum-centre-diphtheria-vaccinations-ukhsa-home-office>, last accessed: 15 March 2023.
95. GOV.UK [UK Health Security Agency] (2022), 'Infectious diseases in asylum seekers: actions for health professionals', 16 December. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/infectious-diseases-in-asylum-seekers-actions-for-health-professionals>, last accessed: 25 April 2023.
96. UK Health Security Agency (2022), 'Recommendations to control cases of diphtheria amongst asylum seekers and refugees in England', 11 November. Available at: <https://www.frimley.icb.nhs.uk/doclink/11-11-22-letter-20221111bn089ukhsarecommendations-to-control-cases-of-diphtheria-amongst-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-in-englandv01-00/eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiOiJCbG9iGciOiJlUzI1NiJ9.eyJzdWwiOiIxMS0xMS0yMi1sZXROZlRlMjAyMjE0MTFibjA4OXVraHhncmVjb21tZW5kYXRpb25zLXRyLWVnbnRyb2wtY2FzZXMTb2YtZGll-waHRoZXJpYS1hbW9uZ3NOLWFZeVWx1bS1zZ-VVYrZXJzLWVlZC1yZWZ1Z2Vlcy1pb1l1bmdsY-VW5kdjAxLTAwliwiaWF0IjoxNjcxNzEwNzZlCjE-HAI0jE2NzE3OTcxOTN9.7E2VndLYjNPXkXII4Y-DIBvdyquUlpQJhsOO11i3w8>, last accessed: 25 April 2023.
97. Ibid.
98. Office for National Statistics (2023), 'Healthcare expenditure, UK Health Accounts: 2021', 17 May. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthcaresystem/bulletins/ukhealthaccounts/2021#:text=Healthcare%20expenditure%20in%202021.non%2Dgovernment%20spending%20on%20healthcare>, last accessed: 24 May 2023.

Figure 9: Estimated costs of healthcare-related provision for small-boats migrants

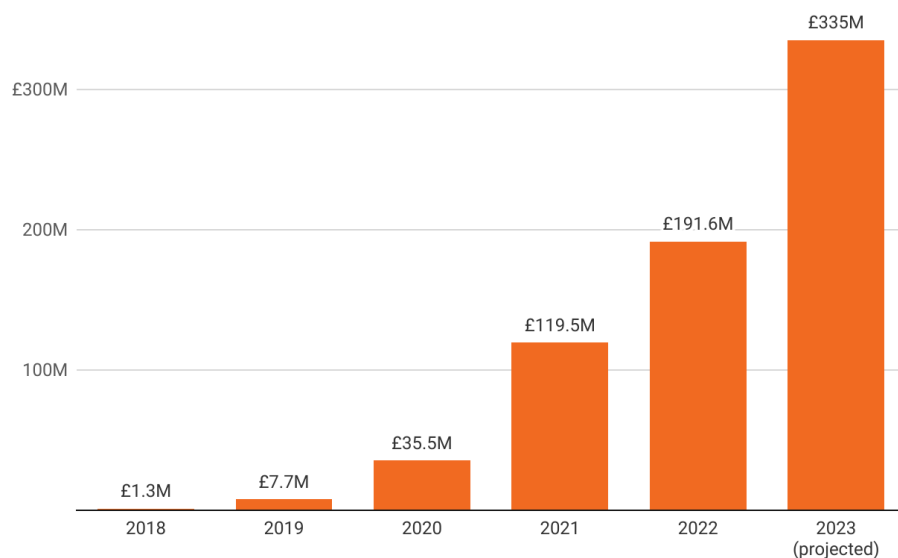


Figure 9 presents an overview of estimated year-on-year costs of healthcare-related provision, based on the number of people that arrived in the UK by crossing the English Channel on small boats and the healthcare spending per head figure of £4,188 for 2021 (as reported by the Office for National Statistics). Five years are included in the analysis: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 (projected estimated cost).

The estimated healthcare-related cost for 2018 is £1.25 million. This increases to £7.7 million for 2019, rising further to £35.5 million for 2020. The estimated cost for 2021 jumps to nearly £120 million - £119.5 million. For 2022, based on the number of small-boats migrants that arrived in the UK that year, the estimated healthcare-related costs is £191.6 million. The projected estimated healthcare-related cost for 2023 - based on the Home Office's modelling which says that up to 80,000 people may arrive in the UK on small boats via the English Channel by the end of this year – is **over £335 million**.

3.6: Crime and Extremism

The relationship between asylum background and criminal activity is one that should be considered with care and caution. This is a highly sensitive issue which is often opportunistically politicised. It is a polarising debate where fringe participants either amplify select cases of criminal activity among asylum seekers or dismiss perfectly legitimate concerns over security by laying the charge of discrimination. The relationship between asylum background and criminal activity is complex and is deserving of considered attention.

A review published by the Migration Observatory focused on the relationship between immigration and crime in both the UK and abroad.⁹⁹ It referred to a study published by the *Review of Economics and Statistics* which found that the share of asylum seekers in the local population is related to a 1.1% rise in property crime but no change in violent crime.¹⁰⁰ Estimates

99. Migration Observatory (2013), 'Immigration and Crime: Evidence for the UK and Other Countries', 13 November. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-and-crime-evidence-for-the-uk-and-other-countries/>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

100. Bell, B., Fasani, F and S. Machin (2013), "Crime and Immigration: Evidence from Large Immigrant Waves", *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 95(4): 1278-1290. Available at: https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/59323/1/CEP_Bell_Fasani_Machin_Crime-and-immigration_2013.pdf, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

suggested that a one percentage point increase in the asylum seeker share of the local population is associated with a 1.1% rise in property crime. It was suggested that the estimated effects for asylum seekers may have been the result of differences in labour market opportunities (which asylum seekers not being allowed to obtain employment in the UK during the period that their claim is being assessed and processed). Given the lengthy process involved in deciding asylum applications – which remains the case with the backlog being over 166,000 at the end of the 2022 – this economic restriction is likely to increase the relative returns to crime (compared to other groups that have access to labour market participation). Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that the UK's currently dysfunctional asylum system – burdened with a mass backlog of applications – risks heightening the susceptibility of economically-restricted and socially-disconnected asylum seekers being drawn into forms of criminality.

While the relationship between refugee- and asylum-related crime is an underdeveloped area of research both domestically and internationally, it has been reported that analysis of a pool of foreign-national offenders convicted of Islamist terror-related offences since 1998 – in the region of 100 individuals – found that around a quarter either claimed or were granted asylum in the UK.¹⁰¹ A recent case was Libyan asylum seeker Khairi Saadallah, who on 11th January 2021 was handed a whole-life prison sentence for the June 2020 terrorist attack in Reading, in which three parkgoers were stabbed to death at Forbury Gardens.¹⁰² There are also ongoing concerns over the British-Libyan 'jihadi nexus' which has taken root in Manchester, which stems from anti-Gaddafi Islamists who were provided refuge in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰³ This includes members of the formerly proscribed Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). It is from this Libyan-heritage Islamist milieu in inner-city parts of Manchester that Salman Abedi – the Islamist terrorist behind the May 2017 Ariana Grande concert suicide bombing – hailed from.

