



Refugee Education UK

A vision for refugee children's education in the UK

June 2025



A word from the Refugee Education UK youth advocates

“As refugee and asylum-seeking students in England, we believe that **education is a beacon of hope for newly arriving students seeking sanctuary in this country**, offering them the chance to rebuild their lives and work towards a brighter future.

Accessing education was not without challenge, and we are **grateful to the educators and support workers who helped us navigate the complexities of the system** and offered flexibility and guidance at crucial moments. This not only empowered us to believe in ourselves again but gave us the sense of belonging and home we were seeking.

For those of us who have faced displacement and uncertainty, **education is more than just a pathway—it is a lifeline, opening doors to possibilities that once seemed out of reach**. These recommendations are a reflection of the change we want to see to ensure young people seeking sanctuary in the UK can easily and meaningfully access education.”

Written by Harneet, Helen and Khoshhal



About Refugee Education UK (REUK)

We are working towards a world where all refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people can access education, thrive in education, and use that education to create a hopeful, brighter future.

Each year we support around two thousand children and young people through our direct frontline work, train and advise around 500 schools, colleges and universities and carry out rigorous research on what works in refugee education, for Local Authorities, universities and United Nations agencies.

Why this matters

In conflict, schools are destroyed, occupied by armed groups and used to shelter displaced people. Where learning continues, students and teachers can be targets of violence. For many, continuing to learn is just not possible.

When children and families are forced to flee their homes, they miss out on more education as they make dangerous journeys trying to find a place of safety.

For young refugees arriving in the UK, education is a priority; it's how lives begin to be rebuilt, and hope for the future is rekindled. But getting back into and progressing in education is fraught with challenge.

Children and young people wait up to a year for school or college places, and, by the time they reach GCSE level, unaccompanied refugee children are on average 3 years behind their non-migrant peers.

But things can be different.

For many years, the young people we work with have told us that education is one of the few forward looking things in their lives

We believe that when we invest in education, it sends a clear and powerful message of hope: that there is a future, and it's a future worth investing in and preparing for.



**“Education is the key that
opens the door to a more
hopeful future”**

Things can be different

There is no overarching policy or strategy for the integration of refugee children into education in the UK. REUK would be delighted to work with the Department for Education to draft a strategy and ensuing implementation guidelines. In the meantime, these are the actions that would lead to the biggest changes for children and young people.

To reduce the wait and enable access:



Safely track data on refugee and asylum seeking children missing from education¹



Create an alternative approach to lagged and uplift funding²



Reduce the educational impact of immigration dispersal³

¹ Statutory guidance identifies children of new migrant families as at particular risk of missing education, and states that local authorities should ensure “there are effective tracking and enquiry systems in place”. While data is currently collected on access to education for children from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong, it is not collected more widely. This means that - apart from research conducted by REUK together with Unicef UK and The Bell Foundation - the full reality of how many displaced children are out of education, and how long they remain out of education, is not known. Data that is collected - including through new measures proposed in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill must only ever be used for safeguarding purposes and the promotion of children’s wellbeing and not for immigration enforcement.

² An alternative to lagged funding is needed to ensure that schools and colleges receive appropriate funding for pupils who arrive after the census, and refugee children can access school whatever time of year they arrive. Uplift funding is currently applied for some refugee children (those from Ukraine and on certain Afghan resettlement schemes) but not others - yet refugee children from Eritrea, Sudan and Iran amongst others have similar needs, and a consistent approach should be adopted.

³ Current dispersal policy leaves young people out of education for long periods of time, resulting in safeguarding and wellbeing risks. At present, the impact of dispersal on a child’s education is only considered if the child is in their final year of school or college and preparing for GCSE, AS or A-Level exams. Education considerations should be extended to all displaced young people facing dispersal.



