Global Exchange on Migration & Diversity at COMPAS

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Improving Education Outcomes for Displaced 16–19 year olds in Oxfordshire

RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW

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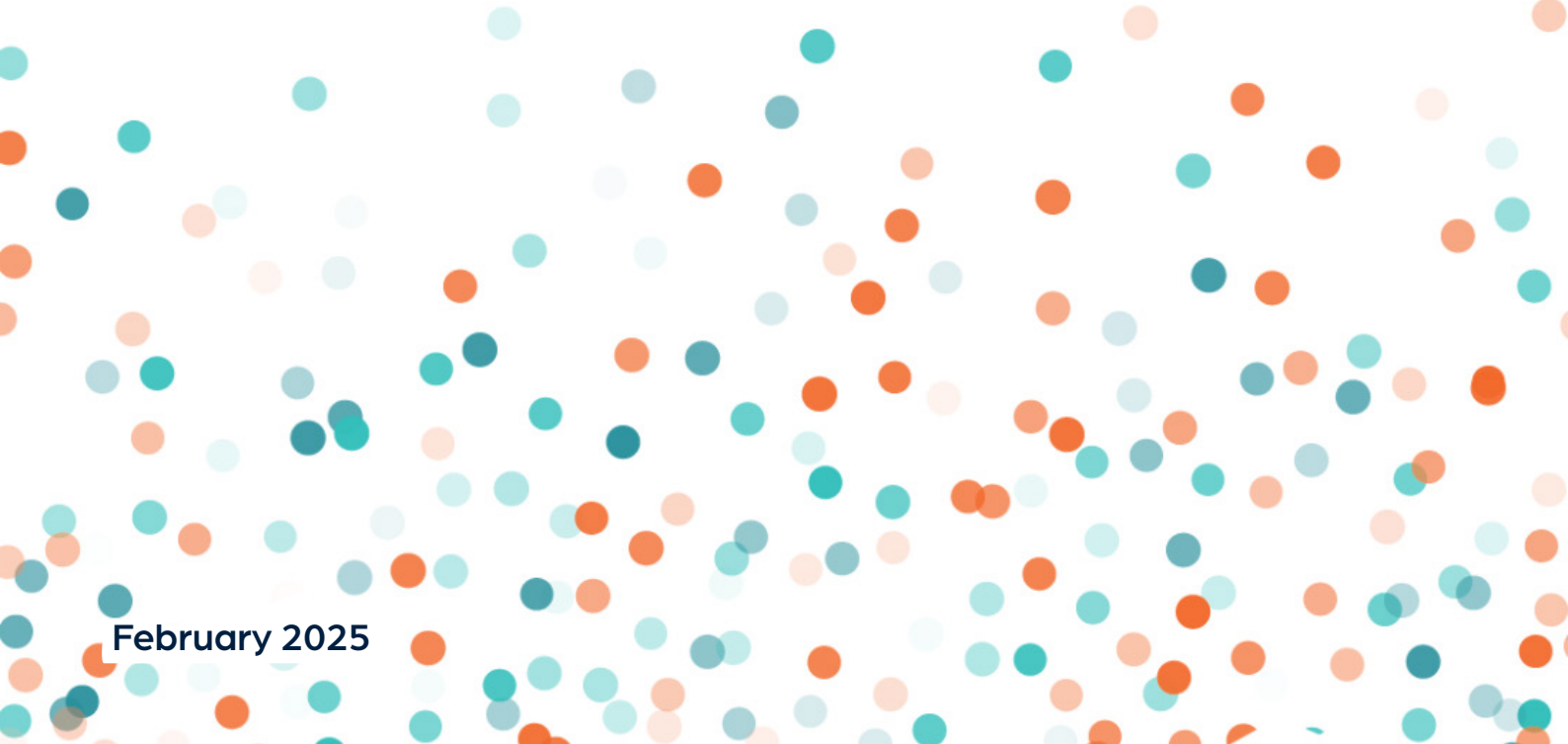

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Disclaimer

COMPAS does not have a Centre view and does not aim to present one. All views expressed in the document are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of funders, those providing feedback, COMPAS or the University of Oxford. *Competing interests: The author(s) declare none.*

Executive Summary

Background

Since 2021, Oxfordshire has seen a significant increase in its population of recently arrived children and young people arriving with their families, through the UK's bespoke humanitarian pathways from Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong.

Oxfordshire County Council has identified a number of key challenges for older children aged 16-19 across these three cohorts in accessing education, employment, training and wider support in order to meet their aims and aspirations. This briefing highlights some of the existing academic and policy literature on this issue, including the multiple challenges displaced 16-19 year old young people face accessing education, existing approaches across the UK, and the gaps in policy and provision.

Summary of evidence base

- Displaced young people are not a homogeneous group and have wide-ranging pre-arrival experiences and post arrival experiences in the UK. Young people will have come from various socio-economic backgrounds, with different upbringings and family set-ups and face different challenges.
- There is a significant gap in literature around displaced 16-19 year old young people's post-compulsory education and their longer-term outcomes (Morrice et al., 2019). We outline some identified challenges and evidence gaps in the literature on 16-19 year old young people newly arriving in the UK.
- There is often a disconnect between displaced young people's aspirations and the reality they experience, post-arrival in the UK. Newly arrived young people in the UK face individual, family, environmental and systemic challenges trying to access post-compulsory education, employment and training in the UK. The existing evidence outlines pre and post arrival challenges:

Prior experiences	Post-arrival experiences in the UK
- Disrupted education, with potentially long periods spent out of education - Long periods spent in transit to the UK or living in third country - Lack of (transferrable) qualifications - Experiences of conflict, violence and trauma, impacting mental health	- Limited English language provision - Delays accessing education - Limited support understanding/navigating the UK education system - Limited pathways and opportunities for post-16, without strong ESOL levels and transferrable qualifications - Limited funding, including no access to home fees for higher education for BN(O) students - Temporary housing and lack of clarity on where they will settle in the UK - Precarious immigration status hindering their ability to access opportunities and their sense of stability to feel invested in their future in the UK - Financial hardship including no recourse to public funds for BN(O) families - Isolation and loneliness - Discrimination, racism and bullying

Policy Context

There is no national education policy for displaced children and no national integration and social inclusion strategy for supporting newly arrived migrants and refugees into the UK labour market. Whilst the Department of Education provides guidance for supporting unaccompanied displaced children and young people into education (Department for Education, 2017; Department for Education, 2018), no such provision exists for children arriving with their families.

