



## **Making connections, building resilience: the Yorkshire and Humber refugee integration strategy**

This strategy was produced by Migration Yorkshire, following consultation with partners and organisations from across the region. We would like to thank the hundreds of individuals and organisations who contributed to this consultation, in particular those who participated in the strategy consultation workshops in June and July 2021.

The strategy is part of a wider project, Refugee Integration Yorkshire and Humber, which aims to develop a range of strategic work in the region, including research, coordination, partnership building, training and guidance. This work covers several integration areas, including housing, employer engagement, volunteering, refugee participation and the voluntary and community sector.

This project is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Making management of migration flows more efficient across the European Union.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Migration Yorkshire and in no way reflect the views of the funder, the European Commission, or the United Kingdom Responsible Authority (UKRA). Neither the European Commission nor UKRA is liable for any use that may be made of the information in this publication.

The strategy was written and designed by Saulo Cwerner, Liz Maddocks and Michael Crowe of the Strategic Integration Team, in collaboration with other colleagues from Migration Yorkshire.

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Vision and values.....	4
Aims and principles .....	5
Strategic priorities .....	5
Housing and environment.....	7
Economic integration.....	8
Health and wellbeing .....	10
Community and belonging.....	12
Families and young people .....	13
Language and communication .....	15
Information and data .....	17
Service planning and provision.....	18
The voluntary and community sector.....	20
Participation .....	21
Implementation and governance .....	23
Notes.....	25

## Introduction

Yorkshire and Humber has a long and proud history of offering sanctuary to those fleeing war and persecution. More recently, in the 21st century, the region has played a significant role in welcoming dispersed asylum seekers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and resettled refugees - including those from Syria and Afghanistan.

Statutory and voluntary services and local communities across Yorkshire and Humber have played a key role in welcoming and integrating refugees over the years, leading to the development of a wide-ranging infrastructure of support and services to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, and a strong tradition of collaboration between partners.

Refugees have also been agents in their own integration. From learning the language and adapting to life in the UK, to volunteering, training, studying, and working in their new communities, refugees have brought diverse skills, perspectives and experiences that have benefited and enriched Yorkshire and Humber, socially, economically and culturally.

An opinion poll commissioned by Migration Yorkshire in December 2020 offers a few glimpses of public opinion in the region. Almost twice as many respondents said that the UK should continue to offer protection to those seeking sanctuary as refugees than not (49% to 25%). People were also more likely to think Yorkshire and Humber is welcoming to refugees and people seeking asylum (46%), than not welcoming (33%).

On the whole, there was a perception of welcome, and that Yorkshire and Humber residents are broadly supportive of giving refugees and asylum seekers opportunities for integration and inclusion.

Since the last regional refugee integration strategy, Finding Sanctuary, Enriching Yorkshire and Humber, was published 12 years ago, new developments have brought migration and refugee issues increasingly under the spotlight. These have included the high profile European 'refugee crisis' of 2015, the focus on migration as a key message in the campaign for the Brexit referendum vote in 2016, the withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan, and new legal and policy developments such as the Nationality and Borders Bill in 2021.

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have created more barriers for refugees to make connections and to settle and thrive in their new communities, especially when face to face support has not been available. This has also highlighted the importance of digital inclusion for successful integration, including reducing social isolation and enabling access to services.

These and other developments have impacted local areas in Yorkshire and Humber in different ways. Our region is diverse, from large urban populations with a long history of migration but often facing local economic and social pressures, to small towns and rural locations with less developed infrastructure to support refugee integration. All have challenges and priorities and demonstrate that integration is, to a large extent, a local process involving local services and communities.

Our region has time and again demonstrated strong leadership in refugee and asylum issues. It is also the home of several examples of best practice in refugee integration. However, there is more to be done. There are still barriers and challenges to refugee integration, many of which will be highlighted in this strategy.

This strategy lays out a vision for refugee integration and identifies key priority areas and themes for the region. It has been designed as a tool to support stakeholders from a wide range of sectors and geographical areas, raise the profile of refugee integration, and help improve the outcomes for refugees living here.

#### Refugees and asylum seekers in Yorkshire and Humber

Tens of 1,000s - people with refugee background estimated to be living in the region

Around 5,500 - asylum seekers supported in the region at the end of September 2021

Around 6,000 - refugees resettled under various resettlement schemes since 2004

Several 100s - estimated number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers supported in the region

## Vision and values

“Yorkshire and Humber is a region where refugees feel safe and welcome, rebuild their lives, fulfil their aspirations, and contribute to the social, economic and cultural life of the communities where they live”

The vision is complemented by a set of values that define us as a region and inform everything that we do to enable refugee integration, including our services, policies, and attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. The values help us tackle the barriers to integration by reminding us of what is at stake when people fleeing war and persecution rebuild their lives in Yorkshire and Humber.

#### Our values

- Welcome - Refugees find sanctuary and compassion in the communities where they settle
- Inclusion - Services and communities are actively engaged in removing barriers and are well equipped to meet the needs of refugees
- Collaboration - Stakeholders work together in strong and sustainable partnerships recognising each other's strengths
- Opportunity - Refugees can rebuild their lives, fulfil their aspirations, and make contributions to the communities where they live
- Equality - Refugees are recognised as individuals with different characteristics, needs and aspirations, and are treated fairly

## Aims and principles

The aims of this strategy are to:

- Consolidate Yorkshire and Humber's leadership in refugee integration
- Build on existing strong partnership work and forge new links between the public sector, voluntary organisations, employers, and other stakeholders
- Establish refugee integration as a priority in the region through strong leadership
- Enable the region to develop effective, innovative, and sustainable refugee integration services, recognising and building on good practice
- Increase stakeholders' resilience in a fast and ever-changing policy environment
- Help improve integration outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers by drawing attention to social isolation and the need to develop social connections
- Develop refugee participation and leadership
- Promote awareness of the needs of refugees, and the contributions that they make to communities across the region
- Challenge negative and misleading narratives about refugees and asylum seekers through facts and positive stories of integration

