

SOLUTION OR PROBLEM: A SOCIAL WORK VIEW OF UK FORCED MIGRATION LAW AND POLICY

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Abstract

The UK receives a tiny proportion of the world's forced migrants and even in Europe is 19th out of 28 countries for numbers received. Nonetheless, immigration is used as a major political issue with public opinion weaponised to achieve the disastrous exit from the European Union. The media narrative encourages the population to believe that there is an 'invasion' of people making the highly dangerous journey across the English Channel in small boats and that they are not 'real' refugees. A plethora of law and policy responses means that individuals are treated differently depending on where they came from, when and how they came.

This paper will give a synopsis of the changes to law and policy that proscribe the 'legal' and 'illegal' routes to the UK for forced migrants. We will consider the outcomes of the financial investment in exclusion (border force, removal centres, planes to Rwanda, British police in France) in the context of a global economic and environmental emergency. Their intended and unintended consequences will be reviewed (destitution and homelessness, Windrush, loss of workforce, social insecurity).

Drawing on the five proposals of the People's Charter for an Eco-Social World presented to the United Nations we propose an alternative approach to migration which values the human agency and capacity of individuals. We give examples from UK and elsewhere to illustrate the success of inclusion over exclusion and offer a reflection on the ability of social work to work within and with contexts.

Keywords: Forced migration, strengths approach, social work, eco-social, human rights

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to share our experience and learning from over 20 years of responding to the challenges and opportunities presented by people who have experienced forced migration and who seek to settle in southwest England. Immigration is being used as a major political issue in the UK by a right-wing government, with public opinion weaponised to achieve the disastrous exit from the European Union. The repercussions of leaving the European Union and increasing the barriers to entry are having serious consequences for migrants, for UK citizens, for the country's welfare services, agriculture, and the economy. Our intention is to share learning from the UK's mistakes and to offer alternative responses to the fact of growing global human movement. We believe that a strengths approach is fundamental to transforming a 'problem' of migration into a solution that benefits both migrants and the receiving community.

The UK receives a tiny proportion of the world's forced migrants and even in Europe is 19th out of 28 countries for numbers received. Nonetheless, immigration is used as a major political issue with public

opinion weaponised to achieve the disastrous exit from the European Union. The media narrative encourages the population to believe that there is an ‘invasion’ of people making the highly dangerous journey across the English Channel in small boats and that they are not ‘real’ refugees. A plethora of law and policy responses means that individuals are treated differently depending on where they came from, when and how they came.

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1. Approaches to Migration

1.1. The Global Picture

The current turmoil in UK politics is giving rise to rapid and inept law-making with scant regard for human rights, as if it is possible to simply legislate our way out of trouble. So, we begin with an up-to-date synopsis of the defensive use of law and policy by the UK government as it tries to stem the tide of migration – with the same chance of success as the attempt by Canute, the 11th century King of England, Denmark and Norway to halt the incoming sea. The UNHCR tracks the number of people who are forcibly displaced and shows the exponential rise year on year. By mid-2022 this was 103 million worldwide.¹ The combination of war, persecution and the climate emergency forcing people to move, indicates that this number will continue to rise. The majority of people displaced either relocate within their country of origin or cross to a nearby country and less than 10% make the perilous journey to Europe to seek asylum. In Europe the UK is 19th out of 28 countries for numbers received with Germany first. Every country has a different approach to receiving forced migrants – for example Uganda, one of the 6 countries with the highest number of refugees, provides land and basic support to enable people to integrate as fast as possible. Lebanon with a population of 6.8 million and severe economic problems, is hosting an estimated 1.5 million refugees from Syria in addition to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees.²

1.2. U.K. Responses

In contrast, however, the UK has politicised the ‘problem’ of migration by investing resources in detention centres, strengthening its border force, contracting with private providers, and passing a raft of legislation to reduce people’s access to their human rights.³ ⁴ For example, the introduction of a Hostile Environment policy⁵ by the UK’s Home Office in 2012 fuelled xenophobia and created a culture that enabled the public to be convinced 8 years later that a vote to leave the European Union was in their best interests. The UK’s right-wing media has incited fear that this small island is being overwhelmed

¹ UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder” United Nations High Commission for Refugees 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

² NRC, “These 10 countries receive the most refugees” Norwegian Refugee Council website 2020. <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/the-10-countries-that-receive-the-most-refugees/> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

³ Bellinger A. and Ford D., “The Strengths Approach in Practice: How it changes lives”, Policy Press 2022.