Instead, education and social inclusion for displaced young people are facilitated at the local level, through schools/colleges, local authorities and the voluntary sector, with charities often playing a key role providing interim education whilst young people face delays to access mainstream provision (Ashlee, 2024). Our evidence review highlights existing approaches set up at a local authority level, city level and sometimes on an individual school/college level. Very few existing models specifically focus on the needs of young people aged 16-19. As there is still limited information published on schemes set up specifically for young people from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, we have also included models targeting a wider group of migrant young people. There is a gap in detailed evaluations of many of the existing schemes, so it is challenging to assess the quality or depth of support provided. Whilst these examples below do not necessarily focus on addressing the relevant needs of 16-19 year olds arriving from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, they still provide learning for local policymakers on how to develop

similar local-level provision as well as learning for national policymakers on how to develop national policy to improve the support provided by local government.

Existing local approaches include:

- Bespoke specialist provision to support newly arrived young people who are unable to access school or college. Examples include Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team (NEST), full-time provision for newly arrived 16-19 year old young people, providing education and work placements for young people to gain work experience and the Baytree Centre in London's Into School transition programme for newly arrived girls into the UK education system through single-sex empowering spaces.
- **Accelerated school programmes to support new arrivals with catching up on the curriculum** (Newman Catholic College in London and Cardiff Cathays High School).
- Local authorities providing a specialist **bilingual support project for displaced children from Ukraine, providing needs assessments, language support and community engagement with families** (London Borough of Hillingdon Ukrainian Team).
- Schools/colleges recruiting **school staff who speak the relevant community languages to act as points of contact for parents and upskill wider school staff on cultural sensitivities and context** (Broadoak Secondary School, Partington in Manchester).
- Local government partnering with local community groups to run **training for newly arrived parents and young people on the UK education system, school curriculum and career pathways in the UK** (East of England Strategic Migration Partnership, West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership).
- Local authorities producing a **guide for newly arrived families on going to school in the UK and guidance for supporting international new arrivals with special educational needs into education** (Hampshire Council, Middlesbrough Council, Sandwell Council).
- Regional government funding holistic support, including helplines for newly arrived families, **therapeutic support for families and training for education providers to upskill staff to increase their confidence in supporting newly arrived families** (North West Strategic Migration Partnership).
- Third-sector organisations providing resources packs for colleges and schools with practical tips and guidance on supporting newly arrived young people and preparing students for transitions (Colleges of Sanctuary, Refugee Education UK).

Gaps in Policy and Provision

Existing literature highlights numerous gaps with recommendations for improving practice:

Provision of educational support and guidance:

- Need for a coordinated and more flexible approach to include young people aged 16-19 arriving mid-year in the education system.
- Need for tailored provision specifically focusing on the educational needs of young people 16-19 who are of post-compulsory school age.
- Need for more flexible bridging programmes that support young people with catching up on missed education and building English language skills.
- Ensuring inclusive provision meets a wide range of needs, recognising displaced young people are not a homogeneous group.
- Employing staff from the community who have the shared cultural experience and language to support with parent and pupil engagement.
- Focusing targeted work on supporting young people and their families with applications to post-16 education, providing ongoing advocacy in case of inadvertent institutional gatekeeping.
- Shifting from short-term opportunities towards long-term education planning and support.
- Setting up buddying and mentoring schemes to support young people on a one-to-one basis.
- Ensuring staff are trained to understand the cultural sensitivities, relevant country context and recognise how young people may be more vulnerable as a result of prior/post-arrival experiences, systemic barriers faced in the UK and having a precarious immigration status.

Partnership working:

- Working in partnership with and funding local voluntary sector organisations/ community groups to build trusting relationships and meaningfully engage with local communities.
- Drawing on the expertise of people with lived experience, involving students, parents and community leaders to develop holistic and culturally sensitive educational practices and policies.

Approach:

- Developing provision that caters to the wider needs of newly arrived young people and their families, focusing on social inclusion, signposting towards relevant advice services, and

supporting parents with ESOL and understanding the UK education system so that they feel more confident supporting their children.

- Whilst it is important to recognise how young people's circumstances can make them more vulnerable, moving beyond a deficit-based approach and instead taking an asset-based approach, harnessing young people's strengths, qualities and resilience to support young people to thrive.

Full Report

Background

Since 2021, Oxfordshire has seen a significant increase in its population of recently arrived children and young people arriving with their families through the UK's bespoke humanitarian routes from Afghanistan[1], Ukraine and Hong Kong. Oxfordshire County Council has identified a number of critical challenges for older children aged 16-19 in accessing education, employment, training and wider support to fulfil their aims and aspirations. Whilst existing literature often focuses on the particular challenges facing unaccompanied young people accessing education without the support and guidance from their families, this evidence review focuses on children arriving in the UK with their family members and who are unlikely to receive support from children's social care/virtual schools with accessing education, employment and training.

This report covers the existing academic and policy literature on displaced 16-19 year old young people's education outcomes in the UK, including the multiple challenges young people face accessing education, existing approaches across the UK as well as gaps in policy and provision.

