

Immigration and Asylum in Barnet: Capacity Reduces as Demand Rises

February 2026

Executive summary:

- Immigration in the UK has been increasing over recent years, and asylum claims have surged to the highest level recorded at 109,000 individuals applying in the year ending March 2025.
- Barnet has been awarded Borough of Sanctuary status by City of Sanctuary UK and is one of the London boroughs hosting the highest number of asylum seekers.
- We are the only free provider of IAA level 3 immigration advice in Barnet that is equally available to everyone.
- Citizens Advice Barnet has seen a significant increase in the number of immigration and asylum problems in recent years and expects to see a further increase in demand once the government's proposed changes to immigration law come into force.
- Almost a third of the clients who come to us for advice on immigration and asylum problems have disabilities or long-term health conditions.
- Immigration casework will be significantly reduced from April because of a lack of funding.
- The ability of Citizens Advice Barnet to provide expert, accessible support has been vital in helping individuals from all backgrounds understand and navigate the immigration process.
- The dramatic increase in immigration and asylum problems combined with a lack of funding to deal with them could make for serious problems in the future including more asylum seekers being unfairly forced to leave the UK.

The national picture

Immigration in the UK has been increasing over recent years, and asylum claims have surged, with 109,000 individuals applying in the year ending March 2025. This is a 17% increase from the previous year and the highest level recorded. Of these claims, just under half, or 45,084 people, were granted refugee protection or other leave to remain at initial decision.¹

Individuals awaiting decisions on their immigration applications must rely on limited government support, receiving around £7 per day to meet their basic needs.² They also have to navigate a very complex and difficult immigration application process which can include long delays, high costs and an unfair burden on migrants to prove their rights. Destitution is also common, with no right to work, poor housing, difficulties accessing healthcare and language barrier problems. These conditions all help to disempower and dehumanise refugees and asylum seekers.³

¹ Home Office. [Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025](#).

² Asylum Matters. [Surviving in Poverty - a report documenting life on asylum support](#).

³ Refugee Action. [Waiting in the Dark - How the asylum system dehumanises, disempowers and damages](#).

To help curb net migration, the UK government has introduced several legal and administrative changes. These changes include a rise in application fees, including for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and Naturalisation, and new rules that have significantly reduced the number of jobs eligible for Skilled Worker sponsorship. Additionally, the UK is moving towards a fully digital immigration system with the introduction of eVisas to replace physical documents like Biometric Residence Permits.

Other recent changes include stricter rules for new skilled worker visas, which will only be accepted with degree level qualifications, and jobs in adult social care will no longer be eligible for Health and Care Worker visas. The government has also recently closed the 'Refugee Family Reunion' applications route which allows people with refugee status or humanitarian protection to bring family members to the UK.

There are also major proposed changes to UK immigration rules following the government's May 2025 'white paper': 'Restoring Control Over the Immigration System'⁴ These changes include higher English language requirements which were introduced in January 2026 and increasing the time it takes for migrants to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) from 5 years to at least 10 years for most immigration routes (set to be introduced in April 2026).

Other proposed changes as outlined in a statement to the House of Commons in November include extending the amount of time before refugees can apply for ILR from 5 years to 20 years. Refugees will now also have to prove continued need for protection every 30 months before applying for ILR.⁵

We expect the recent and proposed changes to increase the number of deportations from the UK, increase instances of destitution and put further pressure on already stretched immigration support services, such as casework provided by Citizens Advice Barnet.

What we are seeing in Barnet

Barnet was awarded Borough of Sanctuary status by City of Sanctuary UK in 2024 for its efforts in welcoming those seeking a safe place to live such as asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees.⁶ The award demonstrates a commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment, whilst also reflecting how important immigration issues are in Barnet.

According to government data, Barnet has consistently been one of the London boroughs with the highest number of asylum seekers, hosting around 1,588 asylum seekers as of September 2025. This is an increase of 22% from the same data for September 2024.⁷ Despite this, access to immigration advice and legal support is limited across Barnet. There are only 10 Immigration Advice Authority (IAA) registered advisers providing assistance in Barnet.⁸ Most of these advisers

⁴ HM Government. [Restoring control over the immigration system.](#)

⁵ HM Government. [Restoring order and control - A statement on the government's asylum and returns policy.](#)