⁴ Team of Authors, Editor C. Maloney, “Seeking Asylum and Mental Health: A Practical Guide for Professionals” Cambridge University Press 2022.

⁵ Clatworthy, L., “A Qualitative Study Exploring the Impact of the Hostile Environment on Plymouth’s Refugee Population”, Students and Refugees Together (START) website 2021. <https://www.studentsandrefugeestogether.com/wp/research/> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

by migrants. In November 2022 according to official figures there were 231,597 refugees, 127,421 pending asylum cases and 5,483 stateless persons in the UK including recent Ukrainian refugees. The total number of refugees, including those from the Ukraine, people waiting for their claim to be decided and stateless people represented only half a per cent (0.54%) of the UK's total population.⁶ There were 72,027 asylum applications in the UK in the year ending September 2022. However, the UK only offered protection (in the form of refugee status, humanitarian protection, alternative forms of leave and resettlement) to 17,378 people (including dependants) in this period.⁷ Fear is rising nevertheless with the surge of people attempting to reach the UK across the English Channel in small boats organised by people traffickers (and it should be said with inadequate public services available to receive them). More than 45,000 people used this route last year in the absence of more government-endorsed pathways.⁸

In response to 'the problem', the UK government has taken steps intended to deter what they call the 'flood of migrants', ostensibly to break the business model of people-smugglers risking people's lives. A scheme to send people seeking asylum via so-called illegal routes to Rwanda (yes, Africa) still forms part of the government's plan to deter forced migrants. This is in spite of the Rwandan government's appalling human rights record and the clear evidence that such offshore schemes have failed both in Israel⁹ and Australia¹⁰. So far, the UK has paid the Rwandan government £140m alone. (This does not include subsequent costs such as flights to Rwanda, food, accommodation, access to translators and legal advice).¹¹ To date however, no-one has been deported through this scheme due to appeals in law (despite a recent UK High Court ruling that it is lawful and does not breach the UN's Refugee Convention or human rights laws, astonishingly).¹²

The UK's asylum system costs £1.5bn a year.¹³ One reason why it might be so high is because of the time (sometimes years) taken to decide on applications and the costly systems to constrain people's freedom while they wait - people are unable to work while waiting for confirmation of their refugee status and must live in the accommodation provided. Of that 1.5 billion, £316 million has been invested in policing the British border in France in an unsuccessful attempt to intercept the small boat launches. Meanwhile new legal measures have been enacted that effectively remove people's right to seek asylum in the UK and construct people as 'illegal' by virtue of their means of arrival. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 means there are now no safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum. The immigration rules make no provision for any person to come (or apply to come) to the UK for the purpose of making an asylum claim.^{14 15}

⁶ Refugee Action, "Facts About Refugees" Refugee Action website 2023. <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees/> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

⁷ GOV.UK, "Summary of latest statistics: 4. How many people do we grant protection to?" UK Government website 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2022/summary-of-latest-statistics> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

⁸ BBC, "How is the UK stopping Channel crossings and what are the legal routes to the UK?" British Broadcasting Company 2022a. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-53734793> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

⁹ Mack, E., "Like the UK, Israel tried sending refugees to Rwanda – it didn't work" Independent 2022. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/refugees-migrants-israel-britain-rwanda-b2060595.html> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

¹⁰ Breeze, E., "The UK has long wanted an Australian refugee system. Here's how that failed spectacularly" The Big Issue 2022. <https://bigissue.com/news/social-justice/the-uk-has-long-wanted-an-australian-refugee-system-heres-how-that-failed-spectacularly/>[L.s. 24.2.2023].

¹¹ BBC, "What is the UK's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda?" British Broadcasting Company 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-61782866> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

¹² BBC, "Rwanda migrant plan is lawful, High Court rules." British Broadcasting Company 2022b <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64024461> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

¹³ Home Office blog, "Factsheet: Cost of the asylum system" Home Office Gov.UK 2022. <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2022/04/14/factsheet-cost-of-asylum-system/> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

¹⁴ Amnesty International, "Briefing: Safe and Legal Routes to the UK" 2021. https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2021-01/Amnesty%20International%20UK%20-%20Safe%20and%20Legal%20Routes%20Briefing_0.pdf [L. s. 24.2.2023].

