

Supporting changing needs

Photo showing volunteers in conversation with a family at Lewisham Donation Hub

Key information

Publication type: General

Contents

[Strategic aims](#)

[New arrivals and immediate, basic needs](#)

[Getting established](#)

[Preparing for Moving on](#)

Introduction

This part of the toolkit connects the changing issues that people seeking asylum might face over time in initial, contingency or dispersed asylum accommodation.

People's needs and priorities will change over time: starting from the first few days when arriving in a borough (and maybe in the UK), through to becoming established in the area over several months. Further needs and priorities relate to preparing to 'move on' after a decision on their claim.

Once they have a decision, most will receive notices to quit, or notice to vacate from the hotel or dispersed accommodation in 28 days and must quickly establish their own, new support structures including accommodation.

The section suggests themes and activities that boroughs can develop or link up with, to support people as their needs change, working within the context of longer term integration goals.

Clear strategic aims are critical to effective responses to the situations covered in this chapter. Local authorities in the Design Lab identified three key potential strategic aims:

1. Social integration.
2. Access to entitlements.
3. Value through partnerships.

Key lessons in this section

1. Ideally local authorities begin support for people seeking asylum to integrate from the first day they arrive in a borough.

2. As residents often wait months or years for their decision, and may become more established in a local area, local authorities should address their changing needs including ensuring people are prepared to move on when they receive a decision.
3. Developing effective communications with individuals and a case management system can help teams gauge, track and respond to changing needs of people seeking asylum, allowing the local authority to adjust strategies over time.

1. Strategic aims

Social integration

The first potential strategic aim noted above was: ‘People currently seeking asylum are likely to integrate successfully in future’. From the first day in your borough, the experiences people have, positive or negative, can affect longer term integration outcomes. Support should start from the first day people arrive, and aim to prevent them losing agency, not least through providing accurate information and access to mental health support. Ideally support to prepare for ‘moving on’ should also start from the time people arrive.

If the local authority sets out priority outcomes for social integration aims, those outcomes can be used to set measurable objectives to structure planning and evaluation. Outcomes could include:

- People seeking asylum increase their own independent agency, autonomy, independence.
- People seeking asylum are resilient to short or longer term shocks (eg. ill health or longer term neglect), socially, economically, and to their mental and physical health.
- People seeking asylum are safe and feel safe and supported.
 - Protection and Safeguarding concerns are raised and addressed properly.
- People seeking asylum transition without crisis if they get a positive decision, when they must leave asylum accommodation and support and have to ‘move on’ to mainstream benefits, finding housing and employment.
- Children and young people develop fully as they should.

Access to entitlements

- The second potential strategic aim noted above was: ‘People effectively access the right services for them, obtain their entitlements and rights (including dignity and safeguarding protection)’. At this early point, soon after arrival local authority activity usually focusses on ensuring people seeking asylum have easy access to the support they are entitled to, as set out in the [AASC entitlements](#). This can include making use of routes for escalation and enforcement.
- Local authorities should also provide support and make adjustments to ensure people seeking asylum have equitable access to broader services available locally, to which they are entitled, such as public health and safeguarding protections; also those provided for public good such as parks.
- When planning how to make services accessible to people seeking asylum, consider the ways that service users may struggle with different elements of access:

Table 1: Different settings and challenges to people's access to support

| Setting | Challenges to access |
|---------|----------------------|
|---------|----------------------|

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Pre-gate | When people are not even aware that a service exists or that they might be entitled to it, or how to find it or how to choose between different options. |
| Gate | The point a person first comes into contact with an agency and has to evidence and persuade 'gate-keepers' that they are eligible for the resources and services that the organisation provides or controls. |
| Queue | The period while a person waits for their request or claim for support to be assessed for completeness, credibility, eligibility and priority in comparison to others in need and for the agency to decide on its response. May include providing additional evidence of need and priority, or of changing needs. |
| Encounter | Face-to-face and other direct interaction with a decision maker and/or person providing the service, who has discretion over what will be provided, usually requiring skill in communication. |

- To ensure equitable access, a local authority may at times take positive action with regard to people seeking asylum as a population, or as individuals, in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty laid down in the Equality Act 2010, stipulating the duty to avoid indirect discrimination.