Fund and resource appropriate, short-term interim provision⁴



Address the complexity of information about further education (FE) entitlements, and ease admissions and enrolment processes⁵



Implement home fees and access to student finance at the higher education (HE) level for a wider group of forcibly displaced young people, including through safe and legal education pathways⁶

⁴ Amidst a reality of refugee children who have already often experienced multiple years of lost learning waiting months for places in a mainstream environment, short-term interim programmes and bespoke initiatives provided by the local authority, the charity sector and education institutions bridge an important gap. This provision must be appropriately resourced and funded. It should be considered a route to facilitating and speeding up access to mainstream education - but never a replacement for this.

⁵ The complexity of FE rights and entitlements for refugee and asylum-seeking young people regularly translates into poor quality, inaccurate or incomprehensible information being provided to young people and those who support them, as well as admission and enrolment staff, about access to FE for displaced children and young people. Specific sub-guidance for displaced young people and those supporting them should be created.

⁶ Asylum seeking students are currently charged international student fees and are ineligible for student finance - but, unlike international students, are not allowed to work. Displaced students who have been granted limited forms of protection also face a number of related barriers that make progressing to tertiary education very difficult. And unlike many other countries, the UK has no education-oriented safe and legal route, through for example, expanded community sponsorship. Yet these talented young people want to study, work and contribute to the UK economy, often in shortage professions.

To close the attainment gap and allow children to thrive:



Invest in English as a Additional Language (EAL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision⁷



Invest in social and emotional wellbeing and mental health support⁸



Overcome lost learning by drawing on emerging good practice in accelerated learning and condensed curricula – and allow children longer to reach key milestones⁹



Promote whole school approaches to inclusion and teacher training that addresses the specific support needs of forcibly displaced children¹⁰

⁷ Over one in five children in state-funded schools in England speak English as an Additional Language. Yet, in 2011, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant funding was removed and the “EAL factor” in the National Funding Formula, which replaced it, has increased at half the rate of funding for other pupils. As a result, the majority of dedicated expertise and support for EAL pupils has disappeared from the system (see The Bell Foundation and the Education Policy Institute for more).

⁸ Trauma, grief and forced displacement has an evidenced impact on the learning brain. School based social and emotional learning and support is a significant enabler of coping and ultimately thriving in the classroom for displaced children.

⁹ Several education institutions in the UK have piloted approaches to boost academic attainment (particularly at GCSE level) amongst learners with both English as an Additional Language and severely interrupted education. These programmes have typically drawn on international learning in using accelerated learning and condensed, EAL infused curricula for refugee children. In addition, at FE level, children and young people who arrived late into the UK education system should be provided with longer routes to GCSE and other key qualifications without funding penalties for the institution.

¹⁰ The free [REUK Education Professionals Network](#) offers comprehensive training and resources to teachers, developed in partnership with the University of Nottingham, The Bell Foundation and others.

Further reading

We've kept this short and to the point, so it can be read in its entirety in 5 minutes. The issues are, however, complex and nuanced. To learn more about the topline issues identified in this briefing we recommend:

	Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children's Achievement: A Policy Briefing. Education Policy Institute, Refugee Education UK and The Bell Foundation. 2025.
	Make or Break: Further Education enrolment for refugee and asylum seeking learners. Refugee Education UK. 2025
	Education for Late Arrivals: Examining education provision for displaced young people arriving in the UK late in the education system. Refugee Education UK and The Bell Foundation. 2024.
	Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Early childhood education and care for the youngest refugee and asylum-seeking children in England. Refugee Education UK and Unicef UK. 2023.
	Promoting the inclusion of refugee children in schools: Recommendations for secondary education policy in England. Refugee Education UK and The University of Nottingham. 2023
	Education transitions for refugee and asylum seeking young people in the UK: exploring the journey to further and higher education. Refugee Education UK and Unicef UK. 2020.
	Education for refugee and asylum seeking children: Access and equality in England, Scotland and Wales. Refugee Education UK and Unicef UK. 2019.