1. Profile of displaced young people arriving with their families in Oxfordshire

Firstly, whilst young people across these three cohorts will have some similar experiences arriving in the UK at a pivotal moment in their education and reconciling prior aspirations with a new reality upon arrival, **displaced young people are not a homogeneous group and will have wide-ranging experiences, both pre- and post- arrival in the UK. Young people will have come from various socio-economic backgrounds, with different upbringings and family set-ups.** Drawing on Hunt, Aleghfeli and McIntyre's socio-ecological framework (2023), we can see the multi-layered context influencing displaced young people's educational access, pathways and longer-term outcomes. Young people's education outcomes are shaped on an individual level, through their family relationships and in their day-to-day environment, through their experience in the wider local community and through national educational and institutional policies and culture. Young people's experiences and outcomes are also likely to vary depending on the specific time of year they arrive in the UK, their age upon arrival, the school calendar year and socio-historical and political events at the time. With this in mind, we have highlighted **potential**

[1] Throughout this report, we will be referring to Afghan young people as people who have arrived through the two Afghan resettlement schemes; however, we note that many Afghan young people have also arrived separately as asylum-seekers due to the limitations with accessing humanitarian safe routes and will have very different rights and entitlements in the UK.

challenges that some displaced young people may have experienced but this will not be everyone's experiences.

Secondly, there is a **significant gap in the literature around displaced 16-19 year old young people's post-compulsory education and their longer-term outcomes** (Morrice et al., 2019). The emerging approaches developed in light of the UK's new humanitarian pathways have only been developed in the last three years, and so there is, therefore, limited evidence on approaches and outcomes for newly arrived young people on the Afghan, Hong Kong BN(O) and Ukraine pathways to draw on. Hence, we have included literature spanning the last decade covering a wider cohort of displaced young people, highlighting learning from UK resettlement schemes and research focused on unaccompanied young people. We outline some of the challenges identified below, but the gap in evidence reiterates why **further in-depth research is needed around supporting 16-19 year old young people newly arrived in the UK.**

2. Challenges in accessing education, employment, training and wider support

2.1 Pre-arrival experiences

2.1.1 Prior education

Displaced young people will have **varying levels of literacy, education and English language skills, depending on their country context and their families' capacity to support them to access education**. Displaced young people are likely to have experienced **disrupted education and potentially long periods out of education**, including living in temporary accommodation in third countries and in transit to the UK. As a result, many young people may not have been able to gain the expected qualifications for their age, and for those that do, their qualifications may not be easily transferrable in the UK.

Young people may have varying levels of English. Research into the needs of BN(O) families highlights **that even when young people have higher levels of spoken English as many Hongkonger families do, schools have reported that young people may still need additional English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision to support with grammar and writing** (Benson & Rolfe, 2023). However, EAL provision is still patchy around the UK, with no official minimum standards for EAL tuition (ibid.).

2.1.2 Prior life experiences

It is also essential for educators to understand that displaced young people and their families may have experienced **challenging and traumatic experiences in their home countries and along their journey to the UK, impacting their mental health** (Ashlee, 2024; McIntyre & Abrams, 2021).

Ukrainian and Afghan young people may have experienced and witnessed **war, conflict, violence and loss, including being separated from and losing family members and friends.** Some young people from Afghanistan may have witnessed a lifetime of conflict and violence and grown up or lived for extended periods in refugee camps or a third country.

Whilst young people from Hong Kong may not have had similar experiences, they or their families may have been **involved in political protests or witnessed human rights violations. As a result, some Hongkongers may be mistrustful of official advice in the UK and prefer to rely on information in Cantonese shared through social media channels. Some families may still be concerned for their safety in the UK,** keeping a low profile as they settle through fear of repercussions for family members in Hong Kong (Rolfe & Chan, 2022). Whilst Hongkongers may be perceived by education professionals as more self-sufficient and needing less support, recent research has highlighted recently arrived Hongkongers talking openly about their mental health, including depression, anxiety and PTSD (ibid.).

2.2 Post-Arrival Experiences in the UK

Whilst there is often a focus on young people's traumatic pre-arrival experiences**, young people are often made more vulnerable as a result of their post-arrival experiences in the UK, living in temporary accommodation, uncertain about their rights and future in the UK, adapting to a shift in family dynamics and responsibilities, all whilst navigating a new and unfamiliar educational system where they may encounter systemic discrimination and racism.**

2.2.1 Family Contexts

Loss and separation

The majority of children arriving on the humanitarian pathways arrive with their parents. However, some **children may still be experiencing loss and separation, separated from one of their parents or close family members who are still in their home/third country**. Seventy-three per cent of adult arrivals on the Homes for Ukraine scheme are female, indicating that many children will arrive without their fathers (Home Office, 2024). Immigration rules across the three schemes may have also prevented families from bringing key family members, including grandparents, aunts, or uncles who may have played a significant part in raising children and who have acted as de facto primary carers at times. **Mental health and well-being may be impacted, as children may be particularly anxious and worried about their missing parent or extended family's safety and well-being** (Refugee Education UK, 2021; Rolfe & Benson, 2023; Ryan et al., 2022).

Older children's experiences

Displaced children's **experiences can vary depending on their birth order within their individual family** (Thomson et al., 2024), as expectations of children and their responsibilities within the family can vary. **Older children may have the added responsibility of caring for younger siblings** (Shakya et al., 2014) **or providing financial support for the family**. It can also be more challenging for older children to settle upon arrival, particularly if they feel they have missed rites of passage, including graduation (Vetere & Shimwell, 2023). All children may struggle with isolation and loneliness post-migration as they adjust to new friendships, however it can be more intense for **older children who maintain strong ongoing social and cultural ties with friends in their home country who have stayed behind.** Research into the needs of Hongkongers highlighted older teenagers actively staying up into the night to be in touch with friends in different time zones, impacting their energy levels during the school day and ability and willingness to make new friends (Benson & Rolfe, 2023).

