

# Asylum Matters

## Our organisational strategy:

Who we are,  
what we've done,  
what we're planning to do

2025

asylum matters



# Who we are

At Asylum Matters, we believe every person should have access to a fair and supportive asylum system. We work with people seeking asylum and local organisations across the UK to build alliances and campaign for change. Together, we amplify efforts for a future where everyone seeking asylum lives in dignity, not poverty, and can rebuild their lives safely in our communities.



## Our vision

People seeking asylum are protected, treated fairly and can rebuild their lives in our communities.



## Our mission

Campaigning collaboratively, locally and nationally to transform asylum in the UK.

## Our values

We act with integrity in everything we do, which for us means living by our values:

- **Intentional:** We make decisions and are led by what matters most to people seeking asylum and the insights of community organisations
- **Collaborative:** We bring people together for collective advocacy to be a stronger force for change
- **Solidarity:** We strengthen community organisations and work as allies to amplify their voices and shift power

## Our principles

- We listen to, learn from and are inspired by people with lived impact of the asylum system
- Our team is rooted in local communities, standing in solidarity with people seeking asylum and local frontline organisations
- We are anti-racist and recognise our role in addressing unequal power and resources, and nurturing talent from all social backgrounds

# Our approach

People seeking asylum in the UK are the most racialised and minoritised people in our country. They've had their rights abused and ignored. We believe that every person seeking protection, no matter their background, should have the chance to access a fair and supportive asylum system that protects their human rights. That's why we're working in local communities across the UK, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with people seeking asylum and the local organisations that support them. We're speaking out when things aren't right and pushing for change that respects and protects the rights of people seeking asylum and the communities they're part of.

With our team embedded directly in regions offering sanctuary to people seeking asylum, we're connecting local knowledge and experience with national discussions and activities. This means we're shifting the power so people can address the problems in their own lives and communities. We work directly with every layer of policy and decision making to make the biggest impact.

Throughout the UK, charities, NGOs and local groups are doing incredible work on the frontline. We play a distinct role by amplifying this critical effort, unlocking opportunities behind-the-scenes. This includes developing capacity, building skills and removing obstacles so people seeking asylum, refugees and grassroots organisations can speak out and engage with decision-makers.



But we can't achieve the change we need on our own. We seek opportunities to bring everyone to the table to make decisions together, connect minds and drive change in every community. We've developed deep and enduring relationships with a diverse network of partners. We've earned high levels of trust in regions and nations, collaborating closely with community organisations. With our collective power, we hold decision-makers to account, ask questions and demand better for refugees and people seeking asylum. Together, we can share learnings, generate new ideas and be a powerful force for change.

Through this extensive partner network, we're in close and regular contact with a diverse range of people at every stage of the asylum process. This includes people housed in dispersal communities, in hotels and other mass containment sites. We routinely build a body of evidence about the harm current asylum approaches inflict, so that we can campaign for solutions. In doing so we strive to always work with agility and responsiveness. We seek to build clear impact objectives whilst also ensuring we adapt to emerging needs, as we believe strongly this approach is essential for organisations led by lived impact.



# Creating opportunities for people with lived experience to thrive

At Asylum Matters, we recognise and celebrate the diversity of lived experiences within the UK's asylum and migration system. We acknowledge that real-life experiences are shaped by a wide range of factors, including personal journeys, cultural backgrounds, individual resources and the types of accommodation provided. We honour the individuality of each person's experience and approach every story with understanding and respect.

We place lived experience at the heart of our four national campaigns, ensuring that those who have navigated the asylum system lead and shape our efforts. By bringing people together, listening to their perspectives and supporting their goals, we provide the foundation for collective action. Across the UK, we support people with lived experience to engage with parliamentarians in their local communities and contribute their valuable insights to reform national policy. We take immense pride in the strength and resilience of asylum-seeking communities and are committed to doing more to amplify their voices.

We deeply value the remarkable skills, insights and talents of people directly impacted by hostile asylum policies. Our new strategy focuses

on nurturing pathways for lived experience campaigners, not just within Asylum Matters but across the entire asylum rights sector. Throughout our history we have always been led by campaigners with lived experience, but we want to do more, go further and be bolder. We've developed new approaches to ensure that people who've experienced forced migration have their voices heard and that their experiences, insights and talents are centred in our work. We've already started this through our Lived Experience Campaigner skills share sessions, bringing our wonderful campaigners together to incubate talents. We're placing their ideas at the heart of our campaign actions, while resourcing and supporting their talents.

Additionally we aim to create meaningful opportunities for people with lived experience to lead and thrive by gaining employment within Asylum Matters and the broader Refugee & Migrant Justice sector. By cultivating people's talents, building solidarity and creating employment pathways we seek to drive systemic transformation, ensuring that those with firsthand knowledge of the asylum system lead efforts to shape a more just and equitable future.

# Our history and achievements

Asylum Matters was formed through the merger of Regional Asylum Activism and Still Human, Still Here in 2016. We became a greater force for change for all the lives negatively affected by the asylum system in the UK. We were set up to ensure strong advocacy and campaigning outside of London, in areas where the vast majority of people seeking asylum and organisations working with them are located.

Initially hosted as a project within City of Sanctuary, we became a registered charity in December 2020 and a fully independent organisation in March 2021.

Over the last few years, we've come a long way. Alongside our partners and network, we've played a crucial role in securing policy changes at a local and national level. These have directly improved the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK.