The recently-published independent review into the UK Government's Prevent programme, which aims to safeguard people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, raised concerns over the radicalisation risk among those who originate from conflict-ridden territories – especially those characterised by high levels of extremist activity. Arguing that there is a strong case for introducing the Prevent Duty in the sphere of immigration and asylum policy, author William Shawcross concluded that there is “good reason to think that those who have travelled from conflict zones, or from parts of the world where extremist ideologies have a strong presence, are more likely to be susceptible to radicalisation”.¹⁰⁴

There have been multiple cases of asylum seekers from conflict-affected countries in the Middle East committing acts of terrorism in the UK in recent times. One is Parsons Green tube bomber Ahmed Hassan, a teenage Iraqi asylum seeker whose homemade explosive injured 51 people on a London Underground train in September 2017.¹⁰⁵ Around the device, Hassan – who reportedly blamed Britain for the death of his father during an air raid on Baghdad – had packed 2.2kg of shrapnel, including five

101. Goodhart, D. (2022), 'Compassionate but Controlled: Reframing Britain's Post-Brexit Immigration Debate', *Policy Exchange*, 22 November. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Human-but-Controlled.pdf>, last accessed: 24 April 2023.

102. Crown Prosecution Service (2021), 'Reading Park killer given whole life sentence', 11 January. Available at: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/reading-park-killer-given-whole-life-sentence>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

103. Benedek, E. and Simon, N. (2020), 'The 2017 Manchester Bombing and the British-Libyan Jihadi Nexus', *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, May. Available at: <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CTC-SENTINEL-052020.pdf>, last accessed: 23 April 2023.

104. Shawcross, W. (2023), 'Independent Review of Prevent', *UK Government*, February. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, last accessed: 23 April 2023.

105. BBC News (2018), 'Parsons Green attack: Iraqi teenager convicted over Tube bomb', 16 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43431303>, last accessed: 23 April 2023.

kitchen knives, two screwdrivers, nails and screws.¹⁰⁶ Recommendation 8 of the Shawcross independent review proposes exploring the possibility of extending the Prevent Duty to immigration and asylum via the UK Border Force and Immigration and Protection Directorate.¹⁰⁷ This recommendation has been accepted by the Home Office, with its response to the Shawcross review stating that it will “work closely with partners, including those in the Border Force, Immigration and Asylum...to explore how Prevent can be embedded operationally in these sectors”.¹⁰⁸

While it is imperative to acknowledge that this does not apply to most newcomers, failures of the asylum system and weak integration outcomes among refugees presents its risks from a security perspective. This is especially the case when one considers the volume of unauthorised and undocumented migration into the UK from war-torn regions which are hotbeds of Islamist terror-related activity. Select cases of asylum seekers and refugees committing acts of crime and terrorism, however small, have the potential to undermine public trust in the UK’s asylum system – underscoring the need for a well-functioning regime which is defined by ‘compassionate control’. This also highlights the importance of robust and well-crafted integration strategies being in place for asylum seekers who are granted refugee status.

In terms of costs, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the ongoing small-boats emergency is placing additional burdens on the police and the wider criminal justice system when it comes to dealing with individuals who originate from parts of the world which have a relatively low level of English language proficiency. This is as victims and witnesses as well as suspects of crime. In the event of language barriers, interpreters will be required for police interviews, the provision of witness statements, and court hearings. This reliance on translators means greater time and resources need to be devoted by both the police and the judicial system. This adds to existing issues with low levels of English language proficiency in relatively-settled migrant communities. The 2021 England and Wales Census showed 1,040,000 adults reported not speaking English well or at all – with the highest numbers of residents being in London, North West England, and the West Midlands.¹⁰⁹ These are regions where asylum seekers are disproportionately relocated, especially in relatively-deprived local authorities such as Southwark, Bolton, and Stoke-on-Trent.¹¹⁰

3.7: Impact on the International Development Budget

An oft-overlooked impact of large-scale irregular migration – specifically the small-boats emergency – is how it is draining the UK’s post-Brexit international development budget. The UK Government’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has described the International Development Strategy published in May 2022 as “a central part of a coherent UK foreign policy”.¹¹¹ Key pillars of the UK’s international development strategy includes tackling poverty in less developed nations, providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to those affected by conflicts such as the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war and supporting countries on

106. Cobain, I. (2018), ‘Parsons Green tube bomber Ahmed Hassan jailed for life’, *The Guardian*, 23 March. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/23/parsons-green-tube-bomber-ahmed-hassan-jailed-for-life>, last accessed: 23 April 2023.

107. Shawcross, W. (2023), ‘Independent Review of Prevent’, *UK Government*, February. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, last accessed: 23 April 2023.

108. Home Office (2023), ‘Independent report: The response to the Independent Review of Prevent (accessible)’, 8 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-prevents-report-and-government-response/the-response-to-the-independent-review-of-prevent-accessible>, last accessed: 25 April 2023.

109. Learning and Work Institute (2022), ‘Response to Census 2021 data on English language proficiency’, 29 November. Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/response-to-census-2021-data-on-english-language-proficiency/>, last accessed 26 April 2023.

110. GOV.UK [Home Office] (2023), ‘Asylum and resettlement datasets’, 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#local-authority-data>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

111. UK Government (FCDO) (2022), ‘The UK Government’s Strategy for

their quest to becoming more secure and resilient societies. There is also a strong emphasis on disease control and prevention – especially tuberculosis and malaria. International development funding can also be provided to help bolster the counter-terrorism and counter-extremism apparatuses of strategically important partners.

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact has estimated that for 2022, the core UK expenditure on in-donor refugee costs was around £3.5 billion - approximately one third of the UK’s total aid budget for the year.¹¹² Along with the rehoming of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, the ICAI report clearly states that the “increasing numbers of asylum seekers crossing the Channel” and the “growing backlog in asylum claims processing” has contributed to the growth in UK aid spent on in-donor refugee costs.¹¹³ This is international development funding that could be devoted towards educational initiatives, entrepreneurship schemes, disease-prevention programmes and environmental-sustainability projects in developing member countries of the Commonwealth of Nations. The ICAI report concludes that an “important consequence” of the reallocation of such funds for ‘in-donor refugee costs’ is that “the UK’s ability to respond to global crises and humanitarian emergencies has been sharply curtailed”.¹¹⁴

3.8: Overall costs of the small-boats emergency

Referring to the various estimated costs covered in this section of the report, an overarching estimated cost – based on the end-of-2022 asylum backlog of 166,261 – can be provided. This overall estimated one-year cost of the small-boats emergency and associated asylum backlog includes six components: 1) asylum-related hotel accommodation; 2) the standard allowance for asylum seekers; 3) healthcare provision; 4) provision of school places; 5) the sustenance of the Small Boats Operational Command; and 6) the sustenance of the technical specialist unit devoted to handling asylum applications submitted by Albanian nationals.

Table 6: Six-part overall estimated one-year cost of the small-boats emergency (based on the asylum backlog figure for the end of 2022)

Cost type	One-year estimated cost (£)
Asylum-related hotel accommodation	2,200,000,000.00
Standard asylum allowance	389,050,740.00
Healthcare provision	696,301,068.00
Provision of school places	186,046,059.00
Small Boats Operational Command	23,663,363.50
Technical Unit for Albanian Asylum Claims	13,709,850.00
TOTAL	3,508,771,080.50

112. Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2023), ‘UK aid to refugees in the UK: A rapid review’, March. Available at: https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/UK-aid-to-Refugees-in-the-UK_ICAI-review.pdf, last accessed: 18 May 2023.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid.

Table 6 presents an overview of the various estimated one-year costs across the six categories (based on the end-of-2022 asylum backlog figure of 161,261). This analysis provides an overall estimated one-year cost of the small-boats emergency and the associated asylum backlog which is in **the region of £3.5 billion - £3,508,771,080.50.**

This overall estimated one-year cost falls in line with the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's estimation of the core UK expenditure on 'in-donor refugee costs' from its international development budget. This ICAI estimation is also in the region of £3.5 billion (one third of the UK's total aid budget).¹¹⁵

115.Ibid.