Positive Action

Local authorities cannot positively discriminate but they can take 'positive action', which means when there is an objective need service providers can give extra help to people seeking asylum to help them to:

- Overcome disadvantages (from the past) to catch up with the wider population
- Facilitate participation (about the present) to make sure people seeking asylum, as a particularly disadvantaged group, don't miss out on current opportunities
- Meet their different needs (about the future): specialist input to make sure continuing challenges (e.g. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) do not lead to people seeking asylum being disadvantaged again in future.
- When supporting people to access their entitlements, complications can arise from there being multiple providers and sub-contractors involved in providing asylum accommodation and support. It is essential that local authority teams have current information about contacts and roles and will need to work steadily to build communication and relationships on the ground as the first point for resolving concerns about access to entitlements.
- From their direct experience, local authorities participating in the Design Lab made the following recommendations for effective ways to ensure people seeking asylum can access the support to which they are entitled, and if necessary to escalate concerns or enforce standards:
 - Regular onsite presence at hotels, building relationships within each hotel, sharing any concerns immediately, preferably face to face; also maintaining direct contacts within Clearsprings Ready Homes for operational speed
 - Being known as wishing to facilitate solutions, but also willing to escalate and enforce if necessary
 - Proactively identifying areas of potential confusion or low awareness and addressing through preventative actions
 - Regular multi-agency meetings; fortnightly or monthly: involving multiple local authority teams, hotel management; Clearsprings Ready Homes; Migrant Help; with NHS, Police and other statutory colleagues including MASH, local VCS representation; Home Office, DLUHC; persistently following through on actions

- Announced and unannounced onsite visits by lead team with multi-agency experts e.g. environmental health
- Gathering political support e.g. Councillors or Cabinet Members, MPs
- A shared or common structure, e.g. Borough of Sanctuary or Borough Integration or Inclusion Strategy for building longer term shared values and structures for collaboration above and beyond daily entitlements.
- The importance of communication with the GLA, London Councils, LGA, local MPs, Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as well as the Home Office.

Advocating to Migrant Help

Although you can make initial enquiries to Migrant Help on behalf of a client you will need the client's permission to take your enquiry further or act on their behalf. Call the Helpline while the client is present or use a signed form. Include their reference numbers and address/hotel room. Or use chat functions on the Migrant Help website and specialist emails detailed on their website. Invite Migrant Help staff to multi-agency meetings and to contribute to trainings.

Value through partnerships

The third potential strategic aim noted above was 'Value through partnership'. Partnership working, including working with people seeking asylum themselves, is the only way to achieve wrap around, coherent support and get best value from limited resources.

- Partnership mapping is a first step but not enough. Local authorities need to build networks, reliable communication structures and flexible collaborative arrangements so all local partners can respond together to rapid changes and ambiguity.
- This includes being able to respond quickly to changes in central Government policy, but also to sudden substantial changes in the numbers or circumstances of people seeking asylum in your borough. Agile partnership working can also be important in responding to urgent events.

2. New arrivals and immediate, basic needs

New arrivals in your borough, who may also be new in the UK, may be vulnerable to harm from actions or inaction of people in positions of power - either through abuse or neglect (see our [Vulnerability and safeguarding](#) and [Outreach](#) pages).

Basic needs from the start

In the first days and month that people are in your borough they usually have certain basic needs. Pettit and Tsangarides (May 2022) conducted research for the GLA with people seeking asylum and outlined their core needs as set out below:

Needs of people seeking asylum

- **Critical elements:** access to cash, travelcards, digital access, information provision, mental health and wellbeing, English language.

- **Asylum support:** secure, long-term accommodation, prompt access to asylum support, Application Registration (ARC) cards without delay, adequate rates.
- **Social connection:** free local activities and leisure, opportunities to participate in society.
- **Education:** learning from arrival, more ESOL provision, tailored and intensive ESOL, free uniforms and school meals, childcare.
- **Information provision:** arrival orientation, day to day help, translations and interpreters, polite hotel staff.
- **Legal:** access to advice, faster decisions, information on rights and entitlements.
- **Health and social care:** prompt access, mental health care, specialist services, interpreters, monitoring safeguarding, vulnerability assessments.