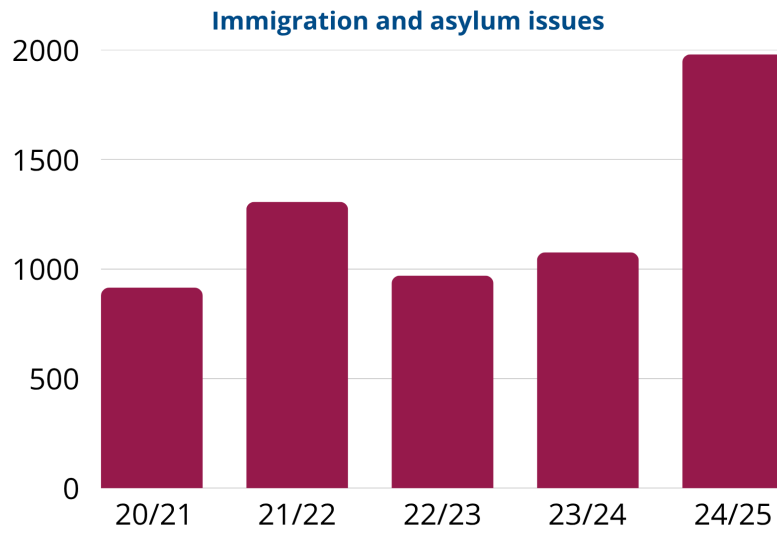
⁶ London Borough of Barnet. [Barnet a Borough of Sanctuary.](#)

⁷ Gov.UK. [Regional and local authority data on immigration groups - Reg_02](#)

⁸ Justice Together. [No Access to Justice 2.](#)

are Level 1 and our service is the only free IAA level 3 service equally available to all ethnicities. This leaves many vulnerable residents without the help they need to navigate the often complex immigration process.

At Citizens Advice Barnet, we have seen a significant increase in the number of immigration and asylum problems in recent years.⁹ Our data shows that between 2020/21 and 2024/25, the number of immigration issues brought to Citizens Advice Barnet has more than doubled, highlighting the growing demand for support for refugees and asylum seekers and increased funding in this area.



Historically the number of immigration and asylum problems in Barnet has fallen below other issues like benefits, housing and debt. However, recent data shows that this is no longer always the case. We also expect to see a significant rise in demand for immigration advice once the government's recent and proposed changes to immigration law come into force.

The most common immigration and asylum problems in Barnet

Many clients come to us because they do not understand the communications they've received from the Home Office, either due to a language barrier or because they are unfamiliar with the terms.¹⁰ Almost a third of our clients have disabilities or long-term health conditions, a fifth are old or young, 6% are overstayers or have no regularised status, and 53% are women, of whom 6% report domestic violence.¹¹ It is not uncommon for us to see clients whose spouses are using their lack of immigration status or reliance on them as their sponsor to abuse them.

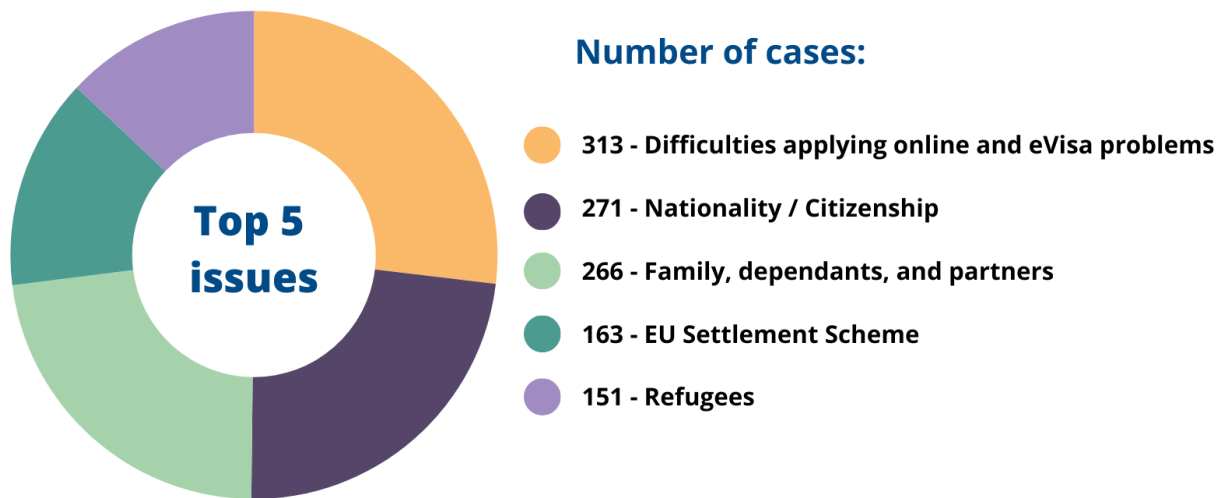
In the most recent financial year we have offered the most support in 5 key areas:

⁹ Citizens Advice Barnet data

¹⁰ Citizens Advice Barnet data

¹¹ Citizens Advice Barnet data

Top 5 immigration / asylum issues for 2024/25



Our data shows that the majority of all immigration issues in 2024/25 are about problems with the online application process or with the newly introduced eVisa (a digital record of a person's immigration status). EVisas have now replaced Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) as the UK transitions towards a fully digital immigration system. They account for 16% of all immigration and asylum problems in 2024/25, showing a dramatic increase from previous years. Many refugees and asylum seekers we see struggle with digital exclusion and experience data inaccuracies and system errors.