The strategy also has some underpinning principles that need to be considered when addressing its strategic priorities:

- Everyone in the region, regardless of their immigration or asylum status, should benefit from integration
- The language and terminology used to describe refugee and asylum issues can have a positive or negative impact on integration
- Refugees and asylum seekers are a diverse group and have multiple identities – being a refugee or asylum seeker is just one part of a person's lived experience
- The region should focus on its strengths and assets, and on what it can do to deliver the best integration outcomes for refugees

## Strategic priorities

Refugee integration is a complex, multi-faceted process. At its most basic level, it involves the rebuilding of entire lives in a new country. Older notions that put the burden of integration on newcomers have long been replaced by more nuanced and complex concepts that see integration as a two-way process, with all stakeholders having a degree of responsibility to enable it. However, integration remains a controversial concept, with definitions often based on the expectations of nation-states and other powerful stakeholders.

When asked about what integration means to them, stakeholders in Yorkshire and Humber, including those with lived experience of forced displacement, responded with a diverse set of ideas, including belonging, community, independence, empowerment, equality, choice, connection, respect, compassion, trust, understanding, acceptance, inclusion, cohesion,

togetherness, welcome, citizenship, home, safety, security, rights, change, sharing, freedom, fulfilment, involvement, solidarity, development, opportunity, stability, empathy, harmony, pride, happiness, and friendships. This is what is at stake for those who live integration day to day, and this strategy reflects this rich palette of experiences.

Integration is therefore best understood as an everyday, multi-faceted, non-linear, and highly individualised process of change for all involved in the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers, including services and local communities. There is no single journey or standardised set of outcomes. Furthermore, integration is essentially a local process. A regional strategy must not substitute for local ones. Instead, this strategy provides a framework for understanding the key barriers, service gaps and priorities for refugee integration in the region. Different areas have developed local integration and/or migration strategies, and this regional strategy is meant to complement and support them.

The strategy is built upon five strategic integration areas (housing and environment; economic integration; health and wellbeing; community and belonging; and families and children) and five cross-cutting strategic integration themes (language and communication; information and data; service planning and provision; the voluntary and community sector; and participation). Five priorities are identified within each area or theme. All aspects of integration - the cross-cutting themes in particular - should be considered by everyone who works with and/or supports refugees and asylum seekers. This strategy invites stakeholders to cross professional and organisational boundaries and take a more holistic and collaborative perspective on refugee integration. There is an ongoing realisation that working in silos limits the positive impacts of integration work, and that successful refugee integration requires more integration between different service areas, sectors and localities.

Additionally, the strategy recognises that different aspects will apply to people with different types of immigration status. The UK legal and policy framework has created different routes and support systems that impact the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in varying ways. The strategy sometimes uses the terms interchangeably, but, wherever possible, strategic priorities and outcomes should apply to all those affected by forced displacement.

Beyond asylum or immigration status and eligibilities, the strategy also invites stakeholders to look at different groups of refugees who have specific needs and often experience additional barriers to integration as a result of marginalisation and discrimination, such as women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI+. On occasion, the strategy highlights issues that affect these groups, but stakeholders should always consider each area or theme from the perspective of different groups of refugees.

Finally, this strategy has two underlying issues that help give it cohesion, and which lend it its title: making connections and building resilience. There is consistent recognition of the positive impact that relationships and social connections have on the integration process, including in employment, health and learning English. These connections help refugees feel safer and fulfil their aspirations. Secondly, following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the ever-increasing 'hostile environment' towards migration in the UK (including new limitations on rights), refugee integration more than ever necessitates greater levels of resilience at the personal, community, and organisational levels. All strategic priorities

included here should be considered in terms of the opportunities that they provide to make connections and build resilience.

## Housing and environment

Refugees and asylum seekers' experiences of housing vary depending on how they arrive in the UK and in the region. Asylum seekers have been dispersed to most local authority areas in the region on a no-choice basis. Local authorities have little say over the procurement and management of asylum accommodation, which often results in many asylum seekers facing poor housing standards and/or living in deprived or isolated areas, with little or no access to support services.

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a sharp increase in the use of contingency accommodation for asylum seekers in the region, usually hotels, which poses additional challenges for local stakeholders. The extensive use of such accommodation (also seen in the case of Afghan evacuees), coupled with poor quality housing, lack of stability, distance from services, family and friends, and 'hostile environment' policies, can have significant impacts on integration, particularly on the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugees find it hard to access suitable and affordable housing, particularly those recently granted asylum in the UK, who need appropriate support as early as possible when moving on from asylum accommodation. Single people with no priority need find it especially hard, but local authorities often struggle to house families and other priority groups as well. For newly granted refugees, sourcing furniture and equipment can be a struggle, and they often rely on donations.

Local authorities and/or their partners also struggle to find affordable accommodation that meets the diverse needs of resettled refugee families. The social housing sector is often unable to plug the gaps, and many refugees and refugee families are accommodated in the private rented sector, where landlords often lack understanding of refugees and their needs.

"I don't want to go too far because if I don't have money, transport fare, I can't go for worship."<sup>1</sup>

Housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) is a challenge that LAs face across the region, as increasing numbers of UASC arrive through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Despite recent initiatives to recruit specialist foster carers, more work is needed to diversify and increase the availability of family-based placements for UASC. Currently, a significant proportion of UASC live in independent or semi-independent provision, often based on overly optimistic assessments of their independent living skills. UASC are particularly vulnerable to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to being separated from their families, and so often require the additional levels of nurture and support that can be provided in a family setting. Family settings aid integration, with young people having better outcomes due to being immersed in the English language and building connections and networks in settled communities.