4. Dispersal of Asylum Seekers – The National Context

The policy of dispersal of those seeking asylum accommodation in the UK was introduced by the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act under the Labour government led by former PM Tony Blair. Under Section 95 of the Act, asylum seekers can apply for support while waiting for their claim (or appeal) to be considered. Support can be in the form of accommodation and/or subsistence, according to the asylum seeker's circumstances and on condition that they satisfy a 'destitution test'.¹¹⁶ The legislative intention was that the dispersal of asylum seekers across the UK would mean that no one area would be left overburdened by the responsibilities that come with supporting asylum seekers.¹¹⁷ This redistribution of asylum seekers receiving state support was sought to avoid their concentration in London and south-east England (where most claims were being made). As part of the regional dispersal policy established in 2000, an advisory cluster limit was set by the Home Office at one asylum seeker for every 200 members of the "settled population".¹¹⁸

The Home Office has a statutory duty to "provide accommodation for asylum seekers who do not have the means to obtain it themselves and/or do not meet their essential living needs".¹¹⁹ Asylum-related accommodation (both initial and dispersed) is provided by the Home Office via contracts with private companies such as Serco, Mears Group, and Clearsprings Ready Homes. Traditionally, local authorities have the freedom to choose whether they wish to house asylum seekers in their areas. Despite the efforts of central government to encourage more local authorities to participate in asylum-seeker relocation schemes, at the end of September 2016, just 121 out of 453 – 26.7% - were providing Section 95 asylum-related accommodation within their boundaries.¹²⁰ In April 2022, the Home Office published a factsheet which stated that fewer than half of local authorities (47%) participated in the asylum dispersal system.¹²¹ The previously-stated limit of one asylum seeker per 200 established residents in a local authority has been breached in multiple cases such as Glasgow City.¹²² This arrangement does not only suffer from a low opt-in rate among local authorities, but has also been left exposed to the charge that relatively-deprived local authorities with lower housing costs disproportionately bear the brunt of rehoming processes (meaning more affluent local authorities with higher housing costs tend to rehome a slender number of asylum seekers in the UK).

Back in April 2017, it was revealed that more than five times as many

116. Politowski, B. and McGuinness, T. (2016), 'Policy on the dispersal of asylum seekers', *House of Commons Library*, 29 April. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2016-0095/>, last accessed: 1 May 2023.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Rankl, F. (2023), 'Is planning permission required to house asylum seekers in hotels?', *House of Commons Library*, 17 February. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/is-planning-permission-required-to-house-asylum-seekers-in-hotels/#:~:text=Typically%2C%20some-one%20seeking%20asylum%20in,as%20'dispersal%20accommodation'>, last accessed: 2 May 2023.

120. House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2017), 'Asylum accommodation: Twelfth Report of Session 2016-17', 31 January. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmbaff/637/637.pdf>, last accessed: 1 May 2023.

121. Home Office (2022), 'A Fairer Asylum Accommodation System', 14 April. Available at: https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/Migration/Asylum_Dispersal_Factsheet_PDF, last accessed: 2 May 2023.

122. Hirst, C. and Atto, N. (2018), 'THE UK'S AILING ASYLUM SEEKER DISPERSAL POLICY: WHERE TO FROM HERE?', *Respond Migration*, 19 September. Available at: <https://respondmigration.com/blog-1/2018/10/24/the-uks-ailing-asylum-seeker-dispersal-policy-where-to-from-here>, last accessed: 2 May 2023.

destitute asylum seekers live in the poorest third of the country as in the richest third. According to the Guardian’s analysis of Home Office data at the time, a comfortable majority of all asylum seekers – 57% – housed by the government were placed in the poorest third of the country.¹²³ At the time, ten local authorities were responsible for supporting more than one third of all asylum seekers in the UK (35.5%). Six of these local authorities – Manchester, Bolton, Rochdale, Nottingham, Leicester, and Swansea – had a median annual income that positioned them in the poorest quarter of the country. The report also stated that at the end of 2016, there were 39,389 asylum seekers in the UK receiving some form of government support – with there being considerable regional disparities. While north-west England had accommodated 9,491 asylum seekers, the corresponding figure for south-east England was sixteen times lower at 580 - despite the south-east of England being notably more affluent and having a larger population than the north-west England region by 1.7 million people. Over two in three local authorities – 69% - were housing fewer than 10 asylum seekers. There were 174 local authorities – or 45% of the total – that were not accommodating any asylum seekers.

A more recent analysis published in August 2021 by The Guardian found that almost one in four of the UK’s 44,825 asylum seekers supported by the Home Office was housed in just ten local authorities – the majority of which were among the most deprived in the country.¹²⁴ Along with cities such as Glasgow, Cardiff, and Stoke-on-Trent, it included northern English towns such as Rochdale, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, and Gateshead. According to an even more recent analysis by The Telegraph, so-called ‘Red Wall’ areas have, on average, 15.2 asylum seekers per 10,000 of the population compared with 2.1 per 10,000 people in the South East of England.¹²⁵ In this analysis, just thirty local councils - fewer than 8% of the total - account for the rehoming of 56% of asylum seekers. While the highest rates of asylum-seeker relocation are well outside of southern England, the escalation of the small-boats crisis in recent times is likely to have a disproportionate social and economic impact on local communities on the English south coast which suffer from traditional forms of coastal deprivation.

4.1: The Knowsley Disorder

Knowsley is a microcosm of the UK’s failed asylum-seeker dispersal system, under which relatively-deprived local authorities disproportionately bear the brunt of the rehoming process – which can be an exceptionally costly ordeal for left-behind and socio-economically disadvantaged parts of the country with limited public resources. The Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley is in Merseyside, North West England – covering several towns and villages such as Kirkby, Prescott, Huyton, Whiston, Halewood, Cronton, Stockbridge Village, and the village of the same name. It forms part of the wider Liverpool City Region. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council has been controlled by Labour since the council’s creation in 1973, with 32 out of 45 current councillors belonging to the Party. Sir

123. Lyons, K. and Duncan, P. (2017), ‘It’s a shambles’: data shows most asylum seekers put in poorest parts of Britain’, *The Guardian*, 9 April. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/its-a-shambles-data-shows-most-asylum-seekers-put-in-poorest-parts-of-britain#:~:text=Six%20of%20these%20E2%80%93%20Manchester%2C%20Bolton,poorest%2025%25%20of%20the%20country>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

124. Halliday, J., McIntyre, N., Pidd, H. and Taylor, D. (2021), ‘North of England leaders urge fair distribution of Afghan refugees’, *The Guardian*, 19 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/aug/19/north-england-leaders-urge-fair-distribution-afghan-refugees#:~:text=A%20Guardian%20analysis%20has%20found,most%20deprived%20in%20the%20UK>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

125. Hymas, C. and Butcher, B. (2023), ‘Red Wall areas housing seven times as many asylum seekers as the South East’, *The Telegraph*, 14 February. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/02/14/red-wall-areas-housing-seven-times-many-asylum-seekers-south/>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.

George Howarth, the current Labour MP for Knowsley, won 80.8% of the constituency vote in the 2019 UK general election – a majority of 39,942 votes. The Conservatives have no councillors on Knowsley Council and won 8.1% of the vote in the local constituency in the last general election.

