



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES



Strategy 2021-2025

Welcome

Welcome to the Refugee Council's Strategic Plan to 2025. We are excited to share our bold new vision **for the UK to be a country where refugees are welcome to live safe and fulfilling lives, contributing to their community and society as a whole.**

Shaped with the refugees we work with, as well as our staff, volunteers, partners and supporters, this is an ambitious strategy which defines how we can have the greatest impact over the next four years.

It sets out:

- **our ambitions for 2025**
- **what we will do to achieve these – building on strengths and improving our ways of working, and**
- **how we will measure success.**

We face some big challenges over the coming years. With the pandemic's economic and social consequences, and a government retreating from the principle of refugee protection – there is mixed public feeling about support for refugees.

But there are real opportunities too. We can build and unite the fantastic, local community support that exists across the country. We can further collaborate and work in partnerships to have a powerful, collective impact. And, we can amplify the voices of refugees, ensuring their stories are told and their experiences lie at the heart of all that we do.

Since the day the Refugee Council was formed in 1951, we have been proud to welcome refugees and help them to rebuild their lives. 70 years on, this strategy outlines our constant and unwavering commitment to continue this work.

In this strategy we use the term 'refugee' to include people and their dependents who:

- Seek asylum
- Are recognised as refugees under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention
- Are granted protection or leave to remain
- Are resettled refugees
- Are programme evacuees
- Are appeal rights exhausted



Image and front cover image: Ingrid Turner

Why we exist

“When I came to the UK I was in a bad situation mentally and physically. I had been beaten in prison for six months in a two metre cell with no light. I didn’t know if it was day or night. I didn’t know how to deal with the situation. Sometimes I think it was my mistake. He (Refugee Council therapist Paul) showed me the skills to deal with the problems I had”

Imagine you and your family had to uproot yourselves from your home and community to flee war, persecution and terror. Exhausted, you arrive in the UK with just the clothes you had when you left your homeland seeking safety, welcome, and kindness.

Imagine the fear, distress, trauma and loneliness you would feel.

Thousands of women, men and children don’t have to imagine this – it’s their reality.

Every year, thousands of people seeking protection arrive in the UK hoping to rebuild their lives. Instead, people seeking asylum aren’t allowed to work, have to live on just £5 a day and survive in poor living conditions, with limited access to essential services. It can take years for their asylum application to be decided. In the meantime, people are left in limbo, feeling abandoned and desperate - leading some to lose hope, self-harm and contemplate suicide.

For those who are given refugee protection and permission to stay in the UK, one of the first documents they receive is an eviction notice. They have just 28 days to leave their asylum accommodation, find a new home and money to live. Not surprisingly, they often end up homeless on the streets, facing extreme poverty.

The refugee protection system in the UK is cruel, harsh and often inhumane. Together, we can change this, so that it is both fair and effective, and treats all refugees with humanity and compassion.



Who we are

“Refugee Council is knowing that there is a safety net. Somebody to stand for you when you can’t stand on your own. But, you must work with me to advocate. Work with communities to express what they’re saying. Give people the voice and space”

The Refugee Council is a leading charity working with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. Founded in 1951, following the creation of the UN Refugee Convention, we exist to support those who come to the UK in need of safety and we speak out for compassion, fairness and kindness.

In 2020/21 we worked with more than 13,000 women, men and children; supporting them to get legal help, to live with dignity and independence contributing to their communities, and to improve their emotional wellbeing.

In recent years, we have expanded our services to provide therapeutic support to refugee children and adults, working in successful employment partnerships for refugees with the NHS, Starbucks and ServiceNow, and supporting refugee children who come to the UK alone to get the help they so desperately need.

Drawing on the evidence from our services, we have fought hard to achieve policy changes that make tangible differences for refugees. This includes:

- Successfully challenging the government’s approach to deciding the age of young people seeking asylum. This ensured that **children should no longer mistakenly be treated as adults.**
- Leading the campaign that resulted in the government commitment to **resettle 20,000 people** displaced by the horrific war in Syria here in the UK.

We are very proud of all we have achieved, working with some of the most marginalised and traumatised people in our communities. In the coming years, as we work with refugees and like-minded partners, we are committed to having an even greater impact in all we do.

Why we need to change

During our conversations with refugees, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters, we identified three important factors that have informed the development of our strategy.

1. We are operating in one of the most hostile and challenging environments for refugee protection since our inception.

Achieving our mission has never been harder nor more important than it is today. We must:

- combat radical government reforms that **diminish the rights of refugees**.
- join forces with allies in the voluntary sector and across business, faith groups and trade unions to create a **broad, dynamic coalition** united around a vision of creating a fair, effective and humane refugee protection system.
- gain **more allies** in powerful sections of society to whom we are currently less visible, including business figures and philanthropists, many of whom have refugee heritage.
- **courageously speak out**. While we will continue to work with Government, we strongly maintain our independence and we will accept no compromise on our commitment to speak truth to those with power.