Shifting family dynamics

Ukrainians on the Homes for Ukraine scheme may **benefit from the support of living with hosts who provide additional support understanding the UK education system, in understanding the relevant pathways, and helping with practical support with applications** (ONS, 2023). However, existing literature also highlights the challenges for families living with hosts, where the relationship with hosts may, at times, feel disempowering and infantilising for the parent, undermining their status within the family (Vetere & Shimwell, 2023). Migration can have an impact on family dynamics - sometimes with a role reversal (O'Toole Thomsen & Todd, 2018), with **children becoming the social navigator, providing language and cultural brokering for their**

parent(s) (Mazarik et al., 2022) **and parents previously in full-time employment may find themselves as stay at home parents** (Benson and Chan, 2022), **shifting the power dynamics within the family** and between adults/children.

Parental support

Parental capacity to support young people with accessing and navigating the UK education system can be instrumental in helping young people fulfil their aspirations. However:

- **Some displaced parents may also not have the English language fluency to be able to support their children.** Whilst there has been government funding for ESOL provision for the three cohorts**,** for Afghan families, there has been a significant variation in the levels of support different local authorities have provided. In some areas, the local provision of ESOL and support into employment has been limited with many **refugees still lacking basic English skills two years post arrival** (Burns et al., 2023). Whilst Hongkonger parents are more likely to have English language skills, they may not necessarily be familiar with the technical jargon related to the UK education system to be able to fully understand written communication about their children's education. Research into the needs of Hongkonger families highlighted the importance of materials being translated into Cantonese for newly arrived Hongkonger families, despite their high levels of English literacy (Benson & Rolfe, 2023).
- **Displaced parents may be unfamiliar with the UK system and struggle to provide children with the relevant support and guidance to access and navigate the system, choose GCSEs/A-Levels and decide on the relevant pathways to fulfil their educational aspirations** (Ashlee, 2024; Benson & Chan, 2022). Hongkonger parents also reported not having enough information about schools' curriculums, homework, extracurricular activities and even the structure of the day and did not always find the staff as responsive to their questions (Benson & Rolfe, 2023). Parents with children with special educational needs (SEN) may prefer to approach local community organisations in more informal environments to discuss how the UK system works and SEN provision (ibid.).
- **Displaced families may also lack the digital skills, technology and Wi-Fi access to support their children with the online school/college application process and the relevant online platforms used by education providers for homework and additional online learning** (Lloyd, 2022).

2.2.2 Local environment

Gaps in advocacy

Displaced young people and their families may lack the social networks and connections in the UK to support them with understanding how to navigate educational pathways (Morrice et al., 2019). Encountering a multitude of never-ending challenges and systemic barriers can hinder young people's feelings of self-belief and self-worth, hampering their capacity to pursue their long-term aspirations (Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020). Having an advocate to push for access to and support with navigating systems and providing ongoing support over an extended period can make a significant difference to young people's opportunities and progression (ibid.).

Whilst children in care may benefit from having a dedicated social worker or a virtual school advocating for their access to education and training, there **is no obvious statutory champion advocating for children in families and helping them navigate the UK education system**. Some Ukrainian nationals may have benefitted from support from their hosts, however others have had mixed experiences with their hosts and found themselves in an "informational vacuum" (Kuznetsova et al., 2024) and like Afghans and Hongkongers, may have to rely on support from within the community or third sector organisations. Research with the BN(O) community indicates that some Hongkonger families intentionally moved to areas without an existing population of Hongkongers "to avoid the development of a 'little Hong Kong', and to encourage their children to socialise and integrate with local pupils while at school" (Benson & Rolfe, 2023). Whilst this may have benefits, it can also mean that some BN(O) families may have limited community support in their local area.

Housing

In order to be able to focus on education, young people need to have their basic needs met (Refugee Council, 2024). However many young people may be living in insecure and temporary housing, which can be overcrowded with limited private and quiet space for studying. Many families may still be unsure of where they will settle in the UK. Many Afghan families have spent a substantial period of time waiting in hotels and temporary accommodation, with limited information on where they will eventually be dispersed to, preventing families from feeling settled and invested in their local area and community, able to rebuild their lives by enrolling in education or finding employment (Quie, 2024; Ryan et al., 2024). Some Ukrainian families have also experienced housing insecurity, with challenges moving from host accommodation into the private rented sector or, in some cases, following an abrupt breakdown in the relationship with hosts (Kuznetsova et al., 2024).

School/College Environment

Young people's age upon arrival in the UK can be pivotal. Schools "caught within a multi-layered immigration–education performance nexus" (McIntyre and Hall, 2018) may be reluctant to enrol 15-16 year olds arriving at a critical exam period within the UK education system (McIntyre & Hall, 2018, Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018; Morrice et al., 2019). Young people may also arrive mid-year, at which point local schools and colleges may not have any places left. **The educational pipeline narrows the later young people arrive in the UK, and instead of benefitting from full-time education, young people may find themselves restricted to further education, with their only option being part-time ESOL courses in classes with adults instead of their peers** (Morrice et al., 2019). **Without the proper support and guidance, older displaced young people are at an increased risk of being unable to fulfil their potential and instead "assimilated into a low wage economy of precarity and poverty"** (ibid.). Whilst there are some pockets of specialist ESOL provision for displaced young people (see pages 15-17), many young people are **frustrated with the limited education options at further education level, with a slow pace of learning and limited study hours not meeting their needs or ambition** (Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020). Whilst the UK system requires GCSEs in English and Maths to progress into further education, employment and training, there is still minimal support to help displaced young people achieve these two key qualifications if they arrive post 16 (Morrice et al., 2021). **Having to delay or pause their educational plans can have a significant impact on young people's well-being, creating additional uncertainty during an already challenging period of transition** (Oliver & Hughes, 2018).