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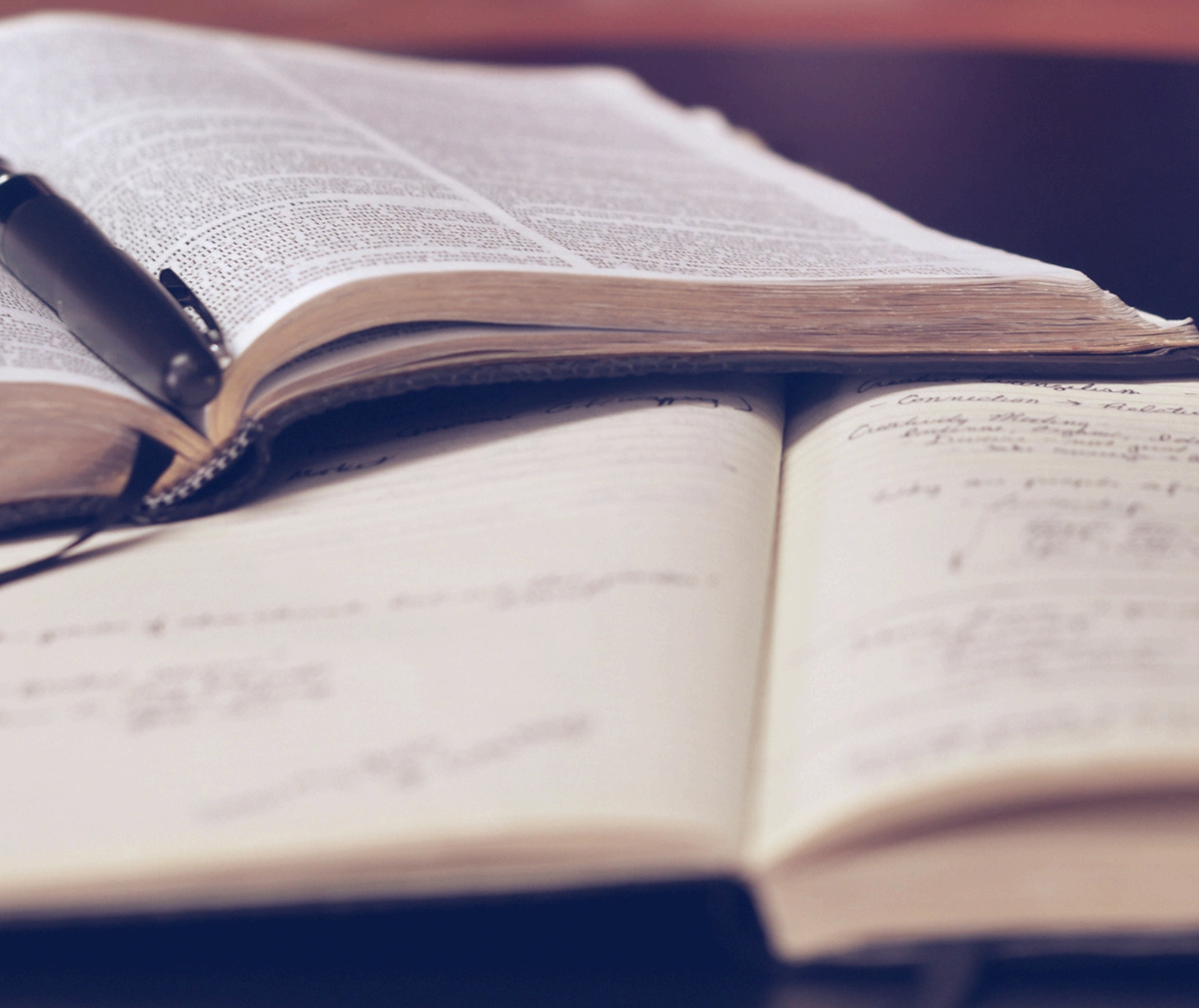
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