Knowsley is the home of the four-star Suites Hotel, which was accommodating asylum seekers when, on 10th February 2023, it was the location of violent clashes which resulted in fifteen arrests. With an age range from 13 to 54 years, the fifteen individuals arrested included thirteen males and two women.¹²⁶ The public disorder included injuries being sustained by police officers and the burning of a police van. It has been reported that in the build-up to the clashes, there was an inflammation of community tensions after the circulation of footage on local social media pages of a 15-year-old local schoolgirl being approached by a 25-year-old man who was allegedly being accommodated at the Suites Hotel.¹²⁷ This has been cited as a trigger for the disorder by local MP Sir George Howarth.¹²⁸

Following the clashes, Merseyside Police confirmed they had been investigating reports that “a man had made inappropriate advances toward a teenage girl” in the town of Kirkby. The government has been rehoming asylum seekers in Knowsley since 2016, with the local council stating that the latest tranche of asylum seekers was relocated by the Home Office to the Suites Hotel to after providing it less than 48 hours’ notice.¹²⁹ In October 2022, the Home Affairs Committee was told that the UK was spending in the region of £7 million a day on hotels for asylum seekers – which was £2 million higher than the daily government spend in February 2022.¹³⁰ To put this in perspective, the average amount spent on the rehoming of asylum seekers in half a week, exceeds the £15.3 million ‘award’ given to Knowsley Council in Round 2 of the UK Government’s Levelling Up Fund.¹³¹

Knowsley is one of the most deprived local authorities in England – recording the lowest average ‘Attainment 8’ score (across eight GCSE-level qualifications) out of all English local authorities for the 2020/21 academic year.¹³² Registering an average score of 37.8 out of 90, Knowsley is significantly below the England average of 50.9 and nearly 25 points below the highest-ranked local authority (Sutton in south London – 62.0). According to data published in June last year, it has the highest percentage of state-funded secondary pupils who are eligible for free school meals in the whole of England – nearly half, at 46.4%.¹³³ The recent lack of A-level provision on offer in the Merseyside borough meant that many of its students had to travel outside of it to continue their studies – making trips to St Helen’s College or sixth forms in Liverpool to do their exams.¹³⁴ The 2021 England and Wales Census revealed that Knowsley had the country’s highest proportion of residents who were identified as being ‘disabled and limited a lot’.¹³⁵ It is also in the top five local authorities for the percentage of people aged five years and over who provided a form of unpaid care – 11.5 %, which is marginally behind the highest local authority (neighbouring St Helens at 11.7 %).¹³⁶

126. BBC News (2023), 'Knowsley: Fifteen arrests over clash outside asylum seeker hotel', 11 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-64611823>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
127. Louise, C., Charters, C., Oliver, C. and Haigh, E. (2023), 'Revealed - Video that sparked migrant hotel riot: Clip of schoolgirl, 15, being 'hassled for her phone number by man, 25', is behind night of violence after it was shared on social media by activists', *The Daily Mail*, 11 February. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11739567/Riot-sparked-local-fury-schoolgirl-posted-video-saying-sexually-harassed.html>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
128. BBC News (2023), 'Knowsley: Fifteen arrests over clash outside asylum seeker hotel', 11 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-64611823>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
129. Ng, E. (2023), 'Home Office gave council 48 hours' notice asylum seekers would be moved to hotel', *The Independent*, 11 February. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-office-merseyside-serco-police-government-b2280305.html>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
130. Burns, J. (2022), 'Asylum seekers: UK spending almost £7m a day on hotels', *BBC News*, 26 October. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63404485>, last visited: 1 February 2023.
131. Knowsley News (2023), 'Knowsley secures £15.3m Levelling Up Fund for Halewood', 19 January. Available at: <https://www.knowsleynews.co.uk/knowsley-secures-15-3m-levelling-up-fund-for-halewood/>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
132. GOV. UK (2022), 'GCSE results (Attainment 8)', 18 March. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/gcse-results-attainment-8-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest#by-ethnicity-and-local-authority>, last accessed: 12 March 2023.
133. Local Government Association (2022), 'Percentage of secondary school pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (from 2016/17 (academic) to 2021/22 (academic)) for All English single tier and county councils', 17 June. Available at: <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lga-standard?mod-metric=2174&mod-area=E06000031&mod-group=AllSingleTierAndCountyLainCountryEngland&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
134. BBC News (2022), 'Knowsley must do better than lack of A-levels on offer, council chief says', 16 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-60768037>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
135. Grimond, W. (2023), 'Census 2021: nearly a quarter of people living with disabilities in Knowsley', *Liverpool World*, 24 January. Available at: <https://www.liverpoolworld.uk/your-merseyside/knowsley/census-2021-nearly-a-quarter-of-people-living-with-disabilities-in-knowsley-3999345>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
136. Office for National Statistics (2023), 'Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021', 19 January. Available at: [https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-populationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/unpaidcareenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=A%20larger%20proportion%20of%20people%20in%20Knowsley%20\(2.9%25\)%20and,city%20of%20London%20\(1.0%25\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-populationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/unpaidcareenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=A%20larger%20proportion%20of%20people%20in%20Knowsley%20(2.9%25)%20and,city%20of%20London%20(1.0%25)), last accessed: 12 March 2023.

As of 31 December 2022, Knowsley local authority was providing asylum support in the form of dispersed accommodation to a total of 238 individuals.¹³⁷ To put this in perspective, the combined number of asylum seekers receiving support in the form of dispersed accommodation across Chelmsford, St Albans, Watford, Kingston-upon-Thames, Richmond-upon-Thames, Sutton, Eastbourne, Mole Valley, and Vale of White Horse – all Liberal-Democrat-controlled local authorities – was one hundred less (138 individuals).¹³⁸ While it has been argued that more rural, affluent, and ethnically-homogeneous local authorities lack the cultural and linguistic infrastructure, there are relatively-diverse, Conservative-controlled local authorities in London which support a lower number of asylum seekers than Knowsley in the shape of dispersed accommodation. This includes Harrow and Kensington & Chelsea, who provided this form of asylum support to 195 and 59 individuals respectively (as of 31 December 2022).¹³⁹

4.2: Tale of Two Scottish Cities – Glasgow and Edinburgh

While asylum policy is a matter reserved to the UK Government and handled by the Home Office, the Scottish government is responsible for devolved matters such as access to essential services like healthcare and education which enable the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in local communities. The distribution of asylum support in Scotland provides further evidence that the UK's internal dispersal system places a disproportionate level of pressure on relatively-deprived communities which suffer from multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage.

Glasgow routinely ranks as the highest local authority in the UK when it comes to the number of asylum seekers supported through dispersed accommodation as a proportion of the overall population. Glasgow remains the most deprived city and local authority area in Scotland. Glasgow City Council has been under no overall control since 2017, being led by a Scottish National Party (SNP) minority administration. All seven of Glasgow's Westminster constituencies elected a SNP MP to the House of Commons in the last UK general election.

According to the 'Understanding Glasgow' project, based on the 2020 Scottish Index of Scottish Deprivation (SIMD), 44% of the city's residents – (over 281,000 people) – reside in the most deprived 20% of areas of Scotland.¹⁴⁰ While 185,099 Glaswegians lived in the most deprived 10% of areas in Scotland, only 37,127 residents in the city lived in the least deprived 10% of areas in Scotland.¹⁴¹ According to the same data source, Glasgow has a significantly more income-deprived population than the other large Scottish cities. In Glasgow, nearly a fifth of the population (19.3%) are living in income deprivation compared to 16.4% in Dundee, **8.7% in Edinburgh** and 8.6% in Aberdeen.¹⁴² The Scottish average, based on 2020 SIMD data, stood at 12.1%.¹⁴³ Based on 2017-19 data, Glasgow City has the lowest healthy life expectancy (HLE) in Scotland with men

137. GOV.UK [Home Office] (2023), 'Asylum and resettlement datasets', 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#local-authority-data>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.