2. We must improve how we work with refugees, partners and supporters. That means:

- working collaboratively with refugees and like-minded partners to achieve **collective impact and drive forward change**.
- seeing ourselves as an **important provider of services** and also a **'system-changer'**, effectively using the available resources to improve service quality to reach unmet need, whilst working alongside a diverse sector that is increasingly refugee and migrant led.
- judging our success on how well we contribute to **improving the refugee system** through improved practice and policy.

3. Our resources are limited and we must use them effectively to achieve impact. This means:

- focusing on what we can do best, supporting others to lead or strengthening their impact where appropriate at a local level. We will consider **stepping back when others, including refugee-led organisations, can do better**.
- **focusing on quality and not just quantity**, ensuring we are clear about the outcomes we want to achieve through all our work and always seeking to learn and improve.
- having **clear priorities** to guide our allocation of resources to have the **greatest impact**.

Our vision:

Refugees are welcome to live safe and fulfilling lives contributing to the UK.

Our purpose:

To work with refugees to transform their experience of seeking protection in the UK.

Our values:



Image: Ilyaz Hajat

Inclusive

We are inclusive. We work with - not for - refugees and people seeking asylum, so they have an equal voice, co-producing projects and ensuring their expertise and experiences are at the heart of what we do.

Collaborative

We are collaborative. Working with others is a priority in order to have the collective impact that is vital to achieve policy and practice reform.

Courageous

We speak out when we see injustice, cruelty and unfairness. We always stand up for what we believe is the right thing to do to transform the experiences of those seeking protection in our country.

Respectful

We are respectful of all those we interact with. We treat everyone – our staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, partners and people we disagree with – with the same respect, professionalism and understanding.



Our Ambitions to 2025

To be effective, we need to focus on specific key ambitions that will inspire and mobilise refugees, our staff, volunteers, supporters and partners.

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Ambition 1

We will successfully press Government and other agencies to take action that significantly improves refugee protection.

We recognise that Westminster is not the sole owner of power. To achieve key reforms to policy and practice, we need to seek greater influence, alongside our partners, in local areas and in other influential institutions, especially regional and local government and the courts.

We will do this by:

- playing a leading role in securing **one or more policy or legal 'landmark-wins'** that materially improve the experience of refugees or people seeking asylum.
- Dynamic campaigning, alongside our allies, to **reverse the hostile environment** imposed on those coming to our country.
- making measurable progress in the fight to **reduce poverty and hardship** for refugees.

We will measure success through:

- developing 'theory of change' outcomes that direct how we **evidence our effectiveness** (alone or in partnership with others) in campaigning to influence the decisions of government.
- playing a leading role in creating a **strong and durable coalition** in favour of ending the hostile environment.
- Achieving **clear changes in policy and practice** by influencing the actions of local and national agencies in the way they treat and deliver support to refugees.



Ambition 2

We will significantly improve access to quality support for refugees in crisis and those seeking to integrate into the UK.

It is a harsh and often brutal world for those who come to the UK. As well as developing our services for refugees and people looking to integrate in their local community, we need to use our convening role to create a better, more welcoming refugee protection culture and environment. This requires us to be a system-changer. Our services will strengthen local networks, test and share good practice with peers, and provide evidence for policy change. It also means that we will develop our service offer while always asking who is in the best position to provide support, and how can we work with others to build their capability to deliver it.

We will do this by:

- ensuring that refugees receive **early access to information, advice and support** to prevent or de-escalate crisis.
- working with refugees to build on their **strengths and resilience** and develop the **skills, knowledge and experience** to integrate and contribute within their local communities.
- **strengthening local support systems** by working with refugees and partners to improve service quality.

We will measure success through:

- a reduction in the numbers of refugees **facing crisis and extreme poverty** in the local areas where we work.
- more refugees reporting they are able to **live with dignity and independence** in the local areas where we work.
- the creation, with refugees and partners, of **a sustainable and holistic system of support** in at least two local areas where we work.

Ambition 3

We will successfully influence improved public attitudes to refugees in new and imaginative ways to reform the hostile environment that impacts their lives.

It has never been more important to ensure a strong and united voice of support for refugees and people seeking asylum. We now need to reach far wider audiences and inspire new supporters and allies to join our ranks. This involves a shift in our approach towards a more public and vocal stance, as well as intentional outreach to groups in society who form natural allies.

We will do this by:

- building a much **wider base of public support** around the shared values of humanity, compassion and justice.
- inspiring a **diverse, active coalition of supporters** from across society to champion our calls for change.
- ensuring the **voices and stories of those with lived experience** of the refugee protection system are at the centre of the design and delivery of our communications and campaigning.

We will measure success through:

- recruiting **new allies and networks of supporters**, alongside monitoring **changes in public attitudes**.
- playing a key role in creating a **coalition of organisations** both within and beyond the refugee sector in the long-term effort to change public opinion.
- Ensuring **refugees are front and centre** in our campaigning, influencing and communications work.



