



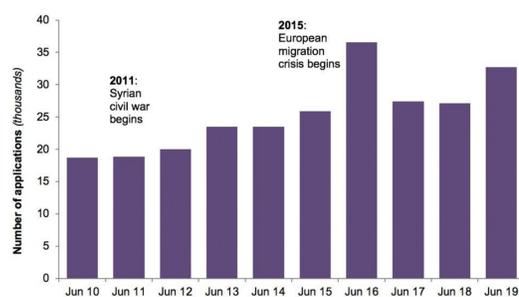
UK: A hostile environment

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Abstract

Focusing both on the policy dimension and the lived experiences of people seeking protection, our research shows that the UK asylum system has been driven by logics of control and deterrence, resulting in an ever increasing erosion of rights, destitution and insecurity. Asylum seekers and refugees become re-traumatised and marginalised, but also maintain their resilience and hopes.

Asylum applications lodged in the UK



Source: Home Office, *Immigration statistics* (22 Aug 2019)

References

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, the UK governments have eroded access to protection and the rights of third country nationals, in particular under the adoption of the '**hostile environment**' approach in 2011. Shaped by **racialised colonial legacies**, asylum and integration have been **securitised and politicised**, driven by reactions to major events and media-amplified 'anxieties', leading to short-sighted policy making instead of a clear focus on the long term. The Brexit process has added to this already 'hostile environment'.

Main Results

Our analysis identifies three key characteristics of UK policies of asylum, reception and integration:

Control and deterrence

UK policy is driven by **control and deterrence**. Practices of control are embedded in provisions for entry and deportation, but also in arrangements for dispersed accommodation, reporting obligations, benefits, and the extensive use of detention. Asylum and welfare rights have been progressively eroded. The resulting **destitution and insecurity** are seen a strategy for deterring asylum seeking.

Stratification of rights and devolved implementation

Entitlements to housing, benefits, education, healthcare and employment **are stratified** according to legal status, stage in the asylum process and more recently on arrival through resettlement schemes. While policy making is highly centralised, there is considerable variation in entitlements and access to support across countries (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and local authorities, creating further **inequalities**.

Barriers to Integration

Exclusion, destitution, and insecurity have a fundamental impact on integration. Asylum seekers and refugees identified many factors hampering a sense of belonging and integration:

long waiting times for asylum decisions, feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty, exclusion from employment, destitution, discrimination and a complex legal process for acquiring citizenship.

Methods and Material

- Analysis of legal and policy documents.
- Semi structured interviews with 15 asylum seekers and refugees in London, Glasgow, Cambridge, Cardiff and Kent.
- Interviews conducted with 16 stakeholders in England and Scotland.



Lessons Learned

UK asylum, reception and integration policies are oriented towards control and deterrence rather than the needs of asylum seekers and safeguarding their rights. 'Hostile environment' policies have exacerbated these trends, engendering calls for a more humane and dignified system.

Exclusion from rights and entitlements, in particular the working ban for asylum seekers, has detrimental consequences on their wellbeing and integration.

Family and ethnic networks enable newcomers to experience a much swifter overall process of integration by providing a sense of support and security and economic stability. The place of living is vital as it strengthens the sense of belonging and home.