140. Understanding Glasgow: The Glasgow Indicators Project – 'Deprivation': <https://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/poverty/deprivation>

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

143. Understanding Glasgow: The Glasgow Indicators Project – 'Income Deprivation': <https://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/poverty/comparisons/with-other-places/income-deprivation>

144. National Records of Scotland (2022), 'Glasgow City Council Area Profile – Life Expectancy', 24 November. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/glasgow-city-council-profile.html#life_expectancy, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
145. National Records of Scotland (2022), 'City of Edinburgh Council Area Profile – Life Expectancy', 24 November. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/city-of-edinburgh-council-profile.html#life_expectancy, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
146. McLaughlin, M. (2021), 'These are the most prosperous council areas in Scotland', *The Scotsman*, 12 May. Available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/these-are-the-most-prosperous-council-areas-in-scotland-3234314>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
147. National Records of Scotland (2022), 'Drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2021', 28 July. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/drug-related-deaths/21/drug-related-deaths-21-report.pdf>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
148. National Records of Scotland (2022), 'Glasgow City Council Area Profile – Population Estimates', 24 November. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/glasgow-city-council-profile.html>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
149. National Records of Scotland (2022), 'City of Edinburgh Council Area Profile – Population Estimates', 24 November. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/city-of-edinburgh-council-profile.html>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
150. GOV.UK [Home Office] (2023), 'Asylum and resettlement datasets', 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#local-authority-data>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
151. Ibid.
152. BBC News (2020), 'Scotland's most and least deprived areas named', 28 January. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-51279966>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
153. Welsh Government (2019), 'Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan', January 2019. Available at: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/nation-of-sanctuary-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-plan_0.pdf, last accessed: 13 March 2023.
154. Welsh Local Government Association – 'Wales Strategic Migration Partnership': <https://www.wlga.wales/wales-strategic-migration-partnership>

estimated to live for 54.6 years in good health and women for 57.6 years (2017-19). For 2019-21, in Glasgow City, life expectancy at birth was lower than the overall Scotland level (for both males and females).¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, in City of Edinburgh, life expectancy at birth was higher than the overall Scotland level (for both females and males).¹⁴⁵ Glasgow City was ranked as Scotland's worst-performing council area by Legatum Institute's "Prosperity Index", which is described as a "comprehensive assessment of institutional, economic and social wellbeing".¹⁴⁶ The Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, which incorporates the City of Glasgow council area and is headquartered in the city, has the highest drug-related death rate out of all Scottish NHS Boards for 2017-21 (33.7 per 100,000 people).¹⁴⁷

According to the National Records of Scotland, as of 30th June 2021, the population of the Glasgow City Council area was 635,130,¹⁴⁸ with the corresponding figure for the City of Edinburgh Council area being 526,470.¹⁴⁹ As of the same day, a total of 4,244 asylum seekers were receiving support from Glasgow City council in the form of dispersed accommodation – the corresponding figure for City of Edinburgh council was five individuals.¹⁵⁰ This means, specifically for 30th June 2021, the number of asylum seekers who were receiving support in the form of dispersed accommodation as a proportion of the total Glasgow City council area population was 668.2 per 100,000 people. The corresponding figure for City of Edinburgh was 0.9 per 100,000 people.

As of 31 December 2022, 99.13% of asylum seekers in Scotland receiving support in the form of dispersed accommodation were supported by one local authority - Glasgow City Council (4,456 individuals). The corresponding percentage for City of Edinburgh was 0.16% - seven people.¹⁵¹ Set against the entrenched deprivation of Glasgow, four of Scotland's ten least-deprived areas in Scotland (according to the 2020 SIMD data) were in Edinburgh.¹⁵² This included Scotland's least-deprived area – Stockbridge, an Edinburgh suburb which is north of the city centre and closely situated to the Royal Botanical Garden.

4.3: The Welsh Experience – Cardiff and Swansea

The Welsh Government has stated that it would like Wales to establish itself as a "Nation of Sanctuary." In January 2019, it published the document "Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan", which states that "the successful integration of refugees and asylum seekers will require concerted effort on the part of the Welsh Government, Welsh public services and Welsh communities".¹⁵³ The document does importantly acknowledge that the promotion of a "person-centred approach" over "one-size-fits-all" measures to facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP), which is funded by the UK Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), works with partners in the statutory, voluntary, private and community sectors to provide strategic leadership, advisory and coordination function on matters of immigration and asylum.¹⁵⁴

Unlike Scotland, the distribution of asylum seekers within Wales who are being supported in the form of dispersed accommodation is not ultra-concentrated in one local authority. As of 31 December 2022, a total of 2,681 people were receiving asylum support in Wales in the form of dispersed accommodation.¹⁵⁵ Just over half were receiving this support from Cardiff Council – 1,359 individuals (50.69%). However, a notable number of asylum seekers were also supported in the shape of dispersed accommodation by Swansea Council (742; 27.68%), Newport City Council (16.11%), and Wrexham Council (135; 5.04%). Therefore, in terms of local-authority distribution, asylum seekers are far greater dispersed within Wales when compared to Scotland.

However, in the UK-wide context, it is worth noting that the combined number of people receiving asylum support in the form of dispersed accommodation from Cardiff and Swansea councils (2,101) comfortably exceeds the number receiving the same form of asylum support in the entirety of South East England (1,735).¹⁵⁶ According to the 2021 Census, the combined population of Cardiff and Swansea was 600,800. The total population for the South East England region in the 2021 Census was 9,278,100. It may be argued that South East England is a relatively non-diverse region and lacks the social infrastructure and culturally-sensitive services which can support the rehoming of asylum seekers. However, there is data which suggests this is a somewhat questionable claim. The combined Census 2021 population of five relatively heterogeneous local authorities in South East England – Milton Keynes, Southampton, Slough, Oxford, and Reading – was 1,030,800. As of 31 December 2022, across the five local authorities, the total number of people receiving asylum support in the form of dispersed accommodation was 538.¹⁵⁷

4.4: Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland, compared to the other home nations, is relatively inexperienced when it comes to rehoming refugees and asylum seekers from non-European countries with Muslim-majority populations. As of 31 December 2022, a total of 1,853 people were receiving asylum support in Northern Ireland in the form of dispersed accommodation. This is more than double the number which was registered exactly two years prior on 31 December 2020 – 921 people.¹⁵⁸ Notable countries of origin among asylum seekers being supported in Northern Ireland include Iran, Somalia, South Sudan, and Libya.¹⁵⁹ As it stands, Northern Ireland does not have an established refugee integration strategy in place, with the Executive Office’s Racial Equality Strategy stating that “there is a strong case for a separate Refugee Integration Strategy, to ensure a smooth transition between being an asylum seeker and a refugee”.¹⁶⁰

Like Scotland but not as severe, asylum support in Northern Ireland in the form of dispersed accommodation is heavily concentrated in one council area – Belfast. As of 31 December 2022, 1,594 of the 1,853 asylum seekers receiving support in the shape of dispersed accommodation were being supported by Belfast City Council – 86.02%.¹⁶¹ The second-highest

155. GOV.UK [Home Office] (2023), ‘Asylum and resettlement datasets’, 23 February. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#local-authority-data>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

159. Meredith, R. (2022), ‘Some asylum seekers in NI in ‘prison-like’ hotel conditions’, 23 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-63722681>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

160. The Executive Office (Northern Ireland), ‘Draft Refugee Integration Strategy’. Available at: <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-refugee-integration-strategy#:~:text=The%20Racial%20Equality%20Strategy%20states.and%20realise%20their%20full%20potential.>, last accessed: 13 March 2023.