Citizens Advice Barnet did have additional capacity to help with the transition to eVisa, and this contributed to the high number of cases seen. However, this funding was only available for a year from September 2024 until August 2025. Since August 2025 there has been a sharp decline in the number of people that we have helped with online applications and eVisa problems, reflecting the reduction in capacity but necessarily the need for our services.¹²

Another key area of concern is nationality/citizenship which made up 14% of immigration and asylum problems in the last year. Within this issue, applicants face difficulty with registration and naturalisation, qualifying and applying, and managing the associated costs.

Other areas of concern are family, dependants, and partners, including extending or securing Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and difficulties managing the costs of application fees. These issues are likely to increase following the removal of the 'Refugee Family Reunion' route to new applications. Lastly, refugees represent around 8% of the immigration problems we see in Barnet, particularly in applying for ILR and travel documents. This percentage is likely to increase when proposed government changes come into force, specifically the requirement for refugees to renew leave to remain every 30 months for 20 years when they will finally be eligible for ILR.

¹² Citizens Advice Barnet data

Funding

Despite a significant rise in the number of immigration and asylum problems in Barnet for 2024/25, our funding in this area has been cut by over a third.¹³ Currently our free Immigration Advice Authority (IAA) level 3 immigration casework service enables refugees and immigrants to understand their options and access their rights through end-to-end casework.¹⁴ This involves free, expert, up-to-date advice on a client's situation and rights, what they are eligible for, the criteria they need to meet, what is involved, the costs (Home Office fees) and end-to-end support with all relevant applications, including for fee waivers and No Recourse to Public Funds conditions to be lifted. We can also signpost clients for other support, such as local solicitors providing legal aid and support for domestic abuse survivors.

Our service offers the only free IAA level 3 service equally available to all ethnicities in Barnet. However, we will need to significantly cut capacity if further funding is not secured. This will impact hundreds of vulnerable immigrants who would have limited means of accessing their rights at a time when immigration and asylum problems in the borough are increasing and are expected to increase further following recent government changes to immigration legislation.

Our immigration casework was funded by City Bridge Foundation and Trust for London until June 2025, but Trust for London could not extend its funding after this date. Given the importance of this service, our board of trustees agreed to fund the shortfall from our own reserves until the end of this financial year (March 2026) while we sought alternative funding. If we do not secure replacement funding by the end of March, we will have to almost halve the service's IAA level 3 capacity at a time when immigration and asylum problems are on the increase.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented in this report, it is clear that immigration is rapidly becoming one of the most pressing areas of need in Barnet. The scale of clients facing complex immigration issues, ranging from navigating the application process to securing basic rights and support is increasing. At Citizens Advice Barnet, our ability to provide expert, accessible support has been vital in helping individuals from all backgrounds understand and navigate the immigration process. However, without access to informed, expert advice, many of our most vulnerable clients risk having their applications for asylum rejected and being forced to leave the country despite having a legal right to stay in the UK

The rising demand from our clients is quickly outpacing the current resources available to us. Without additional funding and support, this critical safety net that our IAA Level 3 service provides is at risk. To protect the wellbeing of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Barnet, urgent investment is needed. Securing long-term funding will not only safeguard an essential service, but will reinforce Barnet as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Ends

¹³ Citizens Advice Barnet data

¹⁴ Gov.UK. [IAA level 3 accreditation for immigration](#).

Case studies:

Nesrin is a single mother to two children, having left her abusive partner. Normally a self-employed graphic designer, she was unable to work as she was having panic attacks following the traumatic loss of several close family members in an earthquake. She was also recovering from injuries sustained in a car accident.

We supported her to apply for a fee waiver for leave to remain. However, when this came through as successful and our caseworker attempted to submit the application for her leave to remain to be extended, the fee waiver code did not work. It took several urgent emails and phone calls to the Home Office to rectify this error, causing Nesrin a great deal of additional stress. Eventually we were able to get a new code from the Home Office and submit the application. This was successful, and Nesrin is now one step closer to indefinite leave to remain, which she will qualify for in 2028.

David is an Iranian national and was granted refugee indefinite leave to remain in February 2025. His UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration account) was created for him by the Home Office, but when he logged in to his eVisa account he kept being shown an error message. David needed to view his eVisa in order to open a bank account and apply for universal credit. David needed to access his eVisa urgently, so we called the UKVI Resolution Team to resolve the issue for him. David was grateful for our support and the issue has now been resolved.

Denise is a Ghanaian national who is unable to create an e-Visa because she has sent her documents to the Home Office as part of an application for indefinite leave to remain. As part of the process she has sent her passport and Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) card to the Home Office to support her claim. However, because the Home Office still has these documents she has been unable to create an e-visa to prove her status to employers, or to the DWP, who have stopped her Universal Credit payments. As a result, Denise is facing considerable financial difficulties but will not be able to create an e-Visa until her documents are returned.