Even when children can access mainstream schools, schools do not always have the capacity to provide tailored and individualised support, limiting support at best to pastoral care and additional ESOL support based on "**a simplistic view of educational integration as "mainstreaming" the student as soon as possible**" (McIntyre & Hall, 2018). Young people may also not necessarily understand the school's academic expectations of them at a young age, and if they do not perform well at GCSEs, how this then limits post 16 options (Morrice et al., 2019).

Hongkonger children also face a specific challenge, given that school years in Hong Kong are different to the UK. Hongkongers aged 16 find themselves in a particularly challenging situation as they are at the equivalent level of Year 10 students when students are aged 14-15 – however, they may not be ready to start sixth form but are too old to start GCSEs (Benson & Rolfe, 2023). The research suggests that a policy solution could be for schools to consider setting up a 'pre-sixth form' year for students to study the Year 12 syllabus in advance of joining Year 12 (ibid.).

2.2.3 Systemic Issues

Immigration status and leave to remain

Displaced young people are also likely to have different immigration statuses with varying periods of leave to remain in the UK, which can impact how settled and invested in their future in the UK young people and their families feel. Afghan and Hongkonger families have the option of a route to long-term settlement in the UK, with Afghan nationals being granted indefinite leave to remain upon arrival and Hongkongers being granted 2.5 – 5 years with the option of applying for indefinite leave to remain as it expires. Ukrainian families are on a shorter visa route (up to 3 years) and from February 2025, they will have the option of applying to extend it for 18 months, however they do not have access to a clear route to long-term settlement in the UK. Evidence indicates that this **time-limited status impacts communities' ability to feel settled and invested in their future in the UK** (Benson et al., 2024; Kuznetsova et al., 2024). Families applying to extend their visas in 2025 may feel pressure and uncertainty with the application process, as well as being able to evidence their right to live and work in the UK in the interim (Hall, 2025).

Table 1: UK Government Policy on entitlements for the different humanitarian schemes.

	Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme & Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy	Hong Kong British National (Overseas)	Ukraine Family Scheme, Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, Ukraine Extension Scheme
Length of leave to remain	Indefinite leave to remain	2.5 years or 5 years, with the option of applying for indefinite leave to remain after 5 years	Up to 3 years Leave to Remain for applications prior to 19 February 2024, with the option of applying for a visa extension for 18 months under the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme.
Local Authority funding per education	Home Office funding: - £4,500 for education per child aged 5-18 - £2,250 for education per child aged 3-4 Additional Department for Education funding in 2021-22 and 2022-23 for children in bridging hotels: - early years (ages two-to-four) – £3,000; - primary – £6,580; - secondary – £8,755	Local authorities can only claim funding of up to £850 per adult to support access to English language classes for those on the BN(O) route for courses commenced after 1 April 2024	Local authorities can only access funding for Ukrainians on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, not for Ukrainians on the family or extension schemes. Ukraine education tariff in 2022-23, no longer continued in the 2023-24 financial year
Higher Education Tuition fees	Entitled to home fees and student finance	Not entitled to home fees or student finance, as subject to the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' visa condition	Entitled to home fees and student finance

Sources include: Home Office Funding Instruction for local authorities in the support of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy, Department for Education Funding Instructions for the Afghanistan resettlement education grant and the South East Strategic Migration Partnership

Local Authority Education funding

In addition to the variation in length of leave to remain, there are also **discrepancies in local authority funding for the different schemes.** Unlike the Afghan and Ukrainian schemes, local authorities do not receive education funding for the BN(O) scheme, only support for ESOL for adults.

Higher Education

The **complexity of the different immigration categories, coupled with further education / higher education admissions staff's limited understanding of migrants' eligibility** (Oliver, 2023) **means some students may inadvertently be denied admission to further/higher education**.

Financial barriers may also prevent young people from being able to access higher education. Whilst young people on the Ukrainian and Afghan pathways are eligible for home fees and student finance, **young people on the BN(O) pathway are excluded from home fees and student finance until they have gained indefinite leave to remain and been in the UK for five years, unless resident in Scotland where they can access home fees after three years. With international fees ranging from 10,000-£40,000 per year, lower-income BN(O) families face considerable financial pressure to afford university pathways for their children.** This has repeatedly been flagged as a concern amongst BN(O) families (Benson & Chan, 2022; Benson & Rolfe, 2023; Rolfe & Benson, 2023; Cheung & Foster, 2023), impacting parents as well as young people who feel anxious and stressed, with some young people feeling like they "have few choices other than to go into employment and put their education and future lives on hold." (Rolfe & Chan, 2022).

The UK Government has introduced funding to universities to support Ukrainian students and in Scotland, Ukrainian students are eligible for free tuition. The British Council has also introduced funding for university scholarships to resettled Afghan students. However, there does not appear to be any specific higher education funding to support Hongkonger students with accessing university.

The accumulative pressure and stressful process of applying to university in the UK, particularly without the support of an advocate, can take its toll on young people's mental health, exacerbating existing pressure. The additional pressure of then being unsuccessful with the application was described by young people as particularly devastating (Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020). For students who are able to overcome the barriers and attend university, some may experience social exclusion and feelings of invalidation and a lack of belonging and institutions may not provide the appropriate support throughout the time at university or with transition post-graduation (Oliver, 2023).

