

UK asylum and refugee policy briefing, September 2025

This summer sadly saw an increase in both anti-refugee hostility and regressive asylum policy. Both have featured frequently in the headlines.

This briefing provides an overview of important developments, including:

- The recent **temporary suspension** of new refugee family reunion cases
- The UK's new **'one-in, one-out' deal** with France
- The scrapping of the trial **extended 56-day 'move-on' period** for most new refugees
- The proliferation of protests **outside of asylum hotels**.

Refugee family reunion

On September 1, 2025, the former Home Secretary Yvette Cooper announced that the UK would **overhaul its refugee family reunion policy**, and that new applications would be temporarily suspended.

The policy review will include considering “changes to the way Article 8 of the ECHR is interpreted.” This Article underscores the right to family life and has been a legal pillar for the refugee family reunion scheme.

Refugees who would like to reunite with family members will in the meantime have to **apply through the standard family visa route**. This has a minimum income requirement of at least £29,000.

The Government's decision has closed one of the only safe routes that allowed refugees to enter the UK. We are concerned that this will likely push more people, including women and children - who made up **92% of applicants** in the most recent year - into taking dangerous journeys across the Channel.

Our policy call

The Government should broaden, not restrict, the criteria of refugee family reunion. These are narrow even prior to any re-interpretation of Article 8. This must include reforms to allow child refugees to sponsor their parents.

The 'one-in, one-out' deal

In July, the Home Office unveiled the **'one in, one out'** deal with France. The pilot scheme will see some people who arrive irregularly in the UK returned to France,

and in turn, a new safe route will be created to enable displaced people in France to enter the UK.

It is one of the few safe routes open under this Government (although will reportedly **just help 50 people per week** initially). Anyone arriving via small boat could be at risk of return, except for unaccompanied children.

People in France applying to the scheme will be strictly screened, subject to full documentation checks, and must never have previously attempted to cross the Channel. These requirements will filter out thousands of people who were either not issued proper documentation or lost it amid conflict and persecution. In her address on September 1, the Home Secretary stated that families and those with close relatives already in the UK **would likely be prioritised**.

The first detentions began days after the program commenced in August, but the individuals have not yet been returned to France. They are being held in immigration removal centres, and the Home Office has said that returns **could begin** later in September.

Our policy call

While we welcome the introduction of any new safe route, the legal right to asylum in this country must be respected for all who seek sanctuary here. We also need to see pathways offered to a greater number of people to stop Channel crossings.

The 'move-on' period

In December 2024, the Government introduced a **trial 56-day 'move-on' period**. This doubled the previous 28-day timeframe that refugees had to move off Home Office support, once they received a positive decision on their asylum claim.

It was **subsequently announced** that the pilot would be evaluated by the National Centre for Social Research, with the findings released in late summer 2025. As of now, they have still not been published. On 7 July 2025, Dame Angela Eagle, the former Minister for Border Security and Asylum, confirmed that the 'move-on' period trial would be extended to the end of 2025.

However, on August 27, the Home Office chose to revert back to a 28-day 'move-on' period for single adults, who account for a majority of people seeking asylum. Families, pregnant women, people over the age of 65, and disabled people will continue to be given 56 days. This decision came without any warning and took effect from September 1. It will be reviewed again at the end of the year.

The 28-day 'move-on' period for newly recognised refugees has long been acknowledged as inadequate. In far too many cases it has pushed people into homelessness and destitution. Extending the 'move-on' period to 56 days for the first eight months of 2025, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act, reduced rough sleeping by providing a necessary lifeline to refugees and giving local authorities an adequate timeframe with which to assist them.

Our policy call

A permanent 56-day 'move-on' period must be introduced. This should be accompanied by a package of policies which will support the successful integration of newly recognised refugees, including granting people seeking asylum the right to work and lifting the refugee citizenship ban.

Anti-migrant protests

Over the summer, a series of ongoing anti-immigration protests spread across the UK outside of asylum hotels. The demonstrations began at the Bell Hotel in Epping and have led to a nationwide debate about the use of hotels to house asylum seekers. While the Home Office had already revealed plans to stop housing people seeking asylum in hotels by 2029, the usage of such accommodation gained significant attention this summer.

The anti-hotel agenda has been co-opted by Reform UK and right-wing activists spreading misinformation and intimidating people seeking asylum. The protestors have demonstrated under the pretext of keeping their communities safe for women and children. However, this movement has frequently used xenophobic and racist rhetoric that has caused disorder, and in some instances, violence. Such protests have not only put people seeking asylum at serious risk, but also stoked fear and division within communities.

People seeking asylum rely on Home Office accommodation as most are banned from working while their cases are considered. This forces those in the asylum system to survive on only £49.18 a week – and just £9.95 for those housed in catered accommodation. Most are subsequently pushed into destitution.

Our policy call

Politicians must counter hateful, anti-migrant narratives by employing compassionate rhetoric that encourages integration and understanding. This should be matched by policy which enables integration, including the right to work.

Learn more

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