161. Ibid.

local authority in terms of the number of asylum seekers receiving this support was Antrim and Newtownabbey – 96 individuals. There have been previous issues surrounding the resettlement of newcomers in Belfast, with a government scheme to resettle refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Northern Ireland being cancelled in 2021 after what the Home Office described as “racist events” in the city.¹⁶² While the Executive Office has no official remit in the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers as this is a UK Home Office responsibility, it has recently stated that it has “been working with local government and statutory partners to identify how best to develop capacity and infrastructure in local areas, including outside Belfast”. This is not without its challenges, considering the long-standing hyper-dependence on Belfast for the rehoming of asylum seekers within Northern Ireland.

In the absence of an official refugee integration strategy in a part of the UK which is characterised by significant political polarisation and continued Catholic-Protestant segregation in integral spheres of life such as education, the increasing number of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland presents serious challenges and additional pressures in terms of social cohesion. This is compounded by the fact that the city of Belfast is relatively deprived when compared to much of Northern Ireland. According to 2017 data, 11 of the 20 most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in Northern Ireland were in Belfast constituencies for the House of Commons – with nine being in the seat of Belfast North.¹⁶³ Due to the ongoing ‘Green/Orange’ emphasis in Belfast’s local politics and the political stalemate at Stormont, there is a risk that the refugee and asylum agenda continues to be a neglected area of public policy in Northern Ireland.

162. Coulter, P. (2021), ‘Refugees: ‘Racist events’ stopped resettlement of refugees in NI’, *BBC News*, 20 December. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-59654654>, last visited: 13 March 2023.

163. McKay, N. (2018), ‘Multiple Deprivation in Northern Ireland: Latest Results’, *Northern Ireland Assembly*, 26 June. Available at: <https://www.assemblyresearchmaters.org/2018/06/26/multiple-deprivation-in-northern-ireland-latest-results/>, last accessed: 1 April 2023.

5. The Illegal Migration Bill

The UK Government’s Illegal Migration Bill, which cleared its final stages in the House of Commons by 289 votes to 230 on 26 April 2023, is designed to be the central legal instrument which can be used to address the small-boats emergency. The Illegal Migration Bill represents a significant step in the right direction – possessing a certain directness and robustness that did not characterise the Nationality and Borders Act. Following a recommendation made in the February 2023 Policy Exchange report co-authored by Professor Richard Ekins KC (Hon) and Sir Stephen Laws KCB, KC (Hon), the Bill’s central proposal is that the Home Secretary will be subject to a legal duty to remove people who have illegally entered the UK.¹⁶⁴ Crucially, this helps minimise the potential for “ministerial half-heartedness and judicial interference to derail the policy”.¹⁶⁵

However, the Illegal Migration Bill – as initially introduced – was vulnerable to litigation. Following pressure applied by Conservative backbenchers, further amendments have been made to the Bill which are designed to curb the power of judicial interventions made by both the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights and the UK courts. This includes making clear that the ECHR’s “Rule 39” orders do halt deportation flights (such as the grounded flight intended for Rwanda in June 2022 following the ECHR’s intervention),¹⁶⁶ leaving to the Home Secretary the discretion as to whether to comply with the order.

Under the current version of the Bill, the ability of UK courts able to block deportations would be much restricted – they will only be able to do so in cases where the person faces an imminent risk of “serious and irreversible harm”. The Bill does state what would constitute serious and irreversible harm – including death, persecution (based on provisions of the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act, elaborating the 1951 Refugee Convention), torture, inhuman treatment, and onward removal to a country where he would be at risk of enduring such harms.¹⁶⁷ However, it also specifies particular instances where the threshold of serious and irreversible harm would not be met – which includes cases where the standard of healthcare available in the destination country is lower than the care and treatment which is available in the UK.¹⁶⁸ The threshold would also not be met in cases where a person can seek state protections in the event of ‘persecution’. This would include countries that have clear constitutional provisions which explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, and language. The new amendments collectively represent a significant tightening of the Bill which seeks to curb judicial interventions – both international and domestic – Into

164. Ekins, R. and Laws, S. (2023), ‘How to legislate about small boats’, *Policy Exchange*, 11 February. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/how-to-legislate-about-small-boats/>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

165. Ekins, R. (2023), ‘The Strasbourg court may fatally undermine the immigration Bill’, *The Telegraph*, 9 March. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/09/strasbourg-court-may-fatally-undermine-immigration-bill/>, last accessed: 14 March 2023.

166. Lee, J. and Faulkner, D. (2022), ‘Rwanda asylum flight cancelled after legal action’, *BBC News*, 15 June. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-61806383>, last accessed: 28 April 2023.

167. Ekins, R. (2023), ‘Richard Ekins: Small Boats, Braverman’s Bill, and new Government amendments. They’re a move in the right direction.’, *ConservativeHome*, 24 April. Available at: <https://conservativehome.com/2023/04/24/richard-ekins-small-boats-bravermans-bill-and-new-government-amendments-theyre-a-move-in-the-right-direction/>, last accessed: 5 May 2023.

168. UK Parliament (2023), ‘Illegal Migration Bill’, 4 May. Available at: <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/50885/documents/3348>, last accessed: 5 May 2023.

the immigration and asylum policies of the democratically-elected UK government.

Acknowledging the degree to which existing protections are being abused to delay and prevent removal from the UK, the Bill provides that modern-slavery referrals for those who illegally enter the UK will be disqualified based on public order grounds (under the terms of ECAT – the international anti-trafficking treaty). As part of its disapplication of modern-slavery protections, the Bill states: “for protections that apply to victims of modern slavery or human trafficking not to apply to persons who are a threat to public order or who have claimed to be victims in bad faith unless compelling circumstances apply”.¹⁶⁹ The significance of this measure is that it avoids limiting the Home Secretary’s duty to carry out removals from the UK, thus ending the state of affairs in which the Modern Slavery Act can be used to delay prompt removal of persons crossing the Channel, even where they have no arguable case for asylum.

The Bill also provides for a cap on the number of entrants into the UK through safe and legal routes, stating that the Secretary of State “must make regulations specifying the maximum number of persons who may enter the United Kingdom annually using safe and legal routes”.¹⁷⁰ Under the Bill, the Home Secretary would be obliged to consult representatives of local authorities and other bodies and persons he/she considers appropriate. This annual cap on the number of people entering the UK through safe routes – which will be subject to parliamentary control – is designed to provide an orderly system. This is especially sensible in terms of providing the best chances for integration and should be complemented with a reformed internal dispersal system which is fairer on the UK’s left-behind and relatively-deprived areas. If the annual cap for a particular year is breached, the Home Secretary would be required to lay a statement before Parliament setting out the number of people who have entered the UK via safe and legal routes for the relevant period and why this number exceeds the cap set. This would enhance the degree of democratic accountability in the sphere of government asylum policy.

¹⁶⁹.Ibid.

¹⁷⁰.Ibid.

6. Conclusion

The UK's small-boats emergency on the English south coast is an unquestionably costly problem which risks undermining social cohesion – especially in left-behind, relatively-deprived communities which are especially exposed to the nation's cost-of-living woes. It is ultimately a two-part crisis – one where the UK's asylum system is being oversaturated by ever-rising numbers being imported by people-smuggling enterprises, with a disproportionate number of small-boats arrivals then being rehomed in socio-economically disadvantaged local authorities. It is not unreasonable to express the view that many of Britain's left-behind areas have essentially been reduced to 'dumping grounds' for the dispersal of asylum seekers who often originate from parts of the world with divergent socio-cultural norms. This threatens to intensify the perceived competition for public resources in traditionally under-invested local communities, presenting fertile ground for nefarious hard-right organisations that wish to exploit both economic and cultural anxieties.