Access to public funds

Unlike Ukrainian and Afghan nationals, **BN(O) status holders are subject to the 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) condition, unable to access social security even if facing financial hardship.** Research from the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kong Kongers highlighted that "more than one in five are living beyond their means, and almost one in ten have no savings to draw on. For younger people the biggest financial issue is finding employment." (Rolfe & Benson, 2023). A more recent report from the Welcoming Committee (Rolfe & Lau, 2024) highlighted the **financial challenges many Hongkonger households have faced settling in the UK, often finding living costs and university tuition fees higher than anticipated, struggling with no credit history and rapidly working their way through the savings they had set aside for buying property or setting up businesses.**

BN(O) status holders can apply to have the condition lifted if they are facing destitution. Since 2021, 510 BN(O) status holders have applied to have the (NRPF) visa condition lifted, over ten times the original number thought to have applied, indicating more significant levels of financial insecurity than previously thought (Leon, 2025). The number of people applying to lift the NRPF condition may be only be the tip of the iceberg in terms of need. Many may be reluctant to apply, as they do not want to seem dependent on government assistance or to be perceived as a burden. However **many Hongkongers are also reluctant to apply, even if facing financial hardship, due to a lack of understanding of their rights in the UK and the fear of ramifications on future applications to extend their leave in the UK (Rolfe & Benson, 2023; Rolfe & Lau, 2024). Some may even interpret 'NRPF' as not being entitled to any information from public organisations, including schools and Jobcentre Plus and therefore may be reluctant to approach schools or support services even for advice** (Benson & Rolfe, 2023; Rolfe & Lau, 2024).

Local government departments, including council career services and college course providers, are not always aware of BN(O) status holders' rights and entitlements in the UK or their eligibility for different resources, including the option to apply to have the condition lifted (Rolfe & Lau, 2024). Local authorities in England can access central government funding to provide support to BN(O) status holders who are facing destitution, however, very local authorities are taking up such funding, with funding claimed for only 12 BN(O) households (including 8 families) since 2021 (Leon, 2025). The large gap between the numbers of Hongkonger households applying to lift the NRPF condition (510 people) and those receiving support from their local authority to do so (12 households) highlights the need for local authority staff to increase their awareness of the BN(O) status holders' rights and entitlements, in order to provide more effective support.

Lack of institutional awareness

Schools, colleges and educational providers may also lack the understanding and awareness of what displaced families have experienced and why they have decided to come to the UK.

Hongkonger parents surveyed wished that schools had a better understanding of the situation in Hong Kong and the culture they had come from (Benson and Rolfe, 2023).

Discrimination

Displaced young people may encounter discrimination within educational institutions in the UK. **Staff may perceive young people through a deficit-based lens, focused on vulnerability and victimhood, and not recognising their resilience and strength, keeping them on separate pathways from mainstream students** (Woltran et al., 2023). A survey of BN(O) status holders highlighted reports of bullying, including some of a racist or discriminatory nature within schools, indicating that **10% of Hongkonger students have faced discrimination, and 15% have faced bullying** (Hong Kongers in Britain, 2023).

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Children may have Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) that have not been formally identified in their country of origin. Families and young people may have a different understanding of SEND in their own other cultural contexts (Jorgensen et al., 2021). Assessments may not necessarily be carried out in students' first language, which can make it more challenging to "disentangle the SEN and EAL needs" (Benson & Rolfe, 2023; Jorgensen et al., 2021). Education providers may benefit from working with local community groups to gain a better understanding of the issue from a cross-cultural perspective. Research into Hongkonger families' needs highlighted that parents with children with SEND may in fact prefer to approach local community organisations in more informal environments to discuss SEND provision (Benson & Rolfe, 2023).

2.3 Expectations and aspirations

A recent study from the Office for National Statistics (2024) highlights that many displaced young people feel that the UK provides more options for them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations. Many of the young people interviewed aspired to work in a humanitarian capacity in a medical profession – for some this was linked to their traumatic experiences pre-arrival and for some, it was because they wanted to return to their country of origin to help others. Whilst it may be too early to assess long-term outcomes for young people on the new humanitarian pathways, an earlier longitudinal study showed that **resettled young people's aspirations for education were not recognised or met in the UK as young people's expectations of high quality education were in stark contrast to their reality of access in the UK** (Morrice et al., 2019). Instead, many felt disappointment that they had not had the opportunity to invest in education: **opportunities had been short-term** with young people feeling like they had been steered solely into ESOL provision instead of further/higher education and external pressures had pushed young people to look for employment without support to plan for a more viable long-term future and prospects. Young people had gone into entry-level employment, hoping to be able to progress but instead found themselves unable to progress without qualifications: "***Regrets and disappointment at not having invested in education, or having had the opportunity to invest in education, were a major theme***. *Feeling they had 'wasted their time', had been 'let down', 'couldn't get help', 'told I had to get a job', 'they just put us on benefits' were commonplace, and many said* ***they wished they had tried harder to get an education rather than settle for language classes.*** *Young people said they had felt* ***pressured into finding work***" (Morrice et al., 2021).

Families' aspirations for their children can also play an important part in shaping young people's trajectories. BN(O) nationals moving to the UK stated that their primary personal consideration for moving to the UK was based on their children's future (Kan et al., 2021) and decisions on which city/region to settle in the UK are "determined first and foremost by their children's education" (Rolfe & Benson, 2023).

There is sometimes a **disconnect between what young people hope to achieve and what their parents and family hope for them.** Some young people may be keen to progress with their education, but their families may encourage them to become business entrepreneurs instead (Office for National Statistics, 2024). Some family members may even be reluctant for the children to pursue higher education as it could be perceived as a threat to traditional gender roles and therefore not celebrated as a success (Oliver, 2023). **Staff supporting young people should acknowledge the cultural and gendered responsibilities that may be expected of girls and young women within their communities** (Hunt et al., 2023) **and that young women may be more comfortable pursuing their education in single-sex spaces** (Wonder Foundation, 2023). However, staff must also be **mindful of their own internalised cultural norms and expectations**

and not systematically steer young women towards gendered pathways, focusing on health and social care whilst steering young men towards more 'masculine' pathways or into employment (Wonder Foundation, 2023). The same study also highlighted that some organisational cultures favoured young women's access to oversubscribed education support programmes, prioritising young women over young men, leading to frustration and tensions among young people.