¹⁵ Susserot, A., "Blog: The Myth of the 'Illegal' Asylum Seeker" Lancaster University 2021. <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/law/blog/the-myth-of-the-illegal-asylum-seeker/> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

1.3. Growing insecurity for UK Citizens

Challenging the legal right of some people's presence in a country has an 'unsettling' effect on others, including those with full rights to work and live in the UK. There are examples, following a change in the law of professionals on international contracts being deported.¹⁶ An even greater scandal and violation of rights was that of the Windrush generation. Windrush was the name of the first boat in 1948 bringing more than 5,000 people from the Caribbean at the invitation of the postcolonial government to bolster the workforce in post-war Britain. They settled, worked and paid tax for over half a century yet their right to remain was denied suddenly in 2010 because of a bureaucratic act by the government, who destroyed their original landing papers – the only legal document entitling them to be in England.¹⁷ Despite acknowledging that it was wrong to place the burden of proof on the people affected, even now the government is retreating from their commitment to compensation. A similar message of citizenship insecurity was strongly voiced recently by the Black British woman born in London who was repeatedly asked by a member of the royal household 'where she was really from'.¹⁸ This insecurity is justified when the Secretary of State can remove a person's citizenship without informing them! When the government decides to deprive a person of citizenship, it is exempted from having to give notice 'if it reasonably considers it necessary in the interests of national security, diplomatic relations or otherwise in the public interest that notice should not be given'.¹⁹

1.4. Social and Economic Failure

As people continue to arrive in small boats, UK policy and practice is revealed as ill-formed, short term, and unrealistic. A defensive reaction to the globally growing phenomenon of forced migration clearly doesn't work, just as demonstrated by King Canute! It is irrational to continue to do the same thing when it has been shown not to work. It is like the Englishman abroad who, failing to make himself understood, thinks that by simply shouting louder in English, people will understand him. The emphasis on 'strong borders' is to ensure that British welfare systems are not abused by 'health tourists' or people seeking an easy life at the cost of the state. It is ironic then that this is occurring alongside the failure of the welfare state²⁰ and many parts of the economy. Post-Brexit there are numerous staffing crises in the workforce in England – lorry-drivers, fruit pickers, hospitality staff and now most drastically in the health and care sector. An economy that has been supported so consistently by migrant workers is suddenly missing the 330,000 people who provided capacity and flexibility.²¹ The UK is now experiencing industrial action from staff in a range of essential services – nurses, ambulance drivers, junior doctors, teachers, lawyers, train drivers, civil servants, even the border force... whose concerns about staffing shortages are articulated as fear for the sustainability of their service. The lack of a reliable transport infrastructure, for example, means that people are struggling to get to where the jobs are, to fill the employment gaps left by migrants. Inflation and the rapid increase of basic living costs - food, fuel and housing - are placing more than one in five people below the poverty line.²² The theory of a

¹⁶ Townsend, M., "EU citizens who applied to stay in Britain facing threat of deportation" The Guardian 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/aug/01/eu-citizens-who-applied-to-stay-in-britain-facing-threat-of-deportation> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

¹⁷ Gentleman, A., "The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment", Guardian Faber Publishing 2019.

¹⁸ Rhoden-Paul, A., "Ngozi Fulani: Lady Susan Hussey's race comments were abuse, says charity boss" British Broadcasting Corporation 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63819482> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

¹⁹ Part 1, Section 10, Nationality and Borders Act 2022, Legislation.gov.uk, 2022. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/36/section/10/enacted>. [L.s. 24.2.2023].

²⁰ Bellinger A., "Using the Strengths Approach when Welfare Systems Fail" Transforming Society blog <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2022/01/14/using-the-strengths-approach-when-welfare-systems-fail/> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

²¹ O'Carroll, L. (2023) Brexit leaves UK short of 330,000 workers – report <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jan/17/shortfall-of-330000-workers-in-uk-due-to-brexit-say-thinktanks> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

²² Joseph Rowntree Foundation, "UK Poverty 2023: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK" <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2023> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

high wage, high employment economy is a dream in the minds and rhetoric of politicians but a fading memory among its citizens.