The UK's dysfunctional and broken asylum system is a social-justice issue – with the line between genuine refugee and economic migrant being significantly blurred. The figures show that the vast majority of those arriving in the UK on small boats via the English Channel are younger men, with prominent countries of origin in 2022 including Albania – a relatively safe country, NATO ally and EU accession state where competitive elections are generally well-administered. There has been a recent surge in the number of Indian nationals arriving to the UK on small boats – with suspected motivations including far lower university tuition fees for those claiming asylum when compared to formally applying for an international student visa.

The reality of hefty payments being made to people-smuggling networks suggests that a notable portion of those arriving in the UK are not necessarily dispossessed and poorly-resourced – possibly even being in the middle classes of their country of origin. While it is important to acknowledge that younger, well-resourced men can be subjected to forms of persecution in their homelands, the current situation means vulnerable women and girls at high risk of sex-based violence in war-torn territories are being left by the wayside by the UK's overwhelmed asylum system and current lack of safe legal routes.

The UK continues to spend in the region of £5-7 million a day on hotels being used to accommodate newcomers – including those who entered the UK on small boats through the English Channel. The typical weekly spend on this comfortably outstrips the amount of levelling-up funding

‘awarded’ to many relatively-deprived local authorities. Collectively, these costs represent a level of expenditure which will be understandably difficult to accept for those who are of the view that the government should provide greater financial assistance for relatively-deprived British families with children during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The current situation is likely to strengthen perceptions that ‘charity starts at home’ – with the lower estimate of the one-year public spend on accommodating newcomers in hotels being nearly three times higher than the £630 million government investment in 2022-23 to tackle homelessness.

The public costs of the small-boats emergency are considerable – with mounting public expenditure in terms of accommodation and administration costs, the creation of new units such as the Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC), and the provision of state-funded school places. The impact of the influx of small-boats migrants on the English south coast is being felt in local authorities in Kent such as Ashford and Canterbury, with pupils from established communities being bussed as far as 25 miles away due to migration-induced pressures on local school places. The current scale of irregular migration being experienced by the UK during a cost-of-living crisis threatens to erode social solidarity and undermine the very sustainability of one of the UK’s most treasured post-WWII achievements – the welfare state.

The UK’s failed dispersal system, which functions on a basis of local authorities opting to volunteer to provide forms of asylum support such as dispersed accommodation and subsistence, has been responsible for relatively-deprived areas disproportionately bearing the brunt of assisting and rehoming newcomers. Inner-city areas of Glasgow, Cardiff, Belfast, and Stoke-on-Trent, along with a string of northern English towns such as Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, Rochdale, Middlesbrough, and Gateshead, have been expected to take on significantly high numbers of asylum seekers in the middle of the UK’s post-Covid cost-of-living crisis. Working-class communities have traditionally taken great pride in providing sanctuary to the world’s most persecuted peoples – but considering the UK’s twin crises surrounding border security and punishing living costs, it is not unreasonable to offer the view that this generosity and benevolence has been exploited by both national and local elected representatives.

Failed asylum-seeker dispersal has produced the remarkable injustice of over 99% of people receiving asylum support in the form of dispersed accommodation in Scotland being supported by a single Scottish local authority – Glasgow City. The corresponding figure for Edinburgh, as of 31 December 2022, is just 0.16%. The multi-faceted challenge of rehoming asylum seekers in the UK, for some time, has been anything but a shared national endeavour rooted in fairness and proportionality. A continuation of the status quo leaves the UK open to the risk of future public disorder as witnessed in left-behind and multiple-deprived areas such as Knowsley in Merseyside, which took place outside the four-star Suites Hotel accommodating asylum seekers.

The Illegal Migration Bill, which has now been approved by MPs, is a

significant improvement from the existing Nationality and Borders Act. While it has received criticism from across the conventional political spectrum on ethical grounds, it represents a genuine attempt to stem the flow of unauthorised small-boats arrivals on the English south coast – an ongoing national emergency which is leading to both mounting economic costs and rising social tensions for the country at large. Local communities in counties ranging from Essex in eastern England to Dorset in the south west of England are concerned by the potential social and economic impact of Home Office plans to relocate large numbers of asylum seekers to their areas – putting the Conservative government at odds with Tory-controlled authorities such as Braintree District Council and Dorset Council.

As well as outstripping government funding for levelling-up projects and tackling domestic homelessness, the small-boats emergency is draining the UK's post-Brexit international development budget. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact has estimated that for 2022, the core UK expenditure on in-donor refugee costs was around £3.5 billion - approximately one third of the UK's total aid budget for the year.¹⁷¹ This is money which could be devoted to funding educational initiatives, healthcare programmes and environmental sustainability schemes in developing nations of the Commonwealth.

The small-boats emergency is unjust in terms of who is being left by the wayside as a result of the UK's broken asylum system and how unauthorised arrivals are being dispersed within the country. There must be a radical reset when it comes to immigration and asylum policy in the UK.

171. Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2023), 'UK aid to refugees in the UK: A rapid review', March. Available at: https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/UK-aid-to-Refugees-in-the-UK_ICAI-review.pdf, last accessed: 18 May 2023.

7. Recommendations

There is a compromise which can be struck over the UK's asylum policy – one which is in keeping with the UK's rich history of rehoming some of the world's most persecuted peoples, whilst adopting a hard-headed approach over matters of public security and social cohesion. The UK should take pride in its response to the Kremlin's military invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. As of 15 November 2022, a total of 199,500 applications been approved across the two Ukraine visa schemes created in response to the conflict – 141,600 under the Ukraine sponsorship scheme and a further 57,900 under the Ukraine Family Scheme.¹⁷² Since the launch of the British National Overseas (BNO) route for Hongkongers at the start of 2021 in response to the totalitarian 'national security law' introduced by the Chinese Communist regime, 154,000 eligible individuals and their dependents have been granted their visa to start afresh with their lives in the UK.¹⁷³ Over 350,000 Ukrainians and Hongkongers – fleeing the Kremlin's militaristic aggression and Chinese-state tyranny respectively – have been provided with sanctuary in the UK.

The UK's capacity to help those at immediate risk of conflict-related violence and political persecution, however, is being undermined by the ongoing small-boats emergency. This has seen its dysfunctional asylum system being reduced to a 'survival-of-the-fittest' arrangement which sees largely young, able-bodied men arriving to the UK with the assistance of profiteering people smugglers, combined with an internal dispersal system that often rehomes newcomers in oft-underregulated accommodation across deprived inner-city areas and post-industrial towns, fails spectacularly in delivering this inclusive compromise. It is worth noting that it does not benefit genuine asylum seekers who have fled violence and persecution, to then wait on an asylum application for a considerable period whilst being potentially rehomed in a deprived local authority with limited resources for the services they require. To help pave the path towards an asylum policy agenda which is both compassionate and controlled, this report makes the following recommendations:

7.1: Curbing the power of judicial interventions in immigration and asylum policy

It is essential that a new Illegal Migration Act ensures that judicial interventions – both domestic and international – have far less of an obstructionist impact on the UK Government's efforts to introduce a robust border-security regime and well-ordered asylum system. As well as

172. GOV.UK [Home Office] (2022), 'Statistics on Ukrainians in the UK', 24 November. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2022/statistics-on-ukrainians-in-the-uk>, last accessed: 28 April 2023.

