

ASAP

ASYLUM
SUPPORT
APPEALS
PROJECT



Strategic plan

2025 - 2030

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“Without the advocate I would have been homeless. The advocate listened to me and understood what I was saying... then made my voice heard in front of the judge”

Asylum support appellant represented by
ASAP, Dec 2023

“ASAP is one of the pillars that the rest of the sector rests on... The sector is smarter, better equipped and more prepared to do the work that they do because of the training and resources provided by ASAP, and that will be leading to better outcomes for the people approaching the sector for support across the country.”

Advice organisation, Dec 2024

History of ASAP

Before 2000, many people seeking asylum could apply for the same state benefits and housing as British Citizens.

However, in 2000 the Government created a separate Home Office run welfare system for people seeking asylum. There was a lower level of financial support, and basic housing with no choice of location. There was the right to appeal if an application was refused, but no legal aid to pay for a lawyer to help you through the appeals process. People were left to navigate this complex area of law alone, defending themselves against a Home Office representative despite language and cultural barriers and a lack of technical knowledge.

A group of lawyers and voluntary sector organisations lobbied for legal aid to be provided, and when this was refused, they founded ASAP in 2003 to provide free legal representation for asylum support appeals.



ASAP conference, 2019. Image by ASAP.

Our focus

ASAP reduces destitution amongst people seeking asylum in the UK through:

Free legal advice for people across the UK who are appealing to the Asylum Support Tribunal against the Home Office's decision to refuse or stop their accommodation or financial support.

Increasing high quality advice on asylum support across the UK, by supporting organisations to build their expertise in asylum support law through free training, advice line and an online network of advisors (Asylum Support Advice Network ASAN).

Tackling the root causes of destitution and increasing access to justice through policy and litigation, so that Home Office and Tribunal policies and practices better meet the needs of people seeking asylum.



Collective, 2019. Image by Mido Makasardi.

Alongside this, we run a women's project to address the barriers faced by women in accessing safe housing and financial support within the asylum system.

Introduction

ASAPs strategic plan for 2025 – 2030 sets our direction for the coming 5 years. It is rooted in feedback obtained by ASAP from staff, volunteers, trustees, people living on asylum support in the UK, and organisations that support them. In total we received input from 95 stakeholders, including 37 people seeking asylum. The consultation assessed the current context, the priorities of people in the asylum system and the work ASAP should continue or develop in the coming 5 years.



ASAP conference, 2019. Image by ASAP.

Summary of key findings from consultation

Many stakeholders asked ASAP to continue the work already in place:



All stakeholders said that ASAP's free legal representation at the Asylum Support Tribunal is vital, as ASAP is the only organisation in the UK routinely doing this work.

Organisations of all sizes flagged ASAP's second tier training, advice line and ASAN network as essential to their ability to continue to deliver advice on asylum support.

Respondents commented on the need for ASAP to continue leading asylum support policy work across the sector, given the opportunities for change with a new government. People felt ASAP's private advocacy and strategic litigation to influence Home Office and AST policies and processes, done in partnership with other organisations, was the right approach.

Staff and trustees recognised the progress ASAP has made in increasing the voices of people with experience of living on asylum support within ASAP over the last 5 years, and felt we should continue this focus.

Thinking about areas for development:



Staff, trustees and partner organisations identified a need for ASAP to increase its capacity to represent people.



Many people living on asylum support said they did not understand the appeals process, pointing to a need for more accessible information about asylum support and appeals.



Advisors from other organisations requested an expansion of the advice line, more accessible online materials and a search facility for information shared on ASAN.



Some staff and people ASAP had assisted suggested an expansion of ASAP's representation work to help people earlier in the appeals process, if they had no other organisation assisting them.



Staff and trustees thought it was important we continue to involve people living on asylum support in setting ASAP's policy priorities for influencing the Home Office.



Internally, respondents suggested that ASAP develops its IT infrastructure, communications capacity, diversifies funding and continues to focus on staff and volunteer wellbeing.



In the policy sphere, respondents suggested making better use of ASAN to evidence national systemic issues and for strategic litigation.



Staff felt we should increase our work to influence Tribunal processes, alongside Home Office policies.

Analysis of external environment

The hostile political and social context over the last 5 years has increased rates of staff and volunteer burn out across the sector.

Organisations report having less capacity to help with asylum support appeals, and being increasingly reliant on ASAP's expertise, in an environment where need is increasing and funding is decreasing. Small new organisations, in need of expert advice and training, have popped up across the UK to try and meet the needs of people housed in Home Office accommodation. But many people still end up being housed in isolated accommodation in advice deserts.

The combination of poor quality housing, hostile policies and delays in decision making have caused a spike in safeguarding incidents in asylum accommodation. The decimation of the immigration legal aid system has led to a stark increase (now just under 50%), in the proportion of people navigating the asylum system entirely alone. This lack of expert asylum

support and immigration advice, has made it all the more important that people can self-refer to our representation service, and that our online materials are accessible.

From 2020 onwards, we saw a reduction in overall asylum support appeal levels and in the proportion of people appealing a support refusal, dropping from approx. 40% to 5%. We had to make changes to our representation service model in order to keep offering free legal advice through the peak of the pandemic. We increased one to one support for duty scheme volunteers, and have retained that support, to help us maintain a quality service and keep our volunteers for as long as possible.



London, 2022. Image by Joss York.

Our vision & values

All people seeking asylum in the UK have shelter, food and support rather than living in destitution.

The Home Office and Tribunal are held to account, to ensure access to justice, dignity and equity.

