

## Overview – summary of our submission

St Augustine's Centre are committed to the view that the way in which someone seeking asylum arrives in the country **should not** affect the protection they're entitled to and that the UK should be able to be proud to offer sanctuary and safety to those fleeing war and persecution.

The complexity of people's lives and situations can never be reduced to such a clear binary as set out in this plan. Simply declaring one group of people as unworthy of support does little to improve the situation on the ground for them or for the communities they are part of, including ours at the St Augustine's Centre. Asylum protection should not be contingent upon 'legal' entry, therefore St Augustine's rejects the foreword's claims that these proposals protect those most in need. The majority of people we see claiming asylum at our centre go on to receive leave to remain, and these are also people who will have by these unfair standards entered the country "illegally".

The language used throughout this policy and the way in which it has been presented to the public and clandestinely consulted upon make it a deterrent policy, ultimately intended to stop people entering and/or claiming asylum in the UK. This is a policy built on a narrative to propel a myth that asylum seekers and the most vulnerable people in our society are the 'burden on the taxpayer' instead of the government holding up a mirror and addressing the actual problems staring glaringly back caused by the broken asylum system.

The introduction of a new temporary status with no recourse to public funds is again only going to increase destitution, black market working, exploitation of the most vulnerable and in the end bear a greater burden on the taxpayer. They have no return agreements in place with any 'safe third county', so the reality of this proposal is that government are only going to waste taxpayer's resources on a delayed process, stuck in a system much longer, reliant on services such as housing and facing increasing deterioration in health before finally being told that they can't be sent back anywhere else and therefore their claims dealt with. This does not solve the problem – it creates more.

Furthermore, many of the measures introduced in the plan have previously been put forward by the government in other pieces of legislation and ruled unlawful. Rather than regurgitating previously failed policies to pedal a divisive narrative, which is again extremely wasteful of important resources, the time and money that has been put into this plan would be much better spent on fixing a broken system which is unworkable and impracticable. Instead of the government spreading fear and pedalling divisive rhetoric, it should be acting responsibly to create safety and unity, where all members of our society can flourish and benefit from all the UK should be offering. These proposals threaten the very right to seek

asylum in the UK, will make life harder for those people who do claim asylum here and will put people seeking safety at increased risk.

### **What we want the asylum system to look like**

St Augustine's agrees that there is an urgent need to fundamentally reform the UK's immigration and asylum systems. They are currently failing to protect people fleeing or seeking refugee protection. Yet these proposals fail to prioritise any reform to the system or guarantee better protection.

Contrary to the claims made in the plan, it is extremely difficult to get to the UK to claim asylum. The current system is slow, complex and restrictive. Asylum decision-making is bureaucratic and very problematic, with around a third of Home Office decisions being overturned on appeal. This broken system forces people to live in poverty, by prohibiting people seeking asylum from working and providing them with just £39 a week to live and support themselves on. It is a deeply dehumanising system which forces many others into homelessness and destitution. It separates people from support networks by dispersing them to where cheap housing is available, or locking people up in immigration detention centres. The proposals do not address systemic issues, introduce or create 'safe' or 'legal' routes, or tackle the root causes of why people are forced to take dangerous journeys to seek safety. Nor will they address the backlog of people waiting in inhumane conditions for a decision on their claim for asylum, and they will only make the lives of people currently in the UK seeking asylum even more difficult.

We want an asylum system we can be proud of, a patriotic one in line with traditional British principles of solidarity and compassion, that treats people with dignity and provides them with the support they need to rebuild their lives. We would like to see the following proactive changes to the asylum system in order to level up, make it fair and make it work for Britain:

- A fair, humane and efficient asylum system – all people seeking asylum should be able to live in humanity and dignity, which means assessing claims fairly, humanely and efficiently, providing decent accommodation in the community, increasing asylum support and giving people seeking asylum the right to work and equal access to higher education. Detention should not be part of the asylum process.
- Effective access to the asylum process – all people seeking protection should have the opportunity to be able to do so. Provide leave to remain to the people who have been in the UK for extended periods, who have been forced to rely on the black market, forced into homelessness or fallen victim to exploitation, trafficking or slavery. Having faced an extended period living in an inhumane limbo, granting these individuals with status would allow the UK to benefit from all that they bring.

- Stop the increased pressure on our judiciary system by ensuring better decision making at the outset. Those seeking asylum should have their asylum claims assessed fully, fairly and quickly with access to adequate legal advice, and they should never be punished for having arrived spontaneously. Reforms are needed also to the legal aid system, allowing people to access justice at the earliest opportunity.
- Global solidarity and responsibility sharing – the UK should play a role in providing sustainable solutions to forced migration and step up to open more safe routes by significantly increasing our resettlement programme, expanding family reunion rights for everyone who is granted refugee status and opening up more complementary pathways (e.g. to study).
- Reception conditions that promote dignity, liberty, empowerment and integration – support provided during the asylum system must ensure liberty, promote dignity, empower people and support their integration in the community from the moment of arrival.
- Integration – policies should support people to realise their full potential and empower them to make a positive contribution to their communities. Allowing, as the government rightly states, the UK to continue to benefit from the skills and advantages that immigration brings to our country, as well as the boost this will have for our economy.

Through these proposals as they currently exist, the government is bringing nothing but shame to the British people. We are a proud, patriotic and welcoming nation, known throughout history to warmly open our arms to the world at a time of crisis. Now, more than ever, at a time when the whole world has come together in the face of a global pandemic, the UK should once more stand proudly and responsibly with the rest of the world. As set out in the Refugee Convention, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of solidarity. St Augustine's strongly believes and advocates that the UK should uphold and abide by these important global standards.