2. Migration: Opportunities and Solutions

2.1. A Strengths Approach

Nevertheless, even within such a negative and defensive environment, through our practice with forced migrants in the southwest of England, we have learned to think differently and to act positively. Our book “The Strengths Approach in Practice: How it changes lives” records many of the individual achievements of students and refugees working together in an organisation called START over the past 21 years.²³ Students and Refugees Together (START) is an NGO that can reach all parts of the system as an agile micro-activist organisation where learning and social justice are core.²⁴ Since it began in 2001 more than 300 international and UK student professionals (social workers, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists among others) have achieved their qualifications through practical placements with refugees. More than 3,000 refugee households have been supported to access their entitlements and make choices about their lives and futures. Unjust law and policy have been challenged successfully – establishing precedents for the future - and in excess of £1million has been brought into the city from trusts and foundations, augmenting the local economy.

2.2. Social Work as a Force for Global Change

Last summer, the International Federation of Social Workers hosted an online summit “Co-designing a new eco-social world – leaving no one behind”.²⁵ This People’s Global Summit continues “to promote and support local and global people’s assemblies to unlock the means to co-design and co-build a new eco-social world.” Its vision is that “together, we (can) bring our local and global expertise from working in communities and populations where transformative change has taken place. Together we can build hope and new systems that foster peace, confidence, and security for everyone.” The voices of indigenous activists, academics, community development organisations and experts of every kind came together at the summit to produce a charter that is a living global document, accepted by the United Nations in July.²⁶ We encourage you to read it, and indeed to join the International Federation of Social Workers whose global definition of social work has been refined and approved to represent the diverse contexts of 141 countries.²⁷ Here we want to reflect on the Charter’s five proposals and consider what they might mean in practice for nation states, academic disciplines and individuals.

2.3. Proposals of the People’s Charter for a New Eco-Social World

2.3.1. *Proposal 1: Ecological integrity*

First and foremost, ecological integrity requires us to acknowledge the urgency of transitioning to non-extractive sustainable systems and developing cultures that respect the rights of nature. Unless we stop pandering to commercial interests in oil and gas extraction then in the relatively short term, the planet will be uninhabitable. Both the strengths approach and deep ecology begin with an absolute acknowledgement of the depth and severity of the challenges facing us now. These really cannot be

²³ Bellinger A. and Ford D., “The Strengths Approach in Practice: How it changes lives”, Policy Press 2022.

²⁴ Students and Refugees Together (START) website <https://www.studentsandrefugeesttogether.com/wp/> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

²⁵ New Eco-Social World, The People’s Summit, Co-building a New Eco-Social world – Leaving No one Behind, Online 29th June – 2nd July 2022.

<https://newecosocialworld.com/?fbclid=IwAR3CSiEp0NrSmGvqDEzbQpjFFzrUXtJn4MUie9ZInG8Z0Vy530X3-21cATk> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

²⁶ New Eco-Social World, “The People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World” <https://newecosocialworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Peoples-Charter-EN.pdf> [L.s. 24.2.2023].

²⁷ IFSW, Global Definition of Social Work. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/> L. s. 24.2.2023].

overstated as wars, social and economic disasters distract us from the climate catastrophe rapidly reaching the point of no return. We have never needed such courage and creative thinking as we do now.

For many years, scientists have been warning about the catastrophic results for the climate if the world reaches average temperatures of 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. According to the World Research Institute global temperatures have risen by 1.1 degrees so far, and already we are seeing an increase in natural disasters such as flooding, hurricanes, and other events. The latest IPCC report warns that the world is set to reach the 1.5 degrees centigrade point within the next two decades and that only the most drastic cuts in carbon emissions immediately will help prevent an environmental disaster. Continuing as we are now will mean a 4-degree centigrade rise by the end of the century – an environment unsustainable for human life.

Clearly there are grounds for despair, and the common human defence responses to such threats are all too familiar. None of us is immune to denial or to indulging in the kind of magical thinking that space exploration and big tech will rescue us.