A case study from Newham may also provide useful insight:

Newham case study - assessment and advice

Early needs assessment for individual or families sets the right processes in motion. Newham, originally working alongside charities in the hotels, developed a prioritisation exercise to avoid being overwhelmed by needs from residents.

Results and lessons:

- Newham consulted residents to understand the key issues across the population in hotels: financial issues, social isolation, health problems. They followed up with 16 in-depth interviews for further detail.
- From this data they identified a list of priority issues to form the basis of an ‘Early Help Check-In’.
- Staff use the list when meeting individuals in twice-weekly visits to hotels. The Check-In balances core needs raised by people seeking asylum alongside the local authority’s key statutory obligations (see also [Welcome Newham](#)).

Below is also a detailed summary of the activities taken across the first 16 weeks in the Welcome Newham process:

Table 2: Summary of the Welcome Newham process

| Phase 1 (Day 0 to Week 2) | Phase 2 (Weeks 3 to 7) | Phase 3 (Weeks 8 to 16) |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 visits | 2 visits | 1 visit |

| Phase 1 (Day 0 to Week 2) | Phase 2 (Weeks 3 to 7) | Phase 3 (Weeks 8 to 16) |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotel Induction • Emergency clothing & medicine • Check Section 95 application • GP Registration/ HC1 • NHS Orientation • School Application • ARC applied • ASPEN applied • Welfare check for neglect • Referrals to: MASH, HU, Newham Nurture, DOST, Children's Centres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting to Legal Aid • Referrals to health visitors • ZIP Card application • Community activities • College application • Follow up school admission • ARC Granted • ASPEN Granted/Apply for Emergency Payment • Bank account letter • Volunteering registration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on Volunteering opportunity • Section 95 granted • Follow up with any referrals made • College application/ESOL • School uniforms and FSM • English Language enrolment • Employment & Employability support (if right to work) |

Orientation

The Home Office provides orientation materials to asylum seekers when they are first housed in asylum accommodation. Additionally, some boroughs have designed 'welcome packs' to give to people seeking asylum. These typically contain information on the asylum process, with key information on entitlements, local authority services and local activities and resources.

Boroughs with experience of developing packs emphasised the importance of co-designing, sense-testing and receiving feedback on resources from people seeking asylum, to ensure that these share information in a useful format and meet people's needs (see our page on [Coproduction and consultation](#)).

Barking and Dagenham - Orientation 'Help Pack'

Barking and Dagenham created an Orientation pack 'Asylum, Help Pack' with direct involvement of people seeking asylum via a series of focus groups. The contents include:

- About the Borough.
- Applying for refugee status: legal representation and family. If my application is refused.
- Rights and entitlements: including Asylum Support (housing and cash allowance), Healthcare rights, Education, Employment, Access to public services and public funds.
- Resources available in the Borough such as Immigrant support services, Mental health, Food banks and others.
- Specialist services such as Albanian and Ukrainian support services, Domestic violence support services, Emergency services and others.
- Resources available outside the Borough.

Lessons:

- Share the packs with GP surgeries and community hubs to reach residents in dispersal accommodation.

- Translate the pack into multiple languages. In the Barking and Dagenham case, asylum seeking volunteers supported translation.
- Orientation packs can swiftly become outdated. Expect to review them six monthly and collect feedback on how packs can be updated.

Keeping in contact with residents from the start

- It is valuable to have a system for gathering and managing contact with people seeking asylum. Many boroughs have early help case systems in place that can be expanded to support case work and general contact, which including storing permission to share data, and information on individuals' preferred communication methods (e.g. WhatsApp/SMS, language).
- As well as facilitating effective support, a data or case management system can facilitate the local authority' capability to reach out and learn from people's lived experience over time, potentially giving the authority a way to hear people's voices and feed lived experience into democratic processes.
- Newham, for example, has developed an in-house case management system that has helped improve their data tracking and quality assurance of casework.
 - The borough initially conducted a 'prioritisation' research exercise: consulting people seeking asylum and expert stakeholders to produce a list of priority needs for asylum seeking residents.
 - This has then informed a checklist of key needs which is used to assess residents in its 'Welcome Newham One Stop Shop' support hub, for example Have you got an aspen card? Have you received your section 95?
 - Data is logged in the case management system and residents are signposted to expert support based on their need, with staff members on each tracked for accountability.

