

Home Office call for evidence on the proposed new Independent Appeals Body – AdviceUK submission

Executive summary

AdviceUK supports efforts to reduce avoidable delays, backlogs and unnecessary bureaucracy in the asylum and immigration appeals process. However, we are concerned that many of the proposals in the consultation will increase pressure on already overstretched advice services. The complete overhaul of the immigration and asylum appeals system, coupled with wider government reforms in this space, will lead to an increase in case work. Advisers will have to learn new laws, systems and processes. This will add pressure to an already overstretched sector and increase uncertainty over their resources and ability to meet demand. If taken forward, we need clarity from the Government on the role of advice services in the new appeals system and how they will be supported. Furthermore, we are concerned that the proposals may erode the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers to legitimately and legally settle in the UK. AdviceUK urges the Government to work with the advice sector to design any reforms to the system.

1. Introduction

AdviceUK welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Home Office's call for evidence on establishing a new Independent Appeals Body for immigration and asylum appeals. AdviceUK is the UK's largest network for independent advice services. We represent over 700 organisations across Britain. Our members provided advice to around 2.8 million people last year on issues including welfare benefits, debt, housing and immigration. Some 120 organisations in our membership provide advice to immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Since April 2024, data from AdvicePro, a case management software used by advice services, shows that asylum cases make up around two-thirds (68%) of all immigration advice work, with over 50,000 cases relating directly to asylum status.¹

For this consultation, we have drawn on evidence from our member organisations in the independent advice sector that provide immigration and asylum advice. We have also gleaned insight from AdvicePro on relevant casework. We have also gathered insights from a roundtable discussion where 22 member organisations discussed wider immigration and asylum reforms. These organisations have experienced supporting asylum seekers, refugees, long-settled migrants, families with no recourse to public funds, survivors of trafficking and exploitation, and people with long-term health conditions and disabilities.

1.1 Impact on advice services

Data from across the advice sector shows that, since April 2025, there have been over 50,000 cases related to immigration and asylum.² This represents a 20% increase from the previous year (42,435 cases in April 2024–2025) and highlights the scale of need and pressure facing advice provision.³ The level of demand is having a negative impact on our members and their clients. For

¹ AdviceUK, AdvicePro data, available upon request.

² AdviceUK, AdvicePro data, available upon request.

³ Ibid.

example, in Q4 2024, 90% of advice centre staff reported an increase in demand over the previous year; yet more than half (55%) reported that they were not confident they could meet that demand.⁴

We are concerned that the introduction of the Independent Appeals Body, and its proposed design, scope and purpose, will further increase demand for advice services. Without further specific details on how the Independent Appeals Body will be implemented it is hard to assess the long-term impact of the proposals on demand. However, in the short-term, demand will almost certainly rise as advisers will have to learn new laws, processes and systems. Therefore, if the proposals go ahead, it is crucial that government works with the advice sector to co-design them, clarifies the expected role of advice services and establishes how they will be supported.

1.2 Reforms will not achieve their intended goals

AdviceUK supports reforms that aim to improve timeliness and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. Our members report that these factors cause stress for their clients and increase the burden on their time. However, we are concerned that by compressing appeals timelines and removing qualified judges, the Government will not achieve this goal. Indeed, this is supported by our member Migrants Organise who state that faster decisions on asylum applications are driving more refusals and appeals.⁵

AdviceUK welcomes the Home Office's statement in its consultation document that individuals seeking appeal must have access to justice and an effective remedy where their protection needs or human rights are at stake. We also support the ambition that the Independent Appeals Body should embed the rule of law, procedural fairness and impartiality in its decision making. This includes, ensuring parties having "equal and effective access" and can navigate the process effectively. However, as above, we are concerned that proposals will not achieve this objective. Instead, they risk eroding the rights of asylum seekers and immigrants with legitimate cases to legally claim asylum and settle in the UK.

AdviceUK would welcome the opportunity to meet with Home Office officials to discuss the proposals further and share the insights from our members in the immigration and asylum advice sector. **Please contact willem.vandeven@adviceuk.org.uk to arrange a meeting.**

2. Impact of proposals on casework and pressure on advice services

2.1 Demand

Demand for advice, across our membership, is reaching crisis point. Our Advice Saves Report 2024 found that 90% of advice centre staff reported an increase in demand over the past year.⁶ Yet more than half (55%) reported that they were not confident they could meet that demand.⁷ Evidence from AdviceUK members demonstrates that this is also true specifically in the immigration and asylum advice sector. For example, African Rainbow Family has reported counselling uptake rising from 47% to 84%, and immigration legal advice referrals increasing from 53% to 90%, following the

⁴ AdviceUK, [Advice Saves Lives Report, 2024](#).

