

HIAS+JCORE briefing: The Government's proposed changes to the UK's asylum system

On 17 November, the Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, announced a sweeping overhaul of the UK's asylum system. The proposed changes draw on Denmark's restrictive – and controversial – model. HIAS+JCORE is deeply concerned that these measures would undermine refugee rights and dignity, harm cohesion, and exacerbate divisions within society.

What is the Government proposing?

Making refugee status temporary

Under the new plans, refugee status would be reviewed every 2.5 years. This would be a major change – previously refugee status lasted for five years.

Returning refugees home if their country is deemed “safe”

Under new plans, protection would be regularly reviewed. The Home Office has indicated that this would also affect Ukrainian refugees who are in the UK under temporary protection, should the war in Ukraine end.

Far longer routes to permanent settlement

People seeking asylum who had entered the UK irregularly would have to wait 20 years before they could apply for indefinite leave to remain. Presently, it's just five years.

Removing automatic state housing and financial support for people seeking asylum, who would otherwise face destitution

Assistance could be removed from people who have the right to work but are unemployed, or those working illegally, who have broken the law, or not complied with removal directions. It's important to note that most people seeking asylum do not have the right to work, unless their claim has not been assessed after 12 months. Even then they are restricted to working in limited fields.

Narrowly reinterpreting Article 3 and Article 8 of the ECHR

The right to family life, for example, will likely only refer to immediate family members. People seeking asylum will also be restricted to raising all grounds for their claim in a single appeal. Meanwhile, the automatic right to refugee family reunion will also be removed.

New safe routes

This will include a capped route similar to 'Homes for Ukraine', where people can sponsor an individual refugee. There will also be limited new pathways for students and skilled workers.

What impact will these changes have – and what do we need instead?

There is little evidence that deterrent approaches work. The Home Office's own research has found that factors like language and community connections are more impactful than domestic policy.

Instead, these measures will merely trap refugees in perpetual states of uncertainty, and harm integration and societal cohesion. While the new safe routes proposed are welcome in principle, they are not designed to meet actual global protection needs and will fail to offset the overall harmful effects of the reforms. A far more compassionate approach – which provides meaningful safe routes, and gives refugees a fair chance to contribute and thrive – is desperately needed.