3. Getting established

Many people have been in asylum accommodation in London for over two years and may have been moved between different sites. They could also be moved at short notice even before getting a decision on their asylum claim. Those in Dispersed Accommodation (e.g. self-catering in houses in multiple occupation) have often been there for long periods.

As the initial needs of people seeking asylum for direct aid (such as clothing), and support for early needs (such as GP and school registration) are increasingly satisfied, and time in the hotels extends, other needs become increasingly urgent. Digital access is a constraint, as are resources for travel and communication. As Pettit and Tsangarides highlighted in 2022, there is a common set of basic needs that facilitate access to immediate and more distant services and opportunities, even in diverse contexts and boroughs with different approaches:

Common set of basic needs for people seeking asylum

- orientation and information provision
- digital access and literacy
- access to cash and travel cards
- a good command of English
- mental health support.

- It is common for people in hotels for more than 8 months to develop mental health issues – depression, hopelessness and suicidal feelings.[Reference:1](#)
- People need positive activities, social interaction and connections, and support for positive identity to maintain wellbeing and good mental health.
- Longer term uncertainty and disempowerment can undermine people’s sense of capability and agency, and affect wellbeing and mental health. However, people who find themselves staying longer in hotels may build local relationships and knowledge about life in the borough and London – e.g. places to access food, places for worship.
- As well as their own use, some longer stay residents can become an asset for other hotel residents, as well as for hotel and local authority staff, and some will willingly step into that role, though many may prefer not to (see our [Coproduction and consultation](#) page). Despite the stresses, anxiety and sometimes boredom from lack of activity and variation, good support at this stage can maintain a sense of agency, and have a positive impact on people’s potential future integration.

Communication and English

People seeking asylum may be fluent in English, or speak little or no English. Where they speak English well they may be unfamiliar with the usage, dialects and communication habits they come across in their new country. Local authorities can facilitate good communication in a number of ways:

- adapt your use of language to aid understanding
- arrange for interpreters and/or train interpreters (see below)
- enable people to access activities that will increase language use and learning including interaction with other using English as the shared language, via informal and formal routes; facilitate access adult learning including ESOL provision. Local authorities can establish a ‘single point of access’ model.

Guidance for effective communication

Ensure your team’s spoken and written English language is accurate, plain and clear:

- Take your time, and ensure the pace of speech is appropriate.
- You might need to compromise on precision to get the core message across. ‘I am the Safeguarding Officer’ could be phrased ‘I am the officer who wants to make children safe’.
- Use standards set out by the [Campaign for Plain English](#).
- Use ‘Easy Read’ standards/methods including pictures designed to improve communication.
- Provide documents in Word or webpage format, not in PDF, so people can use translation software, but remember online translation may not be reliable.

When someone’s English is emerging, use an interpreter:

- Do not use family members: Spouses, adult children, close friends rarely ‘interpret’ – often they filter, summarise, advocate; it compromises confidentiality and risks negative impacts on the family member and relationships, especially concerning regarding impact on children.
- Local authorities might identify and train bi- or multi-lingual staff with the necessary knowledge and skills and qualifications.
 - Consider how their time interpreting, away from their usual job will be balanced.
 - Consider what remuneration is appropriate for the additional responsibilities.