Tackling homelessness remains a major priority for the region, despite some excellent work such as hosting schemes. More needs to be done to help refugees find suitable and affordable accommodation and support those in need, including refused asylum seekers who cannot stay in asylum accommodation and have no recourse to public funds, refugees who are at risk and require emergency accommodation, such as survivors of domestic abuse, and those with special housing requirements.

Once accommodated, refugees may initially need extensive support with managing tenancies, including understanding their rights and obligations, and accessing financial support. Many refugees and refugee families also need information and guidance about their housing options, accessing social housing, and how to look for a house when they wish to move.

Making neighbourhoods accessible, welcoming, and friendly to refugees and asylum seekers remains a major challenge across the region. Effective local orientation is essential, as is providing accessible information about local areas, including public spaces such as parks, libraries, and community centres. Some refugees and asylum seekers also live a great distance away from support services, and often cannot afford transport to reach them, so meeting their integration needs is a major priority as well.

Housing and environment priorities:

- ✓ All refugees have access to timely and good quality housing support and advocacy services, including information about housing options, rights, and responsibilities
- ✓ All asylum accommodation meets local authority standards and local stakeholders can monitor effectively both procurement and compliance
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers housed in more isolated or remote locations, or in contingency accommodation can access services through various forms of provision, or have support with transport where needed
- ✓ Family-based placements are available for UASC, with support for carers
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers are accommodated in welcoming and friendly neighbourhoods, have access to local information, and can safely use local spaces such as shops, markets, parks, and public transport

## **Economic integration**

Refugees bring a wealth of skills and experience to Yorkshire and Humber, and yet face significant barriers to accessing the labour market. Recent data shows that the employment rate among refugees in the UK is just over 50%, compared to 73% for the UK-born population. One major factor is the relative lack of recognition of the skills, qualifications, and work experience that refugees bring with them to the region. Language, the lack of understanding of UK job markets, and poor health are also major barriers.

Refugees also face discrimination and lack of equal opportunities in labour markets and in work, and often engage in employment below their skills and qualification levels and with little chance of progression to their desired occupations. Specific groups of refugees, such as women and young people (including those leaving care), face additional barriers,

including different cultural and gender norms and lack of access to education or tailored training and support.

Many refugees aspire to become self-employed and create businesses but face specific barriers. They often do not have access to guidance and advice about the process of opening and running businesses in the UK and require additional help. Even when they have the required skills and good business plans, refugee entrepreneurs often lack access to funding such as loans and grants.

Employers and businesses are often unaware of the employment rights and entitlements of different categories of immigration status and have little understanding of the skills and experience that refugees bring to the region. Even when there is the will to help refugees, businesses often lack support, engagement with relevant partners, and knowledge about how they can make a difference.

#### Barriers to economic integration:

- Limited knowledge of English
- Lack of recognition of qualifications
- Poor physical and mental health
- Limited education and training opportunities
- Lack of meaningful volunteering and work experience
- Lack of awareness of refugee talent in businesses
- Structural discrimination

Refugees experience similar barriers to accessing higher education, vocational training, volunteering, and work experience opportunities. Lack of immediate access to labour markets makes these opportunities even more important for the successful economic integration of refugees, but they rarely meet the specific needs of refugees. Economic integration is a long-term process, and individual refugees often need tailored and sustainable support through all its stages, from employability training to job retention and progression.

The lack of full economic integration, including underemployment, often leads to frustration, loss of status, and can exacerbate mental health issues. This is particularly the case for asylum seekers, who are usually not allowed to work and have little to no access to employability support and training from day one. Refugees often arrive with expectations that they will find work and become self-sufficient quickly but realise that they face numerous barriers to achieving it. This also makes refugees and asylum seekers more vulnerable to labour exploitation, trafficking, and modern slavery.

"Of course, I am not settled emotionally as I have not found a job in my profession. For a refugee like me, it is not easy to secure a job commensurate to one's skills and academic qualifications..."<sup>2</sup>

The fulfilment of the economic integration aspirations of refugees requires significant positive action by a range of stakeholders, and Yorkshire and Humber have numerous examples of good practice in this field. However, the short-term nature of funding and underdeveloped engagement with employers prevents local organisations from providing sustainable support and matching the skills and experience of refugees with the needs of local labour markets. The economic impacts of Brexit and Covid-19 have led to a growing interest from employers in recruiting staff from refugee backgrounds, and they may require support to enable this to happen.

#### Economic integration priorities

- ✓ The skills, qualifications and work experience of refugees are assessed and recognised at the earliest opportunity
- ✓ All refugees and asylum seekers have access to welfare support or emergency relief when needed, preventing destitution
- ✓ Refugees access tailored and sustainable employment and business development support programmes that meet their diverse needs and are relevant to local labour markets
- ✓ Refugees access higher education, training, volunteering, and work experience opportunities that meet their aspirations and increase their employability
- ✓ Employers and businesses are aware of the rights and needs of refugees and actively promote refugee employment

### **Health and wellbeing**

Access to health services is important for refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the UK. They may arrive with pre-existing long-term health conditions, or issues may have developed or been exacerbated during the precarious journeys refugees often make to reach safety in the UK. Refugee communities tend to have a higher prevalence of certain health conditions compared to the wider UK population.

On arrival, health screening and access to emergency treatment is crucial, and refugees and asylum seekers also need support to register with local GPs and dentists. Delays with registrations can prevent timely access to services, especially in the early days following arrival when some refugees and asylum seekers may be housed in temporary accommodation. Some asylum seekers may not access services because of fear and misconceptions about their rights, immigration status and/or asylum claim, and potential costs, which can lead to undiagnosed or untreated health issues in the refugee population.