3. Existing approaches around the UK

3.1 Policy Context

Since 2021, UK local authorities, schools, colleges, voluntary and community organisations have mobilised at pace developing welcoming models for the three cohorts arriving under the humanitarian pathways (Broadhead & Kierans, 2024). In some areas, regional strategic migration partnerships have developed guidance for schools and local authorities to welcome newly arrived pupils, including an educational toolkit in Wales. However, due to restricted funding criteria, many of the local schemes are operated in silo, focused on one cohort. Whilst the needs of each cohort are different, there are still similarities and a need to bridge the schemes to share valuable learning, building on the successes of the different models (Rolfe & Chan, 2022).

There is no national education policy for displaced children and no national integration and social inclusion strategy for supporting newly arrived migrants and refugees into the UK labour market. Whilst the Department of Education provides guidance for supporting unaccompanied displaced children and young people into education (Department for Education, 2017; Department for Education, 2018), no such provision exists for children arriving with their families.

Instead, education and social inclusion for displaced young people are facilitated at the local level, through schools/colleges, local authorities and the voluntary sector, with charities often playing a key role providing interim education whilst young people face delays in accessing mainstream provision (Ashlee, 2024). Our evidence review highlights existing approaches that have been set up at a local authority level, city level and sometimes on an individual school/college level. Very few of the existing models specifically focus on the needs of young people aged 16-19. As there is still limited information published on schemes set up specifically for young people from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, we have also included models targeting a wider group of migrant young people. There is also a gap in detailed evaluations of many of the existing schemes, so it is challenging to assess the quality or depth of support provided. Whilst these examples do not necessarily focus on addressing the relevant needs of 16-19 year olds arriving from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, they still provide learning for local policymakers on how to develop similar local-level provision as well as learning for national policymakers on how to develop national policy to improve the support provided by local government.

3.2 Education provision:

- **Bespoke longer-term separate educational provision for newly arrived young people**. Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team (NEST) was launched in 2018 with initial funding from the Department for Education. It is the UK's first bespoke full-time provision for newly arrived displaced 16-19 year olds young, who are unable to access school or college. The curriculum model and ethos for NEST were developed based on Professor Joanna McIntyre's research into inclusive models of education for resettled young people, drawing on the concepts of 'safety', 'belonging' and 'succeeding' (McIntyre & Abrams, 2020). The model includes education, enrichment activities for young people to make community links through 'place-making', psychosocial support and work placements for young people to gain work experience. One of the core aims is to prepare them to achieve qualifications at Entry Levels in Functional Skills Maths, Functional Skills ICT and English in the form of ESOL Skills for Life.
- **Voluntary-sector interim provision for newly arrived young people**. Examples included:
    - **Into School at The Baytree Centre, London: third sector organisation providing a transition programme 3 days a week for newly arrived girls aged 11-19 into the UK education system through single-sex empowering spaces**. Taking a person-centred, trauma-aware, and holistic approach, the programme includes ESOL, Maths, Digital skills, support with applications, mentoring and social activities to build self-confidence before entering mainstream education (Wonder Foundation, 2023).
- **Schools and colleges approaches**:
    - **Recruiting multi-lingual staff members to work with displaced communities**: **Broadoak Secondary School in Greater Manchester** have recruited Cantonese speaking Teaching Assistants who run induction sessions for pupils and act as the point of contact for parents, whilst also upskilling school staff on the context of the BNO scheme and why families are moving to the UK (Benson & Rolfe, 2023).
    - **Bespoke provision within mainstream education settings**: Examples included:
        - Newman Catholic College, a London secondary school and sixth form with a **specialised preparatory provision, the English as Additional Language pathway, for new arrivals having missed the start of their Key Stage 4 studies**. The bespoke support ensures students are eventually able to move into the mainstream curriculum and students benefit from additional pastoral and family support. Newly arrived pupils are placed in different classes depending on their level of English and previous education, ranging from basic literacy and numeracy to bespoke GCSEs preparation (Wonder Foundation, 2023).
        - Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College in London provide a **dedicated Year 10 and 11 provision to support newly arrived students with leaving with**

five GCSE grades in Year 11 as well as a **Newly Arrived Academy for 16-18 year olds, focusing on English literacy** (Ashlee, 2024).

- Warwickshire College Group offer **taster sessions in vocational courses for ESOL students** to explore potential training courses and careers that they may be interested in (Ashlee, 2024).

- **Accelerated learning pathways to support children young people with catching up**. Examples included:
  - Leeds City Academy offer an **induction course for new arrivals and a 12-week intervention course for EAL students to support them with transitioning into mainstream provision, upon completion** (Ashlee, 2024).
  - **Cardiff Cathays High School**: With 70% of the students at Cardiff's Cathays High School having EAL, the school set up a programme where children who need support in English start the school year earlier with intensive language classes. They move into mainstream classes in which Basic English is sufficient (including sports, arts or mathematics) for six weeks and are then expected to join all mainstream classes within 12 weeks of their arrival at school. Cathays High School partners with local community members for interpreting and improving the school's relationship with parents (Estyn, 2022).

3.2 Holistic support for life in the UK

- **Cultural orientation programmes aimed at young people: Oxfordshire County Council's Orientation Programme is** a long-running scheme currently only open to unaccompanied young people. However, the learning could be applied to support a wider cohort of newly arrived young people who may also face similar barriers accessing education and training. The 4-week programme, delivered by Refugee Education UK, includes ESOL sessions followed by information sessions about life in the UK and how to stay safe.
- Orientation programmes aimed at parents:
  - **Solihull Council Courses for Parents:** West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership funded 5–10-week courses in Solihull, attended by around 55 BN(O) parents on topics including family learning, parenting classes and supporting children with Maths and English.
  - **Reading School meetings for families:** Delivered by 'Coffee and Craft', a third sector organisation providing meetings in schools in Reading to help BN(O) parents to understand the UK curriculum.
- **Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships commissioning specialist services**. Examples included:

- The North West Strategic Migration Partnership have secured funding from the government's Children and Young People's Resettlement Fund to provide a helpline for families on the humanitarian pathways, therapeutic support/counselling and bespoke training for education providers to upskill staff, increasing their confidence when working with international newly arrived children, young people and their families.
- The East of England Strategic Migration Partnership's funded collaboration with Hong Kong Student Alliance, a Hongkonger youth-led organisation providing social activities and online meetings for young people and their families to learn about the UK education system, skills development and career pathways.