- Consider the option of facilitating people seeking asylum to take interpreting qualifications; they can then volunteer to support your work, within suitable boundaries and supervision, gaining valuable transferable skills and experience;
- Use a professional interpreter who is self-employed or via an agency
 - An agency will charge £50+/hour, of which the interpreter gets about £17.
 - Telephone and video interpreting is usually charged by 15, 5, or 1 minute blocks.
 - Your local authority or local NHS may already have contracts in place with approved agencies.
 - Interpreting agencies should evidence that they have suitable insurance, minimum standards for qualifications, quality assurance, that interpreters have enhanced DBS checks in place; this points may need checking regularly.
- Recruit professional interpreters to join your team permanently. This may be a number of part time posts to cover a range of often-needed languages, supplemented by using agencies for other languages.
 - Employing interpreters as regular (part time) staff members greatly reduces the cost and improves the quality and reliability of interpreting.
 - It improves the employment situation of the interpreters, many of whom are refugees.
- Use face to face interpreting wherever feasible as the quality of communication is higher. Interpreters can also work by phone and online/video calls.

Please find below some further resources:

- [English \(ESOL\) classes in London](#). Use the maps on this page to find a formal or informal ESOL provider. Formal English classes will usually help learners work towards a qualification. Not all formal courses will lead to a qualification. Informal English classes will usually help them to build their confidence and improve their well-being.
- [Subscribe to the GLA's ESOL newsletter](#). The GLA publishes a monthly ESOL newsletter for organisations supporting Londoners with English language needs, including relevant news, case studies, course vacancies and training, funding and ESOL job opportunities.
- [Local ESOL Coordination](#). You will find several resources on this page for sign-posting and partnership work, including information on different models of local ESOL coordination, and templates to support effective data collection to inform curriculum design and planning.
- [Regional ESOL Coordination](#). This page contains research and data resources which can supporting planning at a local or regional level.
- [English Language \(ESOL\) for Resettlement Guidance](#): You can refer to this guidance for an overview of the different resettlement schemes and immigration routes, bespoke ESOL funding, an overview of ESOL and detailed information on funding streams, how to secure or commission provision and how to cater for childcare needs.
- [Supporting the ESOL Sector](#). Visit this page for ideas on different types of ESOL provision, including embedded options such as ESOL plus Arts, and working with volunteers.
- [Find adult learning providers near me](#)
- [Mayor of London's map of migrant support services](#)

Mental health and wellbeing

It is well recognised a high proportion of people seeking asylum present with mental distress often related to past traumatic experiences, including their displacement and journey to the UK. Mental health needs can also arise from a long period of uncertainty awaiting an asylum decision, and the process itself of seeking asylum, as well as the environment they are in including lengthy accommodation in hotels.

There is general agreement that capacity across the mental health sector is a challenge. Practitioners agree that while focused cultural appropriate trauma therapy remains inaccessible, people seeking asylum must be supported to develop emotional resilience to prevent or mitigate crises. Further suggestions on signposting people seeking asylum toward mental health support, and the important process of developing trauma informed approaches, are available via [Thrive LDN](#).

Suggestions to support mental health include:

- Trauma-informed practitioners / improved referral.
- Potential role of social prescribers and collaboration with VCS and local Primary Care Networks to offer alternative and supplementary provision where available.
- Freedom from Torture, Helen Bamber Foundation and the Refugee Council provide specialist therapeutic services.
- A nominated mental health link worker from the local PCN who can support embedded support services in Home Office accommodation in collaboration with local authority and children's services teams.
- Access to funds for transport for individuals so they can travel to mental health care.
- Peer support groups to share learning and recreate supportive communities.

4. Preparing for Moving on

The moment that someone gets a decision on their asylum claim – positive or negative – is usually one of huge change for an individual or family, and can easily become a crisis. New refugees often have no savings, no bank account and limited digital access. There is a delay before receiving the first Universal Credit payment, though Advance Payments can be applied for, but often people are destitute for several weeks, and may rely on individual contacts (leaving them vulnerable to abuse), or on charities providing food.

Migrant Help provides basic 'Positive Move On' advice via its subcontractor Reed in Partnership within the 28 days after a decision is received, in which they refer people to contact the local authority's housing department and the Job Centre.

However, many people struggle to access these services effectively, and many will not be provided with accommodation by the local authority if they are assessed as not meeting priority need criteria. Local authority Homelessness teams should assess people's eligibility for housing against criteria for 'priority need' set out in [legislation](#).