The NHS system may differ from healthcare provision that refugees were used to in their countries of origin, so they need information and guidance about how the NHS works and support with accessing services. At the same time, NHS and other relevant staff require specific training about the health and wellbeing needs of refugees and asylum seekers and the barriers that they face. In particular, services should be culturally sensitive and trauma-informed, and use good quality, professional interpreting and translation services. There are significant gaps in the way that some providers in the region deal with language and communication barriers, and the NHS has developed extensive and in-depth guidance

about commissioning and using language services in health care settings. The negative impacts of health providers failing to provide good quality interpreting cannot be underestimated.

#### Barriers to health and wellbeing:

- Fear or mistrust of authority
- Lack of supportive networks such as family and friends
- Language, especially the lack of good quality interpreting in some services
- Lack of information about health care systems and how to access them
- Services are not culturally sensitive or trauma-informed
- Stigma due to different cultural norms and understandings

Health and wellbeing providers also need to be aware of the health needs of specific refugee groups such as women, LGBTQI+, older or young people and people with disabilities. Health and social care advocacy initiatives can play an important role in ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of different refugees are communicated to health professionals, and that services respond and adapt to meet the intersectional needs of all refugees.

Some health and wellbeing issues such as disability, FGM, sexual health and mental health may be sensitive, or even taboo, subjects for refugees in their countries of origin, which has an impact on their understanding of, and access to, services. Refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities face specific barriers in accessing appropriate services, support and accommodation. In particular, the asylum support system does not always have the capacity or flexibility to meet their needs.

Mental health issues are common among refugees and asylum seekers as a result of the traumatic experiences of forced displacement. Yorkshire and Humber has developed many examples of best practice in specialist refugee mental health services. However, demand exceeds provision in the region, so more specialist provision is needed as well as more accessible mainstream mental health services where appropriate. In addition to more formal mental health support, social and wellbeing activities can provide a real lifeline to refugees, as they help build on the skills and resilience that refugees already have, at the same time as reducing isolation by creating opportunities for meaningful connections in trauma-informed settings in their new communities.

#### Health and wellbeing priorities:

- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers are screened as soon as possible after arrival, have access to emergency treatment and immunisations, and are supported to register with local GPs and dentists
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers, including more vulnerable groups such as women and people with disabilities, know their rights, understand how the NHS and social care works in the region and can access suitable services
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers have access to good quality mental health and wellbeing services that meet their needs, including wellbeing groups and activities

- ✓ All health and wellbeing services provide good quality, professional interpreting and translation services, following NHS guidance
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers have access to health promotion and awareness services, and providers are actively engaged in eliminating health inequalities

## Community and belonging

Forced migration involves loss of place and community and often separation from family, friends and loved ones. The process of rebuilding lives in a new country therefore depends to a great extent on the development of meaningful attachments and connections in, and developing a sense of belonging to, their new communities. At the most basic level, it involves refugees knowing their rights and responsibilities in the UK, having access to good legal advice and representation, and developing trust in institutions and authority figures such as the police.

Building connections with others, whether from the same refugee community or with people from different backgrounds, is crucial. Refugees often mention social interaction as a very important part of the integration process. However, refugees and asylum seekers experience barriers in developing these connections, such as low levels of financial support that asylum seekers access. These are exacerbated by 'hostile environment' policies that result, among other things, in negative perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers in the media, and negative views expressed by people in positions of influence.

### Barriers to community integration:

- Precariousness of immigration status
- Lack of English language
- Cultural differences and lack of knowledge of rights and responsibilities
- Lack of meaningful, sustainable contact with people from other backgrounds
- Negative public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers
- Fear of engaging with authorities, especially the police
- 'Hostile environment' immigration and asylum policies

Local authorities, police officers, and their partners have a key role to play in ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers feel safe and welcome where they live. They need to engage sensitively and effectively with both refugees and local communities to prevent and manage community tension and tackle hate crime, racism, xenophobia, anti-refugee feeling, and others forms of discrimination. Authorities need to build trust with refugees so that they know they have the right to feel safe in their new community and, if they become victims of hate crime, they feel confident to report it.

Successful integration is more likely where refugees are welcomed in the new local area and there are many diverse and welcoming communities across the region. A welcoming and supportive environment can be developed when the local community is aware of the reasons why refugees and asylum seekers arrive locally, and the background to forced

displacement. With the help of positive local media coverage and supportive local services, communities can foster empathy, understanding and compassion towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Welcoming and supportive communities include hubs and settings where refugees can meet other refugees and people from different backgrounds, get to know their neighbours, and take part in cultural exchanges and other activities that bring the community together. The development of meaningful connections can also be supported through more formal interventions such as accessible volunteering opportunities for refugees and people from other backgrounds to work together, community champions approaches, and befriending, buddying and mentoring schemes.

“Integration for me is how we connect, integrate, coming together, mixing up with the environment where we are, mixing with people”<sup>3</sup>

The cultural, leisure, and sport sectors, including libraries and arts organisations, can play an invaluable role in the process of refugee integration by offering a wide range of opportunities for refugees to connect with others and to bond over common interests. Providers can help create these opportunities by promoting activities and events within local refugee communities, ensuring provision and settings are accessible and welcoming to refugees, and by participating in established frameworks for celebrating the contributions of refugees, such as the annual Refugee Week.

Community and belonging priorities:

- ✓ Yorkshire and Humber, through its local neighbourhoods, social and community settings, and local media, provides a welcoming environment to refugees and asylum seekers
- ✓ Refugees make sustainable connections with people from all backgrounds and have regular access to meaningful opportunities to interact with others
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers are aware of their rights and responsibilities in the UK, and have access to good quality legal advice and representation where needed
- ✓ Refugees feel safe, develop trusting relationships with the police and other authorities, and are confident about reporting crime, especially hate crime
- ✓ The culture, leisure, and sports sectors in the region are actively engaged in the integration of refugees through the provision of safe, accessible, and welcoming activities

## **Families and young people**

Most refugees who arrive under resettlement schemes come in family groups, while a significant proportion of asylum seekers are also families. Approximately 10% of all asylum claims are made by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). Additionally, many asylum seekers classed as single persons during the asylum process are reunited with their families after being granted refugee status. Refugees are also likely to have been

separated from family members, sometimes for years, so maintaining contact with relatives (or re-establishing contact following family tracing) is crucial to the overall wellbeing and integration of many individuals.