What we need in place to enable this change

To make change happen, we must develop our organisation, how we work with key partners and, critically, how we ensure refugees have an equal voice. We need to share inspiring and compelling stories, we need to raise funds to support our ambitions, and we need to unlock digital and social media tools to communicate the huge contributions refugees are making to the UK.

Lived Experience

We will ensure people with lived experience of refugee protection are at the heart of what we do by developing a whole organisation approach to their engagement and involvement in our work. We will:

- **co-design solutions** with people with lived experience, alongside refugee community organisations and partners.
- develop pathways for staff and volunteers with lived experience to support their **career progression and development**.
- take immediate action on **equality, diversity and inclusion** to demonstrate to all of our audiences how we are achieving equality and inclusion as well as ensuring people with lived experience have an equal voice.

Collaboration

We will collaborate with like-minded supporters and partners in our campaigning and systems change work. We will:

- build our capabilities around **campaigning to reach new public and political audiences** within the centre ground of British politics, focused on the positive contribution of refugees to Britain and utilising digital campaigning and awareness building techniques.
- play a central role in the **Together with Refugees campaign**, building a wide movement to achieve reform within the asylum system.
- work with refugees and partners to **achieve systems change at a local and regional level** to deliver improvements to how refugees are treated and supported.

People, Partners and Processes

We will develop our staff, invest in our systems and processes, prioritise a learning approach and attract the resources needed to deliver our mission and ambitions. We will:

- encourage and enable our staff, volunteers and trustees to make the **best use of their skills** and abilities, provide excellent selection processes and **high-quality** development training. Our volunteers are a vital part of our team and we will seek to expand their involvement in our operations. Critically, we will ensure that all our people are treated consistently and **valued equally**.
- invest voluntary income into **modernising our systems and processes** and make greater use of digital technologies as well as **piloting new ways of working with refugees**. This will include systematically collecting evidence to shape what we do and improving our **impact data and approach to learning**.
- develop and grow **new relationships** with corporate partners, philanthropists, foundations and supporters to deliver growth in income, impact and influence. Through these relationships we will deliver better employment, well-being and integration outcomes for refugees and engage new collaborators, influencers and audiences to drive forward social change.

Image: Albdul Azad



How we will fund these changes

In order to realise our ambitions, we must allocate our resources effectively. This means:

- Allocating unrestricted resources to fund priority projects, such as our 'lived experience' work.
- Ensuring, when possible, full cost recovery on all future service contracts.
- Ensuring we have efficient fixed overheads and costs of delivery by modernising our systems and processes and making greater use of everyday digital technologies.
- Growing our income from donors by 20% by 2025.
- Achieving a range of new partnerships with trusts, foundations and corporate partners to deliver our ambitions.

By 2025:

- We will have played a leading role in securing **one or more 'landmark-wins'** in terms of policy-change or strategic legal judgments that have materially influenced the experience of refugees.
- We will have demonstrated the impact of our services to enable refugees to improve their wellbeing, live with dignity and rebuild their lives by **reporting on clear outcome measures**.
- We will have **helped to create a wide coalition** of support for refugees within and beyond the sector that is actively and successfully challenging the hostile environment for refugees.
- We will have **successfully raised the positive profile of refugee issues** (either alone or with others) in the UK media and across social media platforms.
- We will be judged by the wider sector and refugee-led organisations to have **played an important role in improving the refugee-support** system in the UK.
- We will have developed **more partnerships** with other organisations, including refugee community organisations.
- We will have resourced and implemented a **powerful whole organisation approach to the equitable engagement and involvement of refugees** that is embedded across all our activities.
- We will be regarded by our staff as an **excellent place to work** and have established **supported career pathways** for staff from refugee backgrounds.
- We will have become a **fully modernised, digitally enabled organisation** that connects and builds impactful relationships with its supporters, staff, volunteers, partners and refugees.
- We will have successfully **broadened our donor base** to increase our unrestricted income.



Compassion, fairness and dignity

This strategy sets an ambitious new direction for the Refugee Council. It builds on our strengths and achievements while supporting us to shift our approach in specific ways to meet our challenging context. We will defend refugee protection in the UK against the Government's corrosive plans with refugees and like-minded allies, united in our desire to create a just, fair and humane refugee protection system. We will root our work in people's experience of seeking protection and self-advocacy. We will work in partnerships to build wider public support. We will be a modern, digitally driven, responsive and agile organisation. We will be a strong collaborator, investing in our relationships and ability to create change together. We will be focused on effectiveness and impact. And, critically, we will develop a whole organisation approach to ensuring our work and campaigning is informed and rooted in the lived experience of refugees and people who have been through the refugee protection system.

To realise our ambitions, we must move quickly to implement this strategy. We will invest in a business plan that enables the organisation to develop so that by 2025 we are achieving an even greater impact with a high public profile. We will move forward decisively and powerfully, putting our values of inclusion, collaboration, courage and respect into action - and working together to achieve real change with refugees, our staff, volunteers, supporters and partners.



Please keep in touch with our work on Facebook and Twitter
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