⁵ Migrants Organise, [A view from the frontline of the asylum legal aid crisis](#), March 2026.

⁶ AdviceUK, [Advice Saves Lives Report, 2024](#).

⁷ Ibid.

announcement of reforms to the refugee renewal status timeframe.⁸ This has placed significant strain on advice capacity and casework provision.⁹

Our member Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) have reported that demand for asylum support advice has grown sharply, but provision is concentrated among a small number of overstretched specialist providers, creating significant capacity constraints.¹⁰ As a result, services are increasingly rationing support and prioritising certain cases.¹¹ This has left many people to navigate complex processes alone, which often leads to errors.¹² Access remains highly uneven, with clear “advice deserts” limiting the availability of support in many areas.¹³

Data and feedback from our member organisations from across the independent advice sector demonstrates an industry that is overstretched and underfunded. We are concerned that the introduction of the Independent Appeals Body will only further increase demand on a sector that is at tipping point. While the long-term impact is yet to be seen there is strong evidence that the short-term effect will lead to a significant disruption to casework as advisers will be required to adapt to new legal frameworks, processes and systems.

These pressures are further exacerbated by structural challenges within the asylum advice landscape. Access to legal representation is severely constrained, with only 1.3% of people seeking asylum successfully matched with a lawyer in early 2024.¹⁴ As a result, advice services are increasingly required to fill gaps in provision, supporting individuals to navigate complex processes without formal representation. Provision is also highly concentrated among a relatively small number of specialist providers, many of whom are already operating beyond capacity and are forced to prioritise crisis cases. This creates a system in which many individuals are left to navigate the appeals process alone, often leading to errors, delays and negative outcomes that require further intervention. Advisers are also routinely required to compensate for wider systemic failures, including correcting administrative errors, chasing responses and explaining processes to clients with limited understanding of the system.¹⁵ Evidence from Refugee, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Action (RAMA) suggests that 45% of individuals have no understanding of the asylum process and a further 40% have only limited understanding.¹⁶ This means that a significant proportion of advisers’ time is spent on basic system navigation.¹⁷ The introduction of a new appeals body will, at least initially, intensify these demands, as both advisers and clients adjust to new rules.

We are therefore concerned our member organisations in the asylum and immigration advice sector are concerned that the establishment of the Independent Appeals Body is likely to increase pressure on advice services, particularly in the short-term. This will potentially also be the case in the long-term if reforms lead to increased refusals or procedural complexity. These impacts are

⁸ African Rainbow Family, [Earned Settlement Policy Brief for LGBTQ+ Refugees and People Seeking Asylum in the United Kingdom](#), November 2025.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ASAP, [Access to advice on asylum support and asylum support appeals](#), June 2024.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Migrants Organise, [A view from the frontline of the asylum legal aid crisis](#), March 2026.

¹⁵ ASAP, [Access to advice on asylum support and asylum support appeals](#), June 2024.

¹⁶ RAMA, [Written evidence submitted for the Home Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into changes to routes to settlement](#), December 2025.

¹⁷ Ibid.

likely to be compounded by other ongoing changes to immigration and asylum policy, which are already driving increased demand across the sector.¹⁸ Therefore, it is essential that the Government provides clarity on the expected role of advice services within the new appeals system, including how they will be supported to meet demand. Any changes that are taken forward must be co-designed with advice services.

2.2 Insecure funding

Demand for our members' services is being exacerbated by insecure funding. Our Member Survey Report 2025 found that just 33.4% of funding is from the public sector with services having to rely on charitable trusts, foundations, individual giving and other insecure private or third sector funding sources.¹⁹ See Annex A for a full breakdown of the funding streams of advice. It demonstrates the breadth of funding sources our members rely on and the relative low level of public sector funding. The insecurity of advice sector funding is not only driven by the number and complexity of different streams, but also due to its short-term nature. Grants, funds and other income streams are typically only available to advice services for a limited time. This means that it is harder to plan for demand in the long-term and mitigate its potential impact by investing in solutions. Demand and funding insecurity have resulted in 61% of our members stating they were likely to reduce or cut services in our Advice Saves Report 2024.²⁰ Without consistent long-term funding, advice services will struggle to support any reforms to the immigration and asylum system. If advice services are not able to fully support those in need, immigrants and asylum seekers with legitimate claims and the right to settlement may have their applications denied.

3. Reforms will not achieve their intended goals

3.1 Bureaucracy, backlogs and delays

AdviceUK supports reforms that aim to improve timeliness and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. Our members report that delays, backlogs and administrative inefficiencies create significant stress for their clients and increase the complexity of their casework. Indeed, government data has shown the scale of this issue. The National Audit Office (NAO) found that, in December 2025, the cost of supporting people seeking asylum reached around £4.9 billion in 2024–25.²¹ The NAO explicitly linking these costs to “long delays and backlogs” in the system.²² There is evidently need for improvements in efficiency and delivery in the immigration and asylum system.