Refugee families integrating into life in the UK need to be supported to understand their rights and responsibilities regarding issues such as safeguarding children, gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, and domestic abuse. Norms in the UK may be different from those in their countries of origin, so it is important refugee families are made aware of this as soon as possible, in a culturally sensitive and non-judgmental way. Early information and education, including peer support, can prevent complex and costly interventions later.

Within refugee families, older refugees might have particular needs to help them adapt to life in the UK and live independently. Parents and carers need to be able to engage with relevant providers of services such as childcare, family support, and relevant legal advice. However, lack of access to suitable childcare can hinder their integration, especially for refugee women who are often the main carers in families.

Access to education is crucial for the integration of refugee children and young people, as soon as possible after arrival in the UK. They can face a number of challenges due to their experiences of forced migration, including breaks in formal education or no previous schooling experience. A significant number of refugee children also have mental health issues such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Schools and colleges can meet the needs of refugee children by ensuring they are safe and welcoming spaces, offering trauma-informed practice, English language support, wellbeing support, effective communication with parents, and monitoring and tackling bullying and hate incidents. Supporting families with digital literacy and connectivity is also essential, especially with a greater reliance on online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"At the beginning our children were shy and not engaged, but, the... sessions as a family helped them to talk. They became confident and free to talk about what was inside them."<sup>4</sup>

For unaccompanied young people, successful transitions are key to integration. The age at which UASC arrive in the UK (78% aged 16-17 in 2020) intersects with the timing that children in care prepare for transitions to independence. To aid this process, UASC need wraparound support from children's services and access to good quality education, mental health services, and placements that meet their needs. Wider opportunities, such as volunteering, employment, training and socialising with peers are also crucial to enabling young people to live life to the full.

Professionals involved in caring for UASC need to be well-trained and knowledgeable so that young people access the right advice and support including legal representation, when they need it. Good and consistent practice around age assessment would ensure children aren't rushed into independence before they are ready, and a trauma-informed approach would enable professionals and carers to recognise and mitigate the negative impacts of UK immigration processes on a young person's development and recovery.

Families and young people priorities:

- ✓ Refugee and asylum-seeking children can access education as soon as possible after arrival in the UK in schools and colleges that are safe and welcoming
- ✓ Refugees have access to information, advice and support with family tracing and family reunion
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers are aware of their rights and responsibilities in the UK regarding issues such as safeguarding children and domestic abuse, and have access to culturally sensitive advice and support services
- ✓ Suitable and accessible childcare and other family support services are available to all refugee families and family members who need them
- ✓ Young refugees and asylum seekers, including UASC and care leavers, feel safe, supported, and have opportunities to recover, develop and thrive in their new communities

## **Language and communication**

Learning English is key for integration and for refugees to be able to live independently in the UK. Access to English language provision (known as 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' – ESOL) is often a priority for refugees on arrival, especially as English language proficiency is usually a prerequisite for further study, retraining or employment. However, learning English is also important in the broader sense of integration, to enable refugees to settle in the new community and get by in daily life - to make friends locally, ask for help, go shopping, book an appointment with a GP, or discuss their children's education with a teacher.

Assessments for English language level need to be conducted as soon as possible after arrival. However, refugees can face a number of barriers in accessing ESOL provision, including restrictions on eligibility for some in the asylum system. Some areas have limited English provision, and formal provision can be daunting for refugees with little or no prior experience of education or limited literacy. Trauma, which many refugees will have experienced, can impact on their ability to engage with learning and course content often does not reflect refugees' lives. Additionally, lack of accessible childcare prevents some carers, especially women, from attending ESOL sessions.

Yorkshire and Humber has a wide range of English language provision available for refugees including formal, informal, accredited, unaccredited, class-based, community settings, one to one support and conversational opportunities. The region benefits from good information resources that list ESOL provision in all local areas, and good practice is shared regularly through a regional network of ESOL providers and practitioners. However, there are still gaps in provision in some parts of our region and there is a need for more ESOL provision overall. It is therefore important that language providers work collaboratively to ensure refugees are signposted to the most suitable local ESOL provision, providers adapt current provision to reflect the needs of refugee learners, and ESOL commissioners target future funding to address any gaps in provision. Refugees also need more access to

guided self-study and opportunities to practice English to help speed up the learning process.

Many refugees require additional language and communication support, and it is crucial that service providers use good quality and professional interpreting and translation needs. The cost of such services is cited as a barrier by some providers, but not providing them can increase disadvantage and isolation in refugee communities and is a major barrier to accessing services. There are several negative impacts of providing poor or no interpreting, especially in safeguarding and healthcare contexts.

“If I don’t go to college, I will not be able to communicate, I won’t know how to be part of the community, get a job... if I can’t communicate or speak, I will have so many difficulties supporting my children”<sup>5</sup>

Interpreting services must meet the needs of individual refugees and asylum seekers, including dialect and gender, and, in order to maximise the benefits, frontline staff should always be trained in using interpreters. Community interpreting can be a solution in many settings, and at the same time offer some refugees a route into training and employment. It is essential that refugees understand what is being communicated to them so they are able to engage fully, make informed choices, or give consent, and that must include, where possible, translated resources in accessible formats.

Digital inclusion is key to communication, especially with the increasing reliance on online service provision. Refugees and asylum seekers often have limited digital skills on arrival in the UK and may also lack digital devices or connectivity at home. It is crucial refugees are supported to develop their digital skills and access digital devices as soon as possible, so they can access online services and support for their integration. Additionally, these skills and connectivity are important for refugees and asylum seekers to maintain relationships with friends, family, and communities.

