Forum and strategy commission submission

In support of the work of the Commission on the Integration of Refugees we would like to submit details of the Regional Refugee Integration Strategy and Refugee Integration Forum for Yorkshire & Humber, funded by AMIF (see links below).

The Strategy, ‘Making Connections, Building Resilience’ was produced following 16 consultation workshops with over 250 stakeholders on a wide range of integration themes over the Summer of 2021, including 2 workshops specifically focussed on refugee participants themselves. The Strategy was launched in Autumn 2021 and identified 10 key priorities and cross-cutting themes relating to refugee integration in our region:

- Housing and Environment
- Economic Integration
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community and Welcome
- Families and Children
- Language and Communication
- Information and Data
- Service Planning and Provision
- Voluntary and Community Sector

- Participation

A new strategic regional Refugee Integration Forum was then set up in early 2022 to help ‘bring the strategy to life’ and promote refugee integration throughout Yorkshire and Humber.

Over 40 leaders and key stakeholders from a wide range of sectors across the region were invited to become Forum members. These include representatives of Local Authorities, the Voluntary and Community Sector, the Home Office, Employment, Education, Housing, the Police, Health and Wellbeing, Arts and Culture, Sport and Leisure and those with lived experience as refugees.

The Forum met for the first time in March 2022 and has met quarterly since.

Objectives of the Forum

- To help develop a whole society approach to refugee integration in Yorkshire and Humber
- To ensure refugee voices are heard and reflected in the work of the Forum
- To raise awareness of current key issues relating to refugee integration
- To raise the profile of refugee integration across the region, and nationally

- To promote the Regional Refugee Integration Strategy and implement the Forum Action Plan

During 2022 the Forum bonded as a group, exploring key issues related to refugee integration in the region as highlighted in the Strategy, including the importance of social integration, participation and economic integration. In particular, every Forum discussion has also provided an opportunity for Forum members to consider how these issues might apply in their own organisations and sectors and what they might be able to do to promote refugee integration in their own settings.

With extension funding secured for 2023, the Forum has now drawn up a simple Forum Action Plan (see attached) for the members to deliver this year, with ongoing support from Migration Yorkshire. The two objectives are:

- Develop Refugee Participation
- Promote Refugee Integration

Actions are listed against each objective, but exactly how the plan will be implemented will vary depending on individual Forum members. By the end of the year we aim to collate a number of case studies from Forum members, to share learning and celebrate examples of good practice. We also hope the Forum will inspire other stakeholders in our region and beyond, promoting a 'whole society approach' to integration.

Supporting statement from Zahra Niazi and Rawand Ahmed, Co-Chairs, Regional Refugee Integration Forum:

“As Co-chairs of the Forum we are delighted to hear about this Commission. With support from Migration Yorkshire, excellent progress has been made in developing and shaping a regional strategy for refugee integration and realising this ambition.

We are extremely passionate about creating a welcome for refugees in Yorkshire and Humber. We believe that what we’re doing with the Regional Refugee Integration Forum is innovative and pioneering - bringing together a wide range of organisations, sectors and refugees with lived experience in one space, to help make change happen. We are particularly proud that the Forum champions the inclusion of those with lived experience.

However, we also recognise the difficulty, constraints and rhetoric which continues to limit progress and real meaningful integration, which is desperately needed to truly transform the lives of those seeking refuge.”

We are keen for the Strategy and Forum to feed into the work of the Commission and would welcome any opportunity to connect with others across the region or nationally on this issue. We would also like to extend an invitation to the Commission to visit the Forum.

Supporting link for Regional Refugee Integration Strategy:

https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/news/making-connections-building-resilience

Supporting link for Regional Refugee Integration Forum webpage:

https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/refugee-integration-yorkshire-and-humber/regional-refugee-integration-forum

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