However, we are concerned that the proposed approach will not achieve these objectives in practice. By compressing appeals timelines, widening the pool of decision-makers beyond legally qualified judges, and introducing the principle that cases may be prioritised according to the “public interest”, the proposals risk undermining decision quality and procedural consistency. These are key drivers of delay within the current system and weakening them is likely to generate further inefficiencies rather than resolve them.

¹⁸ African Rainbow Family, [Earned Settlement Policy Brief for LGBTIQ+ Refugees and People Seeking Asylum in the United Kingdom](#), November 2025.

¹⁹ AdviceUK, [Member Survey Report](#), 2025.

²⁰ AdviceUK, [Advice Saves Lives Report](#), 2024.

²¹ NAO, [An analysis of the asylum system](#), December 2025.

²² Ibid.

Compressing appeal timelines will significantly reduce the time available to prepare cases, gather evidence and secure representation. This will place considerable strain on advisers and risk incomplete and insufficient submissions. This strain will, in turn, lead more individuals and families being turned away from advice services, likely hurting system efficiency further. There is also a particular risk that faster processes will lead to poorer appeal decisions. Evidence from Migrants Organise suggests that efforts to accelerate asylum decisions have already resulted in higher refusal rates and an increase in appeals.²³ This indicates that speed alone does not reduce pressure on the system. Instead, it often merely shifts it elsewhere. Where decisions are made quickly, but without sufficient scrutiny or access to evidence, they are more likely to be challenged. This prolongs the overall resolution of cases and increases the administrative burden across the system. This problem will be exacerbated by the existing pressure on advice services. Evidence from our member organisation ASAP demonstrates that, as demand is reaching crisis point, services are reducing support, leaving many claimants to navigate the immigration and asylum systems alone.²⁴ ASAP argues that this is leading to increasing numbers of errors and mistakes.²⁵ Therefore, the Government needs to work with the advice sector to mitigate any further strain on their services if it is serious about improving efficiency in the system.

Depending on how the Government designs the Independent Appeals Body, it is therefore reasonable to anticipate that, far from clearing the backlog, appeal decisions will increasingly be re-appealed at a higher court. Similarly, the introduction of shorter appeals windows risks limiting the ability of individuals to sufficiently prepare their cases. This is likely to lead to incomplete submissions, adjournments or flawed decisions that require further challenge.

3.2 Systemic issues

Evidence from across the sector highlights that many individuals already struggle to understand and navigate the asylum system. A significant proportion require extensive support simply to engage with the process. Indeed, RAMA have stated that 45% of individuals have no understanding of the asylum process and a further 40% have only limited understanding.²⁶ Introducing a new appeals framework, particularly one that emphasises speed, is likely to exacerbate this challenge. The Independent Appeals Body is at risk of increasing errors, miscommunication and procedural non-compliance. All of these factors are likely to contribute to delays rather than reduce them.

3.3 Legal concerns

AdviceUK also has concerns about the proposed shift away from traditional judicial decision-makers. Immigration and asylum appeals often involve complex questions of law, credibility and country evidence, requiring a high level of legal expertise and independence. Replacing judicial decision makers and expanding the role of adjudicators without equivalent legal training or judicial experience risks introducing inconsistency into decision-making, which may lead to increased challenges and reduced confidence in the system.

3.4 Human rights concerns

²³ Migrants Organise, [A view from the frontline of the asylum legal aid crisis](#), March 2026.

²⁴ ASAP, [Access to advice on asylum support and asylum support appeals](#), June 2024.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ RAMA, [Written evidence submitted for the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into changes to routes to settlement](#), December 2025.

AdviceUK welcomes the Home Office's commitment that the new system should be underpinned by the rule of law, procedural fairness and impartiality. However, there is a clear tension between these principles and the operational design of the proposals. The emphasis on prioritising cases in the "public interest" may risk decisions being perceived as less impartial or less grounded in their legal merit. This is likely to generate additional disputes rather than resolve them.

The proposed reforms may not achieve their intended aim of reducing delay and bureaucracy. Instead, by prioritising speed over decision quality and procedural fairness, there is a risk that inefficiencies will be displaced elsewhere in the system. The proposals may lead to more contested decisions, greater procedural complexity and longer overall resolution times. Ultimately, this undermines both efficiency and fairness. Any reforms to the immigration and asylum appeals system must be co-designed with the advice sector.