- Local authorities should access live data available to them, that indicates people who are about to receive cessation notices, though it may be only days before the deadline to leave the accommodation.
- Some local authorities may choose to send some form of communication, text or letter if they have contact details, inviting the new refugee to contact them for support.
- Local authorities assess each homelessness applicant in line with Duties and following the Homelessness Code of Guidance on priority need.
- A few local authorities offer a 'move on' support service, in addition to meeting statutory duties, that can provide information, advice and referrals to a range of relevant services for residents receiving a decision on their application. As set out on our [Outreach](#) page, this can be developed within an outreach approach, for example through migrant and community hubs where they exist. It may make use of existing outreach and drop-in sessions so people can reach out to support start during the 28 days after receiving their

decision letter.

Lambeth has set up a 'move on support' appointments booking system, with a simple online questionnaire filled in with help from hotel management or other support, after which a case worker contacts the person back, within 5 days, to develop a support pathway as they make the transition. Lambeth Sanctuary Services also hold weekly engagement sessions with hotel guests.

Newham - Move On service

Newham's Move On support is delivered through a '[one stop shop](#)'. This originally supported Ukrainian refugees, but branched out after the team noted that many of the services provided (housing, employability) were very similar for people seeking asylum. The service offers support with:

- Help with GP registration
- Universal Credit queries
- Housing costs and child benefit queries
- School admissions support
- Homelessness support
- BRP guidance
- ESOL registration
- Job seeking assistance
- Affordability assessments for private rented sector (PRS) accommodation
- Tenancy sustainment support.

Results and lessons:

- The Shop is hosted in Newham library every week (seen as a trusted space), and an additional workshop takes place weekly to provide advice on accessing private rental accommodation and social housing.
- The Shop has found that it is beneficial to communicate simply the main areas of move on support very clearly at the outset to set expectations.
- The Welcome Newham team brings in cross-department expertise to support the service: including a seconded housing officer, and representatives from 'Our Newham Money' and 'Our Newham Work'.

Housing

- Many people plan to stay in London, perhaps to remain in the city and live as Londoners for the rest of their lives. But people have at times assumed they will be provided with accommodation and that this will be in London and can be unprepared at the point they receive their decision and must find their own housing in 28 days or fewer by the point they receive notice to vacate. If a new refugee does not find accommodation in time, they will be homeless and may end up rough sleeping. The housing market in London at this time makes it difficult for new refugees to find affordable accommodation in the city.
- Many boroughs are challenged currently by the sudden scale of cessations. In the current housing situation, some local authorities are making new refugees offers of accommodation outside London, though the refugees are often initially reluctant to leave.
- Local authorities can examine options to engage early, and raise awareness among people seeking asylum of actions they will need to take, of what to expect and sources of support available for those who receive a positive decision. This can help people gain an accurate picture of what local authorities can realistically provide and also starting to raise awareness and even offer training and support in how to find housing in

the private rental sector.

- If engaging early, local authorities may be able to discuss the possibilities, pros and cons of moving outside London so that for people currently in the asylum process have time to consider this option before they have to make a decision. Preparation can start from the first day that a person arrives into a borough, especially if welcome and orientation activities are already in place.
- When someone has received a decision letter and may have to leave their asylum accommodation in 28 days or less, many will contact the local authority's homelessness team. The local authority has a duty to assess need, and to house families and people with priority needs. Local authorities can provide support to prevent homelessness for those who are not considered in priority need. At present, some local authorities:
 - provide new refugees advice and signpost to supportive landlords
 - provide group workshops, drop ins or one to one support to give training and pathway planning, informing and showing people how to seek and secure accommodation in the private rental sector, including developing material to give out
 - provide help with deposits
 - top up rent on top of the Local Housing Allowance if needed, to prevent homelessness.

Employment

Initiatives on employment can also start early to prepare residents for the UK labour market and support their employability. People seeking asylum are not allowed to work by default, unless they are granted a Work Permit for jobs on the Shortage Occupation List. REED in Partnership with partners provides a move on service from the Home Office, under the [Refugee Employability Programme](#).

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

[Back to table of contents](#)

References

- [Reference:1](#) Based on expert input from the Refugee Council to the GLA Design Lab team, 19 November 2023.