Alternatively, the scholarship of deep ecologists has provided us with ways of navigating our situation. We have drawn from Naess' work to summarise these key principles.²⁸ His work distinguishes between surface ecology, with its focus on recycling waste or allocating blame, to a profound recognition that we must:

- have respect for all parts of the system, from microbe to constellation,
- maintain trust in the potential for true sustainability and
- acknowledge the depth and severity of the challenges.

Deep ecologists confront the catastrophic reality of our situation, urging us to grieve for what is lost and start from solid ground. The message of the environmental activists 'Just Stop Oil' is a good example. Although it is hard to imagine such a drastic change to our lifestyles and expectations, if extraction of oil, gas and other finite resources were to cease, the resulting crisis would release creativity. The money currently invested in destruction of the environment could be redirected to invest in sustainable development. The Covid pandemic offered a lesson about the potential of humans to adapt and to accommodate major differences in the way they live their lives. At country, community and individual level, all decisions and actions need to be directed by ecological integrity.

2.3.2. *Proposal 2: Economic reform*

Secondly economic reform means measuring the success of economies according to wellbeing rather than primarily financial growth. We are not proposing a fantasy world in which markets no longer exist. Rather it is to ensure the integration of markets with wellbeing so that growth is not at the expense of people and planet. Many of the predictions of the "Limits to Growth" report commissioned by the Club of Rome in 1972²⁹ have been proved accurate in that there are serious global challenges to food and water security, loss of biodiversity and widespread pollution, in addition to increasing climatic disasters of flooding and fires. Economists are now critiquing existing models of economic growth that are underpinned by unsustainable extraction and consumption.

In the words of Donella H. Meadows, one of the authors of the original report:

'The first commandment of economics is Grow. Grow forever. Companies must get bigger. National economies need to swell by a certain percentage each year ... The first commandment of the Earth is

²⁸ Naess, A. "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: A summary", 'Inquiry', 1973, 95–100.

²⁹ Team of Authors, Donella H. Meadows, "The Limits to Growth; a Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind" Universe Books 1972.

*Enough. Just so much and no more. Just so much soil. Just so much water. Just so much sunshine. Everything born of the Earth grows to its appropriate size and then stops.*³⁰

New economic models are vital to promote human and ecological wellbeing. In 2019, New Zealand became the first country to adopt a "well-being budget", prioritising health and life-satisfaction rather than economic growth.³¹ Another radically different approach to economic growth is articulated in Kate Raworth's doughnut economics model in which all growth globally is contained within the earth's finite resources, and no-one should lack life's essentials.³² We believe that as long as public services are valued in financial terms and especially when they have to generate profit for shareholders, they will fail. In his presentation to the People's Global Summit, Remco van de Pas, a public health doctor and global health researcher from Germany, argued for an alternative paradigm of ecological wellbeing, growth in human and spiritual connection rather than economic growth, and a world in which good care consists of enough – not everything possible.³³ In this vein, START has preserved its independence and integrity by resisting temptations to scale up, to take on a regional or even national profile. As a small, locally specific organisation it remains flexible, nimble and responsive to constant changes and remains true to the core values of the strengths approach.

2.3.3. *Proposal 3: International solidarity*

Third is international solidarity: from national introspection to global cooperation. This principle is clearly illustrated by the failure of the UK's approach to migration. Seeking to protect national interests by denying the fact of migration constitutes a violation of human rights. Moreover it is an increasing drain on resources and ultimately ineffective. Compare the cost and effectiveness of excluding people arriving in small boats with the cost and effectiveness of the Ukrainian refugee scheme in the UK to which we will return.

Internationalisation at START extends to the staff group currently who include former refugees from Eritrea, as well as practitioners from the Czech Republic and USA. Moreover, START has provided practice placements for over 60 students from Germany, Norway, France, Switzerland, Poland and the Czech Republic, working alongside students from the UK. The benefits of internationalisation for the START community of learning and practice is incalculable. International students arrive with affinity for refugees in terms of needing to operate in English which is not their first language. They have to find themselves accommodation in the unfamiliar city of Plymouth. They too are bewildered initially by the labyrinthine bureaucratic systems governing access to health and care support. They are shocked by the "Hostile Environment" of policy and legislation towards refugees outlined above and their questions encourage a critical lens for home students to adopt in learning about social justice. They learn about the strengths approach; in turn they bring different models of practice and scholarship that has shifted the focus in student supervision to global issues of concern, most notably social work in a time of climate emergency, capitalism and migration. Undoubtedly their presence enriches START as a learning organisation and promotes relational practice with refugees from many different countries. Worldwide friendships are sustained among students fostering understanding and solidarity, all of which will inform their work as future professionals.