Language and communication priorities:

- ✓ The English language needs of refugees and asylum seekers are assessed as soon as possible after arrival in the region using consistent and comprehensive tools
- ✓ All types of ESOL provision across the region are effectively mapped and promoted, and refugees can access suitable provision locally
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers have access to a range of ESOL provision that is suitable to their individual needs and aspirations, including informal learning opportunities
- ✓ Services and organisations provide suitable, good quality and professional interpreting and translation services, including translated resources in accessible formats
- ✓ Refugees and asylum seekers are digitally included, and have the required skills, equipment and connectivity to access services and support online

## Information and data

Information about refugees and asylum seekers in Yorkshire and Humber is patchy. A range of publicly available statistics of this population group are available, but of limited use. Because of the different schemes and programmes that exist, statistics are usually specific to certain groups within the refugee and asylum seeker population and are normally limited to overall numbers of dispersed asylum seekers or resettled refugees at local authority level. The region has developed unique sets of data and information resources over the years. However, developing the skills that stakeholders require to make effective use of such information remains a challenge.

Local authorities (and, on occasion, commissioned services) have access to more detailed information, particularly within the context of refugee resettlement schemes. However, beyond resettlement and, to a smaller extent, asylum dispersal and UASC, there are no data sources that provide reliable information about the region's refugee population as a whole. More specifically, survey data that also covers refugees who have been granted asylum in the UK, particularly those who have obtained settlement status and/or British citizenship, are rare, and most of it is restricted to labour market data.

To compound this problem, outside refugee resettlement schemes, there is effectively no consistent and robust data about refugee integration that regional and local stakeholders can access at any particular time. On the other hand, providers (including the Voluntary and Community Sector) are constantly collecting administrative data about refugees and asylum seekers who access their services, although there is a lack of consistency in the way that this information is collected and shared. The fact is, without robust data on refugee integration, it is very difficult to measure the impact of services, projects, and interventions.

A significant amount of high-quality research into refugee integration has been carried out in Yorkshire and Humber in recent years. Much of this research is qualitative in nature, but, when effectively disseminated and used, it can help stakeholders monitor and improve their services. More independent evaluation research is also needed to identify (and disseminate) impacts of services and good practice.

"I think sometimes the biggest way that we learn is just to take a step back and review what's working. We tend to evaluate a project every six months, so to go back to the drawing board and think, actually, yes, maybe this isn't really working, and can we do this better? "<sup>6</sup>

The region is currently developing effective collaborations between researchers and linking them with practitioners to increase the impact of research on services and organisations. There is also emerging good practice in Yorkshire and Humber in training and employing researchers who have lived experience of forced migration.

Many stakeholders identified the collection, use and sharing of data and information as a major priority for the region. For this to happen, more collaboration between stakeholders is needed, as well as robust protocols for sharing such information, and a degree of regional coordination of this work.

Research output also needs to be available in more accessible forms that most stakeholders can use in their roles, including research briefings, toolkits, good practice guides, and other formats. Stakeholders also need training, guidance, and resources to monitor and evaluate the impact of services that they provide.

Information and data priorities:

- ✓ Services and organisations in Yorkshire and Humber have access to, and are able to use effectively, information and data resources about refugees and asylum seekers
- ✓ Services and organisations collect, store and share data and information on refugee integration in consistent, effective and robust ways where relevant, compliant with data protection legislation
- ✓ There is regular engagement and collaboration between the research community and other stakeholders in the region, identifying priority information gaps and fostering effective dissemination of research output
- ✓ Refugee communities are involved in the production of data, research and information about integration
- ✓ The impacts of services and interventions on refugee integration are regularly monitored and evaluated by providers and independent researchers

## **Service planning and provision**

Refugees and asylum seekers arrive in the region as a result of international events, continuing persecution and human rights abuses in different parts of the world. Refugee integration has also been impacted by constantly changing immigration and asylum policy and legislation. This has meant that services have taken mostly reactive approaches to the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. As a result, a lot of expertise has been developed in the region to support refugees and asylum seekers, but, unfortunately, this can be lost when a specific scheme ends, or a new policy is introduced.

Advanced planning for refugee integration can be challenging. However, as more areas in our region are affected by the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers, it's important for all areas to plan for refugee integration. This calls for more proactive approaches to integration, informing all aspects of services, from strategic and business planning and leadership development, to commissioning, staff training, recruitment (of staff, volunteers, etc.), and frontline provision.

Services need to acknowledge that refugees and asylum seekers face multiple disadvantages. This means that refugees often need additional support, and this inevitably requires additional resources. Whether it is more time for an appointment with the doctor, or extra employability support, positive action needs to be developed, whether in-house or commissioned externally to enable refugees and asylum seekers to access services they require and achieve their potential. This does not necessarily mean setting up separate services for refugees, but, at the very least, addressing access barriers through activities such as engagement, language support, and staff training as required.

Tips for developing welcoming and inclusive services for refugees:

- Ensure that there is buy-in from leadership
- Know your communities and service users
- Embed refugee integration into the whole organisation
- Develop an ethos based on compassion and understanding
- Ensure that all staff are adequately trained
- Ensure that refugees are not discriminated against in recruitment
- Allocate adequate resources to tackle disadvantages
- Develop holistic services through collaboration
- Participate in local and regional partnerships
- Engage with the refugee community and voluntary sector
- Identify refugee community assets and promote participation

Effective and regular staff training on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers is particularly crucial. Training should be culturally sensitive and trauma-informed whenever possible. Staff training on refugee and asylum issues should be repeated regularly, in order to deal with staff turnover and changes in policy and in the profiles of refugees settling in the region.