173. GOV.UK [DLUHC](2023), 'Government announces a third year of support to help Hong Kongers settle into life in the UK', 1 March. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-a-third-year-of-support-to-help-hong-kongers-settle-into-life-in-the-uk#:~:text=%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87-.Government%20announces%20a%20third%20year%20of%20support%20to%20help%20Hong%20into%20life%20in%20the%20UK.&text=The%20government%20today%20\(1%20March,the%20BN\(O\)%20visa,](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-a-third-year-of-support-to-help-hong-kongers-settle-into-life-in-the-uk#:~:text=%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87-.Government%20announces%20a%20third%20year%20of%20support%20to%20help%20Hong%20into%20life%20in%20the%20UK.&text=The%20government%20today%20(1%20March,the%20BN(O)%20visa,) last accessed: 28 April 2023.

empowering the Home Secretary to ignore “Rule 39” orders issued by the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights to block deportations from the UK, the scope for UK courts to do the same on the grounds of the Human Rights Act must be restricted. This would significantly enhance the workability of the UK-Rwanda migration partnership – facilitating removals to a safe ‘third country’ (or British Overseas Territories such as Ascension Island and Crown Dependencies such as the Channel Islands). This is especially important for removing those who originate from countries which are not included in the Illegal Migration Bill’s list of countries or territories to which a person may be removed (such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria) but have had their asylum claim rejected in the UK. Agreements such as the UK-Rwanda arrangement can only disincentivise unauthorised small-boats arrivals in the UK if the possibility of illegal migrants being swiftly relocated outside of the UK is a genuine one.

7.2: Prioritisation of women and girls under a Parliament-agreed annual cap on refugees

Alongside the Illegal Migration Act, the Government should establish a new safe and legal route for refugees from any country, subject to an annual cap democratically determined by Government and Parliament on a yearly basis, and prioritising women and girls at major risk of sex-based violence in conflict zones and insecure displacement facilities. The level of the cap should be required to be proposed each year by Government in a statutory instrument and approved by Parliament under the affirmative procedure. This would sit alongside existing country-specific schemes, such as those for Hong Kong and Ukraine. Once illegal migration had been reduced to below the level of the cap, this route would begin to accept refugees through this route – with the total number from both illegal and the new safe and legal route not exceeding the cap. Under this route, Government should prioritise women and girls, both those in conflict zones where systematic rape and sexual abuse have been used as weapons of war, and those who are at risk in insecure displacement camps in neighbouring countries. This would redress the injustice of the UK’s asylum system being currently overwhelmed by male-dominated patterns of irregular economic migration. Alongside this, the UK should establish more returns agreement with countries, allowing small boats migrants who illegally entered the UK to be returned more easily.

7.3: An Expansion of Ukrainian-style Sponsorship Schemes for Other Nationalities

The current asylum system is not only too expensive but also too statist. The key to better sharing the load with wealthier parts of ‘progressive liberal Britain’ – relatively pro-refugee areas which tend to have higher housing costs – is galvanising voluntary spirit. The ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme has

been described by the UK Government as a “significant success” – with a total of 159,600 visas issued under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (as of 2 May 2023).¹⁷⁴ With the asylum backlog at the end of 2022 standing at 166,261 people, the UK Government should explore the possibility of expanding the Ukrainian-style sponsorship model for asylum seekers of other nationalities. With the UK being a multi-ethnic success story, there are now well-settled families and established communities of Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian origin with specific cultural assets that could help with the rehoming of asylum seekers and aid refugee integration. Charities such as Refugees at Home, along with organisations such as the Afghanistan & Central Asian Association, Iranian Association, the Federation of Iraqi Refugees, could play important roles in a wider refugee and asylum voluntary model co-ordinated by government. Volunteers could also be mobilised to help refugees improve their command of the English language, thereby reducing pressure on the ESOL budget and organically facilitating integration in local communities.

7.4: Extension of Prevent Duty to the sphere of immigration and asylum

It is vital that the Prevent scheme – which is designed to safeguard at-risk individuals from either becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism – is extended to cover the sphere of immigration and asylum (as recommended in the Shawcross review). In recent years, the UK has suffered a series of Islamist-inspired terror attacks at the hands of those who had an asylum-related background. These incidents have the potential to do serious damage to public confidence in the asylum system – testing the usual generosity and openness which characterises the British mainstream. An integral part of border security is detecting radicalisation risks among those who enter the UK through irregular methods – especially small-boats migrants who originate from conflict-affected territories where there are high levels of extremist activity. Prevent duty training must be in place for UK Border Force and Immigration and Protection Directorate personnel for them to better understand the risk factors associated with radicalisation when it comes to new arrivals and how to manage cases of concern. It is especially important that robust safeguards are in place to ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are not exposed to extremist beliefs held by those who may have the intention to indoctrinate. This requires stronger regulation and tighter supervision of asylum-related accommodation.

174.GOV.UK [Home Office] (2023), ‘Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data’, 4 May. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2#:~:text=1%20January%202022-Total%20Ukraine%20Scheme%20visa%20applications%20received%3A%20286%2C800.Ukraine%20Sponsorship%20Scheme%3A%20192%2C400>, last accessed: 4 May 2023.

7.5: A fairer internal distribution of asylum seekers

The current dispersal system for asylum seekers in the UK is simply not fit for purpose, with some of the most deprived, left-behind communities disproportionately bearing the brunt of rehoming newcomers. The voluntary participatory structure of the UK’s dispersal system has been reduced to a deeply unjust and hierarchical arrangement which insulates

wealthier local authorities. The planned introduction of a ‘full dispersal system’ by the UK Government – under which all local authorities in England, Wales, and Scotland would become ‘asylum dispersal areas’ – must reduce the load on socio-economically disadvantaged authorities (even if this potentially means relocating more asylum seekers in parts of the country with higher housing costs). These additional costs should be offset over time by fostering a leaner and more efficient asylum system with an annual cap on the number of people granted refugee status, and through community sponsorship schemes as set out above. Under the new structure, it is imperative that relevant bodies in local areas – including the council, schools, NHS facilities, social services, the police, and voluntary organisations – are given appropriate prior notification by the Home Office of dispersal and the number of asylum seekers involved (with relevant details provided based on protected characteristics such as disability).¹⁷⁵

7.6: The official establishment of an Asylum Support and Refugee Integration Strategy for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is relatively new when it comes to the rehoming of asylum seekers and integration of refugees in the UK. As a matter of urgency, the Home Office should work with the Executive Office of Northern Ireland to establish an official asylum-support and refugee-integration plan – as proposed in the latter’s Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland. This should have a particular focus on collaborating with local government and statutory partners to identify how best to develop social capacity and cultural infrastructure in local areas outside of Belfast - helping to reduce pressures in its deprived inner-city areas. The integration of asylum seekers who are granted refugee status is a challenge for a society which continues to grapple with long-standing sectarian and political divides based on Christian denomination, Brexit, and Northern Ireland’s constitutional future. It is imperative that secular, apolitical, non-denominational organisations in the third sector are provided with the freedom and resources to enable members of Northern Ireland’s refugee population to integrate themselves to a position where they make positive economic and social contributions to their new home.

175. Soni, D. (2023), ‘The disabled asylum seekers trapped in unsuitable housing’, *Channel 4*, 27 April. Available at: <https://www.channel4.com/news/the-disabled-asylum-seekers-trapped-in-unsuitable-housing>, last accessed: 2 May 2023.



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