

# HIAS + JCORE

The UK Jewish Voice on Refugees and Racial Justice



## OUR CALL FOR COMPASSION

A Jewish values led vision, for a fairer  
refugee policy this General Election

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# Foreword

## **Rabbi David Mason, Executive Director, HIAS+JCORE**

This election is an opportunity for a rethink: it is clear that the UK's asylum system is not working. But a better, more compassionate and welcoming alternative is possible.

At HIAS+JCORE, the UK's leading Jewish voice on refugee and asylum policy, our vision is of a UK that allows refugees and asylum seekers to live and flourish. A UK that is more cohesive and brings communities together. And a UK that is welcoming and inclusive – allowing refugees to feel part of our country – not excluded from it.

**For too long, displaced people have faced an environment marked out by cruelty.**

As British Jews, we have been in that position before, facing hostility, as we sought refuge from persecution. We as a people cannot stand by while refugees suffer today.

Led by our Jewish values of compassion, responsibility, solidarity



and partnership, HIAS+JCORE calls for policy which respects the humanity of those seeking protection here.

**This manifesto is shaped by these values. And crucially, it is informed and led by the experiences of the young asylum seekers we work with, and the challenges they so often face.**

We continue to be inspired by the remarkable resilience they show. We hope that all political parties – and whoever succeeds at this election – will commit to a just system, which is so much fairer for them.

*David Mason, June 2024*

# Our policy priorities

## 1: Decent housing for displaced people

Every person seeking asylum in the UK should be able to live in dignity while their claim is being processed – and the same must be the case for people who have received refugee status.

## 2: Reverse legal aid cuts

Without legal support, young unaccompanied asylum seekers are left to navigate a complex system alone.

## 3: End pseudoscientific age assessments

Far too many children and young people are wrongly being assessed to be adults. This leaves them at serious risk of harm.



# 1: Decent housing for displaced people

## What is the context?

All too often, asylum accommodation is poor quality and inappropriate. Thousands of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have been housed in hotels – a decision the High Court ruled as unlawful in July 2023 – and even more worryingly, some have wrongly been placed in accommodation with adults.

**Appallingly, many people receiving refugee status now face an almost immediate risk of homelessness: what should be a time of celebration has become a source of anxiety and destitution. Home Office policy gives new refugees just 28 days to vacate their accommodation. Some have been given as little as 7 days' notice.**

In this time, people have to set up a bank account, apply for Universal Credit, and find somewhere suitable to live. This all requires navigating complex, bureaucratic systems, in a language people may not be fluent in.

## Our policy ask

*Double the 'move-on' period for newly granted refugees from 28 to 56 days.*

## Commentary from Rabbi Naomi Goldman

*"In Tractate Ketubot 67b...*

*The Sages taught: Concerning an orphan boy who has come to marry, the community tries its utmost to provide for all of his needs. The charities rent a house for him, arrange for him a bed and all his utensils... as it says: "But you shall surely open your hand to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he lacks." (Deuteronomy 15:8). With regard to the phrase "sufficient for his need," this is referring to the house. "That which he lacks"; this is referring to a bed and table."*

Secure housing is one of the basic necessities of life, according to Jewish sources. Discussions of poverty assume that even the poorest person should have somewhere secure and decent to live."

## 2: Reverse legal aid cuts

### What is the context?

The 2012 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) drastically cut the legal aid budget. From 2012/13 to 2022/23, legal aid spending fell by £728 million (in real terms).

These cuts have had a catastrophic impact on our young people's ability to access immigration solicitors.

### Commentary from Rabbi Richard Jacobi

"Reflecting on legal aid cuts, the verse:

"צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוּף לִמְעַן תַּחְיֶה" (*Justice, justice you shall pursue, in order that you shall live...*)

immediately comes to mind.

The repetition of 'צֶדֶק' - justice - in this line highlights that a just outcome has to be achieved by just means.

Our Jewish values guide us to seek fair means to secure the rule of law."

### Our policy ask

*Reverse legal aid cuts, so all asylum seekers have access to justice.*



## 3: End pseudoscientific age assessments

### What is the context?

Figures obtained by the Helen Bamber Foundation, the Humans for Rights Network and the Refugee Council found that the Home Office wrongly assessed more than 1,300 children to be adults, from January 2022 to June 2023.

There is strong evidence that age assessments using ‘scientific’ methods are deeply unreliable. They are never in the best interests of the child involved, and result in exclusion from child refugee protection and care. Consequently, some children have been held in adult accommodation - resulting in a myriad of serious safeguarding concerns..

### Our policy ask

*‘Scientific’ age assessments should not be used to specify a young person’s precise age.*

### Commentary from Rabbi Jeremy Gordon

“Refugees often have no documentation, and often come from societies that do not mark birthdays with the delight of my own children.

Judaism determines adulthood in different ways.

There is an ancient ‘scientific’ assessment discussed in the Talmud Niddah (45b), but on the same page, that test is supplanted with the commitment to understand if a young person has a ‘mature mind.’

Rabbis fifteen centuries ago understood, surely, that so-called ‘scientific assessments’ are not only invasive but they are an unreliable marker of true maturity.”

## TAKE ACTION



Vote on July 4th to support refugees and asylum seekers



Share our manifesto with candidates - and ask them at your local hustings how they'll welcome refugees



Spread the word through your networks, and on social media