Effective planning for refugee integration also requires collaboration with other services. There is a growing consensus that refugee integration services need to be holistic if they are to enable refugees to rebuild their lives successfully in the region. Developing holistic services involves strong partnerships and collaborations through processes such as regular information sharing, multi-agency referral pathways, developing multi-disciplinary teams, and, where possible, joint commissioning of services. The latter can increase positive impacts and save costs, and activities that can benefit from joint commissioning include training, interpreting and translation services, and community engagement. Developing and participating in local multi-agency groups and partnerships should also be promoted.

Successful refugee integration requires services that are welcoming and accessible to refugees, including tackling the discrimination and disadvantages that refugees and asylum seekers experience. One way that services and organisations can achieve this is through various accreditation or recognition schemes. Finally, better engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) can help services recognise relevant assets in refugee and local communities.

Service planning and provision priorities:

- ✓ Leadership within services, especially in the public sector, are committed to refugee integration and to developing welcoming and inclusive services
- ✓ Services promote positive action for refugees and asylum seekers, and allocate the required resources for eliminating disadvantages they face in accessing provision
- ✓ Refugee integration is embedded across providers' whole organisations, including commissioning, recruitment, and learning and development
- ✓ Service providers ensure that all relevant staff are adequately trained on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, and that training is regularly updated

- ✓ Providers in Yorkshire and Humber develop holistic services, and collaborate effectively with each other through strong partnerships, robust referral mechanisms and joint commissioning

## **The voluntary and community sector**

Despite the ever-changing asylum and immigration legal and policy environment, refugee integration has historically been regarded a matter for local areas. Although guidance and strategic direction have been sporadically provided by central government, it has long been the case that the work of integration has been led by local government, local public services, and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Whether supported through resettlement funding, local and central government funding streams or contracts, charitable trusts, other funding sources, or simply through the sheer passion and commitment of individuals and communities, the VCS has played a central role in refugee integration.

However, due to the changing nature of refugee resettlement and the asylum system, much of the funding accessed by the VCS in the region is short term, leading to a cycle of time-limited projects. Within this environment, organisations often struggle to retain the expertise that they develop and face significant constraints on their capacity to deliver much-needed services. This is particularly the case with smaller groups and organisations who lack the capacity for effective fundraising. Overall, refugee VCS organisations generally compete for the same ever-shrinking funding streams, although recent resettlement funding has provided a boost in many areas.

Despite funding limitations, the refugee VCS in Yorkshire and Humber is a vibrant and diverse community of organisations and individuals who are deeply committed to welcoming and supporting refugees on their integration journeys. It has developed services and projects that are best practice in their fields, and have added value to integration through volunteering, donations, and other assets.

The VCS plays a key role in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers by:

- Providing a warm welcome and friendly support
- Helping people navigate complex UK systems
- Providing specialist services
- Advocating for individuals and groups
- Campaigning for refugee rights and better services
- Providing safe spaces where refugees can meet others
- Recruiting staff and volunteers with lived experience of forced migration
- Providing emergency relief to destitute individuals
- Celebrating the contributions of refugees to the region

Our consultation evidenced the strong partnership between VCS organisations in the region, but there is room to develop better connections and information-sharing between them. This would enable more dissemination of innovation and good practice and benefit smaller

organisations in areas where the refugee VCS is less developed. There's also the need to increase engagement between the VCS and some public services and businesses.

Finally, a strong refugee VCS needs strong Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) led by refugees for refugees. To a large extent, the integration journey 'ends' with independence, empowerment, and self-sufficiency, and RCOs play a significant part in that journey. Refugees need to feel confident to express views and articulate their own needs. RCOs offer refugees the space to mobilise and organise, celebrate and represent their cultures, and engage effectively with services and other stakeholders. Yorkshire and Humber is home to many RCOs and organisations supporting them, but more needs to be done to enable them to expand the unique contributions that they make to the integration process.

"The challenges, of course, are always consolidation, how to maintain what we are doing. Funding is a big thing because all the funding is short-term only, and, after 2020, I need to see how we are going to keep our door open."<sup>7</sup>

Voluntary and Community Sector priorities:

- ✓ The refugee voluntary and community sector in Yorkshire and Humber has access to sustainable funding that enables it to develop and retain knowledge and expertise in refugee integration
- ✓ Key stakeholders in the public and private sectors are aware of the strengths of the refugee VCS, and engage effectively with the sector
- ✓ All relevant localities in the region have vibrant, well-funded refugee voluntary and community groups and organisations
- ✓ Yorkshire and Humber have strong and empowered Refugee Community Organisations that effectively represent refugee communities
- ✓ The region's VCS provides meaningful volunteering opportunities for refugees, asylum seekers, and people from other backgrounds who want to contribute to integration

## Participation

Forced migration is deeply disempowering. In addition to the experience of grief, loss, and trauma, refugees arriving in the UK often speak about feeling lost and disorientated. For some, the very meaning of the word 'refugee' is associated with powerlessness. This is compounded by services that are not always geared to meet the needs of refugees, and over which refugees have very little, if any, say. Moreover, refugees do not have the right to vote in England, which excludes them to a large extent from the political process.

Many refugees have very specific needs and different understandings of how integration processes work. Their voices are rarely heard. The development of welcoming and inclusive services and communities that support the integration of refugees requires refugee participation, so they can help shape their own integration. However, refugees face

significant barriers to participation, which prevent them from making vital contributions to these services and communities.

Firstly, barriers to employment result in workforces that are not representative of communities where refugees settle. Refugees are also under-represented on boards, governing bodies, and other leadership positions. Secondly, existing participation structures and forums are rarely accessible to refugees. Thirdly, there are linguistic, cultural, and logistic barriers to participation, particularly among certain groups of refugees such as women and young people. Finally, lack of stability due to precarious immigration or asylum status is often a barrier to participation, especially among asylum seekers.