³⁰ Meadows, D. (2002) "Just so much, and no more", 'Resurgence' 2002 January/February, p.17.

³¹ Cohen, J., "Measuring Wellbeing: It's More Than GDP" Forbes 2018.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuacohen/2018/10/15/measuring-well-being-its-more-than-gdp/?sh=165b74ec4eaa> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

³² Raworth, K., "Doughnut economics: seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist", Chelsea Green Publishing 2017.

³³ Van De Pas, R., "The Limits to growth and its implications for health care" Co-Building a New Eco-Social World Leaving No-one Behind, Global Summit 2022. <https://newecosocialworld.com/speaker/remco-van-de-pas/> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

2.3.4. *Proposal 4: Employment and work*

The fourth proposal from the Charter is a call for employment and work to be valued and for people to have dignified working conditions. Public sector workers in the UK, including medical staff are now taking industrial action, both because they are unable to earn enough for housing and food, and also because of the conditions in which they work. Many workers are on a minimum wage or in insecure employment as public services have been privatised in order to deliver profits to shareholders.

During the Covid pandemic, however there was a cultural awakening about who ‘key workers’ are and what tasks needed to be done to keep everything working. Overnight, refuse collectors were judged to be more important than marketing consultants while health workers were literally applauded in the streets. At START, although NGOs are often expected to keep all costs to a minimum, staff are given as much financial security as can be managed and, alongside all other contributors – paid and unpaid – their ideas, concerns and aspirations are taken seriously. A non-hierarchical structure promotes ownership, job satisfaction and a sense of doing something worthwhile, however difficult the circumstances.

2.3.5. *Proposal 5: Public spending for state social protection*

Finally, the Charter calls for public spending to be directed at state social protection. One of the principles enshrined in the strengths approach is that change is possible: the government response to the war in Ukraine is a clear demonstration of it. Instead of seeking to control all aspects of entry and accommodation, the British public were supported to offer accommodation to people fleeing. Government money was made available to encourage speedy settlement and integration.

The impenetrable barriers to work, income security, health care, education for others seeking asylum were removed overnight. Over 100,000 Ukrainians have sought sanctuary in the UK through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, one of the fastest, biggest and most generous visa programmes in British history. This represents more than twice the number of people who have arrived in the UK through so-called ‘illegal’ routes. 1.1 billion British pounds was spent on the Homes for Ukraine schemes in contrast to the 1.5 billion for the asylum system and costs which could soar to £1.4 billion for the Rwanda offshore scheme.³⁴ The defensive waste of public money needs to be redirected to positive schemes with real investment in infrastructure such as health, education, public housing, efficient transport, food and water security.

Conclusion

Social workers must work within existing contexts and in the UK, as we have explained, the context is challenging and largely hostile to migrants. Even with this environment, it is possible to find ways of collaborating with migrants, upholding their human rights, striving for social justice and teaching future social workers how to work proactively with others. Refugees have been enabled to access their individual rights and entitlements in spite of numerous obstacles. Additionally legal precedents have been set and discriminatory institutional policies changed.³⁵ The commitment of social workers to working with and within such contexts is the focus of this paper. We have reflected critically on the UK’s Hostile Environment policy, the consequences of defensiveness for both society and the economy. In contrast we have proposed a positive, proactive approach to co-building a better, fairer and more sustainable world. Migration is a natural feature of human behaviour and populations. With the strengths approach, we can embrace the opportunities it brings.

³⁴ Refugee Council, “PM announcement on asylum seeker relocation to Rwanda: Refugee Council response” Refugee Council website 2022. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/pm-announcement-on-asylum-seeker-relocation-to-rwanda-refugee-council-response/> [L. s. 24.2.2023].

³⁵ Bellinger and Ford, cf. Footnote 23, pages 52 and 50.

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