WE BELIEVE IN

Human rights

Access to justice

Independence

Empowering people to access their rights & advocate for change.

WE VALUE

Openness and transparency

Partnership work

The expertise of people living on asylum support

What we do?

We reduce destitution amongst people seeking asylum by protecting their legal rights to food and shelter.

Advocacy

Resources

Training

Advice

Support

Representation

Who we work with?

We work with people who have been forced to flee their home countries and seek safety in the UK, who then find themselves destitute and in need of food and shelter. We also work with organisations around the UK who assist them.

Legal professionals

People seeking asylum

Front-line agencies

Advisors

Vulnerable adults

Theory of change

The three strands of ASAP's work tie together, to achieve our goal of reducing destitution by protecting the legal rights to food and shelter of people seeking asylum in the UK.

1



Our free legal representation at the Asylum Support Tribunal has an immediate impact, reducing destitution for people appealing a refusal or withdrawal of support.

2



We build the skills of advice organisations across the UK so that they can confidently assist people who need help and support to navigate the asylum support system.

3



We improve asylum support policies and practices, using evidence gathered from our frontline and second tier work to persuade the Home Office and Tribunal to reduce systemic barriers to housing and financial support faced by thousands of people across the UK.

Goal 1

Increase quality representation and dignity at the Asylum Support Tribunal for all people seeking asylum.

To do that we will:

- › Increase capacity for quality representation and advice for people appealing against the Home Office's refusal or discontinuation of their housing or financial support.
- › Review ASAP's support for people who have no access to advice in the lead up to their appeal
- › Review our package of support for duty scheme volunteers to assist wellbeing and retention.
- › Review feedback mechanisms for appellants.
- › Increase access to justice for people with paper appeals including exploring changes to our service model

"I was in contact with ASAP from the beginning of my appeal process and they have been incredibly helpful throughout ... (The advocate) gave me a rundown of what was going to happen and the questions I may likely face, in addition his words of confidence about the likelihood of us winning the appeal lifted my confidence and ability to answer questions during the trial."

Appellant assisted by ASAP, Sep 2024

"Given the amount of failures in Home Office procedures ASAP has been invaluable. Asylum seekers with no funds to access legal advice could not manage without this service. The help and information given freely and without judgement is exceptional"

Advice organisation, Dec 2024

"As a migrant who's not familiar with legal procedures and laws of this country it's a turning point to have an advocate who can explain the real situation, strengths and weaknesses"

Appellant represented by ASAP, Dec 2024

Goal 2

Ensure people seeking asylum across the UK have access to quality advice and information about their legal rights to food and shelter, by building other organisations' asylum support skills.

To do that we will:

- › Increase capacity for expert training, guidance and second-tier support on asylum support, including in new dispersal areas.
- › Increase accessible information about appeal rights, for and in partnership with people living on asylum support.
- › Expand the advice line including scoping an email advice service.
- › Simplify and expand online materials to help advisors assist people with asylum support appeals.
- › Enable advisors to better utilise information shared via our googlegroup ASAN.

"ASAP is my go-to place for all the information and training I need on asylum support. It would be very difficult to keep up to date with the constantly changing asylum support landscape without it".
Advice organisation, Dec 2024

"(ASAP is) the sector leader in knowledge and experience in navigating the asylum support system. Their presence allows organisations on the ground like ours to ensure that we can help our members access their rights and prevent destitution"

Advice organisation, Dec 2024

Goal 3

Tackle the root causes of destitution through policy, advocacy and litigation.

To do that we will:

- › Harness our network of advisors (ASAN) to develop a national evidence base, collate case studies and ensure small organisations have a voice in national policy fora.
- › Build capacity for people with experience of living on asylum support to influence ASAP's work to improve the system.
- › Increase access to justice by influencing Asylum Support Tribunal practice and procedures.
- › Persuade the Home Office to improve the quality of their decision making, contracts and safeguarding procedures.
- › Increase access to safe accommodation and financial support for women in the asylum support system.
- › Proactively use strategic legal challenges to improve the asylum housing and financial support system, where this is more effective than policy work.

"You are the foundation which we all work within. You mediate, represent and challenge"

National advice organisation, Dec 2024

"ASAP's recent report was very comprehensive and will be referenced by me (and others!) for years to come. ASAP also... play (an) important role in chairing (the) ASEG group, and I always feel like our concerns / questions are escalated efficiently"

ASAN member, Dec 2024

Goal 4

Maintain ASAP's resilience, purpose and expertise, for people seeking asylum and the organisations supporting them.

Whilst maintaining high quality financial, HR and operational processes, we will:

- › Ensure our work across the organisation is influenced by people with experience of living on asylum support.
- › Develop ASAP's IT infrastructure including exploring ASAP's approach to AI and technical solutions to our other goals.
- › Maintain an inclusive, accessible and supportive culture, expanding ASAP's wellbeing support for staff and volunteers.
- › Enhance ASAP's induction and training plan for staff.
- › Review ASAP's funding sources to ensure sustainability within an increasingly challenging environment.
- › Expand ASAP's already effective partnerships to deliver our goals.
- › Increase ASAP's communications to support service delivery, and better celebrate ASAP's success.

"They are very relational. Very easy to contact. I think that's really important - that's how partnerships are built."

Evaluation interview, Dec 2024

"Sharing knowledge, building sectoral knowledge and confidence and connections. Reducing isolation, Really valuable. I actually think it has helped with staff (my) morale at times - seeing we aren't alone, and knowing how many skilled people there are out there working for the best."

Advisor, ASAN, Dec 2024