- **Local authority specialist teams to support resettled and newly arrived communities**. The majority of these examples predominantly focus on school age children and not children aged 16-19 however, the learning could be applicable to older age groups. Examples included:
  - The London borough of Hillingdon's Ukrainian team**,** a specialist team working on a **bilingual support project for displaced children from Ukraine providing needs assessments, language support and community engagement with families.**
  - Hampshire County Council's Ethnic Minority Achievement Services provide dedicated support to help young people settle into school, a w**ebpage with information for young people, families and teachers, a study skills programme and training on best practice** (Ashlee, 2024).
  - Middlesbrough Council Admissions team and Ethnic Minority Achievement Team have a **publicly available guide for families on going to school in the UK and have also developed guidance for supporting international new arrivals with special educational needs into education.**
  - **Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS)** provide **EAL development for children new to Sandwell and the UK as well as Information and short courses for their parents and carers.**
- **Third sector organisations providing tailored support**:
  - Refugee Education UK are a specialist charity providing **educational mentoring, ESOL/academic tutoring** and well-being support to improve education and well-being outcomes for displaced young people in the UK. Their bespoke provision for Afghan young people includes **welcoming packs and bespoke training to schools.**
  - City of Sanctuary have created a resource pack for colleges with guidance for best practice and case studies highlighting pilots delivered by further education colleges.

4. Gaps in provision

The existing literature highlights a number of gaps with recommendations for improving policy and practice:

4.1 Provision of educational support and guidance:

- Need for a coordinated and more flexible approach to include young people aged 16-19 arriving mid-year in the education system (Ashlee, 2024).
- Developing short-term interim provision to support newly arrived young people facing delays in accessing education and facilitate their transition into mainstream provision (Ashlee, 2024).
- Developing more flexible bridging programmes, providing accelerated pathways to support young people with catching up on missed education (Ashlee, 2024) and building English language skills, that can take place during school holiday times before term starts, working in partnership with the voluntary sector (Morrice et al., 2021).
- Ensuring inclusive provision meets a wide range of needs, recognising displaced young people are not a homogeneous group and even with nationality cohorts, children may come from a wide-range of socio-economic backgrounds, with varying levels of English and prior education (Anstruther et al., 2023).
- Employing staff from the community who have the shared cultural experience and language to support with parent and pupil engagement (Benson & Rolfe, 2023).
- Focusing targeted work on supporting young people and their families with applications to further and higher education, providing advocacy throughout in case of inadvertent institutional gatekeeping (Ashlee, 2024; Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020).
- Shifting from short-term opportunities towards long-term education planning, guidance and support (Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020).
- Setting up buddying and mentoring schemes to support young people on a one-to-one basis (Ashlee & Gladwell, 2020; Benson & Rolfe, 2023; City of Sanctuary, 2022).
- Ensuring staff in both policy and practice are trauma-informed and trained to understand the cultural sensitivities, relevant country background and displaced young people's experiences, recognising how numerous factors (including young people's prior and post-arrival experiences, the systemic barriers faced in the UK and their potentially precarious immigration status and living environment) can make young people more vulnerable.
- Pooling together funding from across the resettlement funding schemes to widen access to other newly arrived displaced young people who cannot benefit from support narrowly restricted to specific communities on the bespoke pathways.

4.2 Partnership working:

- Developing a multi-agency approach, working in partnership with, commissioning and funding local voluntary sector organisations, community groups and leaders to build trust with the relevant communities to understand cultural sensitivities and promote awareness of role models within the community who have achieved their educational and employment aspirations.
- Drawing on the expertise of people with lived experience, involving students, parents and displaced researchers/scholars to develop holistic and culturally sensitive educational practices and policies (Miri, 2024).

4.3 Approach:

- Developing provision that takes into account the wider and more holistic needs of newly arrived young people and their families, focusing on social inclusion including:
    - Providing a welcoming approach in UK schools and colleges to both students and their parents (Rolfe & Chan, 2022).
    - Supporting young people and their families to feel a sense of safety, belonging and success (McIntyre & Abrams, 2020) through education and the local community. This could include signposting and supporting families to access immigration advice to apply for settled status in the UK and to access welfare advice for support accessing their rights and entitlements in the UK, minimising financial hardship.
    - Supporting parents with ESOL provision and cultural orientation to the UK education system, curriculum, expectations on pupils, education and employment pathways and opportunities including vocational routes (Benson & Chan, 2022; Tip et al., 2020) so that they feel more confident supporting their children. This could include providing resources in their own language (Refugee Education UK, 2021) and recruiting staff who are able to speak parents' community language (Benson & Rolfe, 2023).
- Whilst it is important to recognise how young people's circumstances can make them more vulnerable, it is important that local providers move beyond a deficit-based approach and instead take an asset-based approach, harnessing young people's strengths, qualities and resilience to support young people to thrive (McIntyre & Abrams, 2020).

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IMPROVING EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR DISPLACED 16–19 YEAR OLDS IN OXFORDSHIRE

Improving Education Outcomes for Displaced 16–19 year olds in Oxfordshire (2024–2025) is a research and knowledge exchange programme, funded by Oxfordshire County Council, exploring the educational and employment needs and aspirations of newly arrived 16–19 year olds arriving in the UK with their families on the three bespoke humanitarian schemes from Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong.

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