Benefits of refugee participation:

- Increased awareness of refugee experiences
- Services are more responsive to the needs of refugees
- Refugees understand how services work
- Recognition of the skills and contributions of refugees
- Increased sense of belonging
- Development of leadership skills in refugee communities
- Reduction of social isolation and marginalisation
- Greater empowerment, more accountability

Meaningful participation also presupposes certain skills that are needed for people to be able to articulate their voices, and to deliberate on matters that concern them, either in advisory or decision-making roles. Many refugees lack these skills when they arrive in the UK. Finally, there is little recognition that there are circumstances when it is right to recompense refugees for their time and expertise in shaping and improving services, organisations, and communities.

This strategy includes a regional commitment to developing, increasing, and improving refugee participation, building on the work already being carried out through consultations, reviews of participation structures, and by the development of specific models such as 'experts by experience' or community champions. The following strategic priorities provide a framework for stakeholders from across the region, and from different sectors, to embed refugee participation into their integration practices. This would ensure that refugees are empowered to shape their integration and have a wider influence in their communities.

"Refugee is like a word that puts you down, someone who is looked down upon...someone who is not considered, someone who always needs help, someone who needs "first aid", I don't know, but it doesn't sound well... "8

Participation priorities:

- ✓ Refugees are meaningfully represented in workforces, boards, partnerships, and leadership positions across the region
- ✓ Refugees are involved in shaping services and organisations through existing participation forums and mechanisms

- ✓ Refugees can articulate their views in independent forums and organisations that have influence on the integration process
- ✓ Services, organisations, and local communities are actively engaged in tackling the barriers that different groups of refugees face, and provide adequate incentives for participation
- ✓ Refugees have opportunities to shape the narrative in a variety of media, and can influence public perceptions on forced migration and asylum in the region

## Implementation and governance

This strategy provides a framework for understanding refugee integration and the challenges that our region faces. This framework includes a vision of what successful integration looks like, as well as a set of key priority areas and themes to guide our work and collaborations. For those already familiar with the highlighted issues, the strategy provides a regional resource that can be used to develop new or existing services and approaches to refugee integration and help secure new funding. For those who are new to refugee integration, the strategy provides new perspectives and identifies a number of ways through which they can contribute to the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Yorkshire and Humber.

Delivering our vision of refugee integration and making progress in each of the priority areas and themes requires a robust whole-of-society approach, in which all stakeholders have responsibility for, and play their part in, developing welcoming and inclusive services and communities. From the local level of neighbourhoods, associations, and faith groups, all the way to central government departments, and including people with lived experience, this strategy aims to mobilise the wider society so we can deliver on our priorities.

The strategy identifies a range of actors that have strong contributions to make to refugee integration, including local authorities, the NHS, police forces, businesses, the media, schools, universities, and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Migration Yorkshire will engage with these and other stakeholders from across the region, including sectors and organisations that are not currently involved in refugee integration. This will not only ensure that as many partners as possible are aware of the strategy and its priorities, but are also able to play their part, contributing skills, perspectives, and experiences towards achieving greater refugee integration in the region, for the benefit of all.

This whole-of-society approach will be implemented by an Action Plan and a new regional Refugee Integration Forum. The Action Plan, to be agreed by key stakeholders, will propose and define practical steps to deliver results on the identified strategic priorities. This Action Plan builds upon available research and integration services already being delivered across the region.

The Forum will strengthen collaboration between some of the regions' key stakeholders, including local and regional leaders. It will drive forward the strategy's vision, promote refugee integration, and help mobilise stakeholders. The Forum, which will be supported by Migration Yorkshire, will bring the strategy and Action Plan to life by:

- Raising awareness of the key current issues relating to refugee integration
- Raising the profile of refugee integration across the region, and nationally
- Ensuring refugee voices are heard and reflected in the work of the Forum

Yorkshire and Humber is committed to continue to lead on refugee integration. This strategy provides a unique opportunity to consolidate the excellent work that already exists, but also to develop new opportunities to meet the integration needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and the communities where they live. The Action Plan will provide practical tips on how stakeholders can get involved in bringing the strategy to life for the benefit of all in the region.

“I would say it's when you are able to live within the wider community and being able to contribute... I would say somebody who is integrated would be able to work, to advance and provide for their own family and their own needs, and also to be useful both to their own community and the community in general”<sup>9</sup>

## **Migration Yorkshire**

4th Floor West

Merrion House

110 Merrion Centre

Leeds

LS2 8LX

Telephone: 0113 378 8188

[Migration Yorkshire Twitter](#) (@migrationyorks)

[Migrant information hub](#) (www.migrationinfohub.org.uk) Covid-19 information for migrants and services in Yorkshire and Humber. Resources to share.

[Migration Yorkshire website](#) (www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk)

## Notes

---

- <sup>1</sup> *Living the Weathers and Other Stories*, Migration Yorkshire, 2021, p 65.
- <sup>2</sup> *Living the Weathers and Other Stories*, Migration Yorkshire, 2021, p 26.
- <sup>3</sup> *Living the Weathers and Other Stories*, Migration Yorkshire, 2021, p 59.
- <sup>4</sup> The Children and Families Wellbeing Project Wellbeing Evaluation Report, Richard Malfait and Nick Scott-Flynn, 2020, p.8.
- <sup>5</sup> *Living the Weathers and Other Stories*, Migration Yorkshire, 2021, p 73.
- <sup>6</sup> *Integration Works: The Role of Organisations in Refugee Integration in Yorkshire and the Humber* - Philip Brown, Claire Walkey and Philip Martin, University of Huddersfield, 2020, p 41.
- <sup>7</sup> *Integration Works: The Role of Organisations in Refugee Integration in Yorkshire and the Humber* - Philip Brown, Claire Walkey and Philip Martin, University of Huddersfield, 2020, p 43.
- <sup>8</sup> *Living the Weathers and Other Stories*, Migration Yorkshire, 2021, p 53.
- <sup>9</sup> *Living the Weathers and Other Stories*, Migration Yorkshire, 2021, p 59.