4. Conclusion

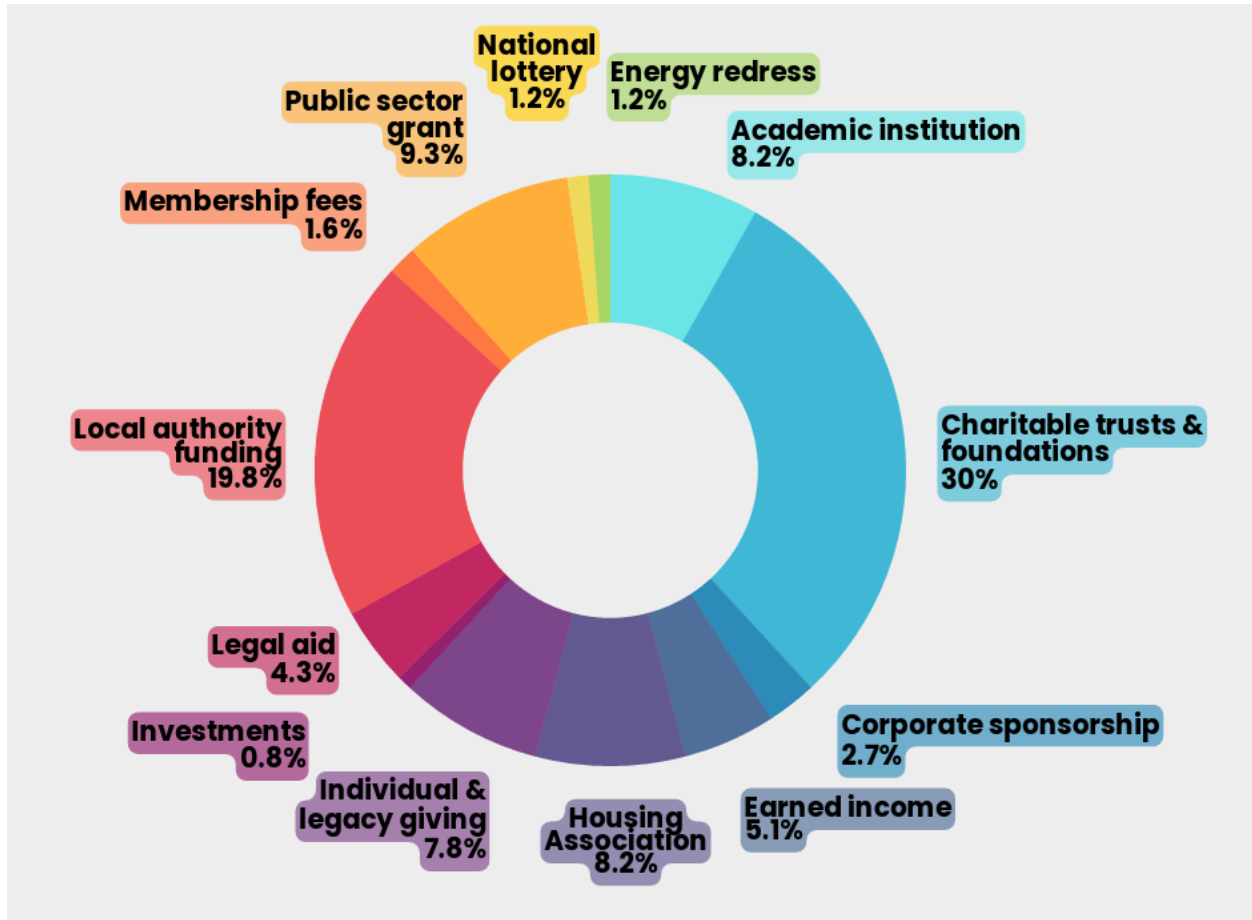
AdviceUK supports the Government's objective of reducing delays and improving the efficiency of the asylum appeals system. However, the evidence set out in this submission demonstrates that the proposals, as currently designed, are unlikely to achieve these aims. Instead, the combined effect of compressed timelines, changes to decision-making structures and wider immigration reforms are likely to increase demand across the system. There is a clear risk that inefficiencies will be displaced rather than resolved, leading to more contested decisions, greater procedural complexity, longer overall case resolution times and the potential for risks to human rights protections.

At the same time, these pressures sit within a context of rising demand, limited access to legal representation and insecure funding across the advice sector. Advice services play a critical role in enabling individuals to navigate the appeals process and in supporting the effective functioning of the wider system. It is therefore essential that the Government provides clarity on the role that advice services are expected to play within the new appeals framework, and how they will be supported, and funded, to meet demand. If any reforms are taken forward, AdviceUK urges the Government to work in close partnership with the immigration and asylum advice sector to co-design them.

Appendices

Annex A

Percentage breakdown of funding sources for AdviceUK members. From the [AdviceUK Member Survey Report 2025](#).



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