## Some of our team's highlights in recent years include:

- **Progressing reform of the rules on the right to work.** As co-secretariat with Refugee Action of the award-winning Lift The Ban campaign, we've convened a 300-strong coalition and enabled experts by experience to take part in impactful campaigning. Our work involved gaining cross-party and public support, including the House of Lords, and a petition with over 181,300 signatures.
- **Securing increases to asylum support rates.** We helped secure the largest asylum support rate increase in two decades – nearly 5% in 2020 – by conducting compelling research on the devastating impacts of low rates of support. During the 2021 contract transition, which left thousands without access to money for weeks, we coordinated frontline partners, spotlighted the crisis in the media and parliament to help resolve it quickly. Later, we co-authored a report documenting these failures to prevent any future recurrence.
- **Improving asylum accommodation and blocking harmful proposals.** Through our Communities Not Camps campaign, we brought local partners and communities together to prevent harmful large scale accommodation sites in Yorkshire, Teesside, Tyneside and Merseyside. We've campaigned to secure the closure of the Bibby Stockholm barge, Napier barracks and the cancellation of plans to open sites in Scampton & Northeye. We've provided resources for partners across the UK to enable them to challenge harmful accommodation in their communities.
- **Mobilising opposition to UK government legislation on asylum.** When the previous government developed hostile plans to effectively ban asylum in the UK, we challenged this through the Fight the anti-refugee laws pledge, joint actions with other organisations and supported campaigners with lived experience to speak out. We facilitated communities to successfully call on leaders across the UK to reject the government's approach and speak up for a vision of welcome.
- **Securing change at a local level.** Our team has collaborated with partners to secure many local policy improvements. In the North East, we successfully prevented contractors from entering asylum residences unannounced. In the West Midlands, we intervened after people seeking asylum were evicted from hotels without notice, resulting in a new policy granting a notice period to challenge evictions. In April 2024, we helped expose serious safeguarding issues at a Birmingham hostel, leading to its closure.

# Protecting people from racist violence and challenging anti-migrant rhetoric

As part of our Fight for Asylum Rights Campaign we have been able to respond with agility to the rising threat of racist anti-migrant extremism. Reacting quickly with partners we developed key resources to help people being attacked in hotels to stay safe, and guidance to our partners to help them navigate the risks around them. This continues to be a feature of our work; convening key sector partners together to build a body of shared work, dropping deeper into communities at risk of attack to build resilience and solidarity, to resource and inform partners, and to advance a position of change locally, regionally and nationally. We led the cross-sector response to the Labour Government's 'Island of Strangers' to further develop our movement by asking for a commitment towards growing an 'Island of Solidarity' across civil society. This work will underpin our Fight for Asylum Rights across the next period.



## Refugee and migrant groups join with hundreds to warn against 'politics of division'

In an open letter more than 350 groups - coordinated by Asylum Matters - say they are speaking up for 'meaningful and enduring contributions' of migrants



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NEWS By Ashley Cowburn Deputy Political Editor

20:00, 25 May 2025



A recent demonstration to give those seeking asylum the right to work (Image: Sonny Malhotra)

Hundreds of organisations come together today with refugee and migrant groups to stand against the "politics of division".

In an open letter more than 350 groups - coordinated by Asylum Matters - say they are speaking up for "meaningful and enduring contributions" of migrants. Some of the groups include the National Education Union, the anti-fascist group HOPE not hate, refugee charity Care4Calais, and LGBT+ charities.



# Our objectives and Impact

Asylum Matters will remain rooted in the diverse communities in which we work, collaborating locally and regionally with community organisations and small NGOs. We'll listen and respond to emerging need, organise community campaigning and support positions of welcome.

## Our objectives will work to:

- Protect the ability and right to claim asylum in the UK and secure improvements to asylum policy and practice through our Fight for Asylum Rights campaign
- Ensure that people seeking asylum can live with dignity and enough money to meet their needs through our asylum support rates campaign Stop Asylum Poverty
- Safeguard the right for people seeking asylum to rebuild their lives in safety and as part of our communities through our Communities Not Camps campaign
- Campaign for employment rights, so people seeking asylum have the right to work and contribute their skills and experience through our Lift The Ban campaign

## Five ways we'll deliver these objectives:

- People seeking asylum and the organisations supporting them will be the driving forces for shaping our campaigns, holding us to account for our actions, values and impact
- Expand our reach and influence through increased media and political engagement to secure policy changes
- Create pathways to increase opportunities for people seeking asylum to work with us
- Support and care for our team by continuing to build a culture that prioritises their health, wellbeing and development
- Strengthen financial sustainability and forge partnerships to create a resilient and strong UK asylum and refugee sector

We have published public-facing excerpts of our campaign strategies on our website because we want to model best practice for campaigning organisations - be measurable in our impact, be guided by effective strategies, embed lived experience at every stage of our work, and collaborate meaningfully with others.

# Our Theory of Change

The Asylum Matters model is to sit closely in the ecosystems surrounding people seeking asylum. Our crucial partners are people experiencing the asylum journey and the small NGOs and community support organisations working with them. Our geographically dispersed and regional model also allows us to not only collaborate effectively on national campaigning, but also to drop deeply into grassroots communities, bridge the gap between asylum policy and the realities on the frontline, build capacity for small organisations plugging the gaps of support, and help develop local campaigners and communities of welcome. We listen, we understand and we act on the lived impact of hostile asylum policy by channelling those experiences into our national work.

## We have three core approaches to national impact:

- **Public campaigning**
- **Parliamentary advocacy**
- **Private influencing**

