



# Impact Report

---

# 2018/19



SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES

# Maurice Wren,

## Chief Executive of Refugee Council



Image: Refugee Council

Though many charities use the word 'impact' indiscriminately, often as a more dynamic way of talking about their overall outputs or outcomes, at the Refugee Council we give a particular meaning to the word.

Put simply, our core objective is to have a demonstrably positive impact on the lives of every single person we work with, whether they are unaccompanied children, resettled families, refugees keen to live independently, or those whose mental wellbeing has been undermined by their experiences of trauma.

If we are not improving their conditions, their options or their prospects – by the information and advice, or the welfare, housing, employment

and therapeutic support we provide – then our value to our beneficiaries, as well as to our supporters, must be open to question and challenge.

This fundamental imperative to transform and enhance lives infuses the whole organisation and means that our services are personalised in their delivery, with the solutions we generate tailored to each individual.

In this report, we describe the impact we had in 2018/19 across all our service delivery and related activities. It's a track record we are proud of because we know we've had a genuinely positive effect on the lives of all those who look to us for help and support. We've tried to convey a sense of this with the compelling stories featured in the report, though these are just a snapshot of what we achieved throughout another busy and challenging, though ultimately rewarding, year.

Thank you for the essential part you continue to play in giving us the means and the encouragement to be bold and ambitious on behalf of our service users. Your endorsement and confidence in us is as valuable as your generosity and I do hope that you appreciate your crucial role in ensuring the flame of refugee protection continues to burn brightly in the UK.

**Maurice Wren**  
Chief Executive of the Refugee Council

# 8,527 refugees and asylum seekers were supported

**4,528**  
were  
children

**2,772**  
people were  
helped to resettle  
in the UK

**190**  
people attended  
our destitution  
centre

**300**  
children whose age  
was disputed got help  
with their claim

**3,816**  
unaccompanied children  
were supported by our  
children's services

**493**  
adults received  
mental health  
therapy

**460**  
people developed  
the skills they  
needed to find work

**279**  
children  
received mental  
health therapy

**1,076**  
people received crisis  
advice and support

**50,095**  
hours were donated  
by volunteers

An additional  
**1,325**  
refugees received small grants  
to help with employment,  
training and education

Cover Image: Phil Taylor Photography



# Mental health

Refugees are five times more likely to have mental health problems than the rest of the UK population. Our therapists are specially trained to provide culturally sensitive counselling to people who have experienced severe trauma and to build a trusting relationship through the medium of an interpreter.

**Last year we provided therapeutic support to 493 adults**

## **Mariam was overwhelmed by her grief and had seriously considered suicide**

"If it was not for you I would not be alive. You've given me the only space where I can truly express my pain and grief at losing my children. You have helped me overcome my loss of hope for life and have helped me learn to manage my depression. With you I have been able to mourn, to share my fears in a safe space. You listened to me, you stayed with me in my pain and you did not judge me at all."



# 279 children received mental health support

We developed our My View project to meet the needs of refugee children who have arrived in the UK without a parent or guardian.

**54%**  
reported  
improvement  
in distressing  
thoughts  
and feelings

**67%**  
felt less  
unhappy

**50%**  
said they had  
reduced feelings  
of self-harm

**41%**  
felt they were  
now able to cope  
when things  
went wrong

**In Yorkshire & Humber, 51% of the refugees who have been resettled in the area are children. This year we piloted a Children and Families project in partnership with local NGOs to provide mental health services to refugee children in their families and in their schools.**

10 year old Karam suffered from dreadful nightmares, was frightened to sleep on his own and refused to talk to anyone about his feelings. In school he was isolated and bullied.

"I worked with the school and we organised a workshop for Karam's class to discuss migration and encourage the children to welcome differences. With Karam we identified a teacher that he trusted who he could go to if he needed support.

In the family's therapy sessions we spent time playing 'feelings' games which opened up



discussions between family members about feelings and Karam realised that it's not his fault for feeling angry and afraid. Karam gradually started sleeping in his room and made friends at school."

**Julie, Refugee Council therapist**

# Helping refugees make a new life in the UK

We support refugees who have come to the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement and Gateway programmes. These are very vulnerable refugees; survivors of torture, people with serious medical conditions, and women with children. They are identified by the UN and then screened by the Home Office before being resettled in the UK.

## Zakaria and his family were resettled in Harrogate.

"The day I arrived at the airport in Britain with my wife and two sons we felt welcomed. There were another family on the plane and Refugee Council put us all on a mini bus and we were taken to Harrogate. We stopped at a Community centre where we were given a drink and people played with the kids.

Then they took us to our new home. At first we needed help with everything. They took us to the bus stop and showed us how to get bus tickets, then they showed us where the shops were and the bank, the jobs centre. They took us to the school; my kids were a bit worried in the beginning but they have settled in now.

I wanted to work again and Refugee Council provided me with an employment advisor called John. He helped me with paperwork such as creating my CV. Then he came with me to an employment agency and I got a job within a week. It was only pot washing in a kitchen but I took it because I wanted to be independent and to learn the language.

Now I am a self-employed chef. I have my own Kurdish Kitchen which I hold at Baltzersens in Harrogate. I started off just doing it one night a month with people pre-booking on line. It's been very popular so I am increasing it in the New Year."



Image: Phil Taylor Photography

# Crisis advice and support

When refugees are given the right to remain in the UK they have just 28 days to get benefits and find somewhere to live before the government evicts them from asylum accommodation. This would be hard enough for anyone. For people with limited English, who aren't familiar with the UK system and who've been living on just £5 a day asylum seekers allowance and have no money for a rent deposit it's often an insurmountable challenge.

**Last year  
1,076  
refugees  
turned to us  
for support  
and advice**

**N**ot surprisingly many refugees end up homeless. In June, a report published by the No Accommodation Network suggested that more than one in four homeless people using night shelters are refugees.

## Dawit and Helen's experience mirrors this, as Dawit explains.

"When we got our asylum claims accepted, we felt so happy. Now we had the status we wanted to learn and we wanted to work. And then we found that we only had 28 days to find somewhere to live. We felt confused at that time. We didn't know where to go. We didn't have anything and we didn't have friends here.

We came to London because here there is our church and community. Someone from our country found us in Stratford. He saw us sleeping rough and he gave us £20. He told us about Refugee Council.

Refugee Council tried to find us accommodation and for three weeks we slept in a shelter. And then Adonis from Refugee Council called us. He surprised us! He had found us accommodation. He also gave us one day training about our rights in our home and what were the landlord's rights. He gave us advice and asked us, when we reached the accommodation, if there were any problems.

We are very lucky to have Refugee Council beside us. They helped us with the job centre and getting schooling and they helped us to find a GP and with our council tax.

We are both in college now. I want to go to university and study media. I worked as a cameraman before and want to do that again."

**"He gave us advice and asked us, when we reached the accommodation, if there were any problems."**

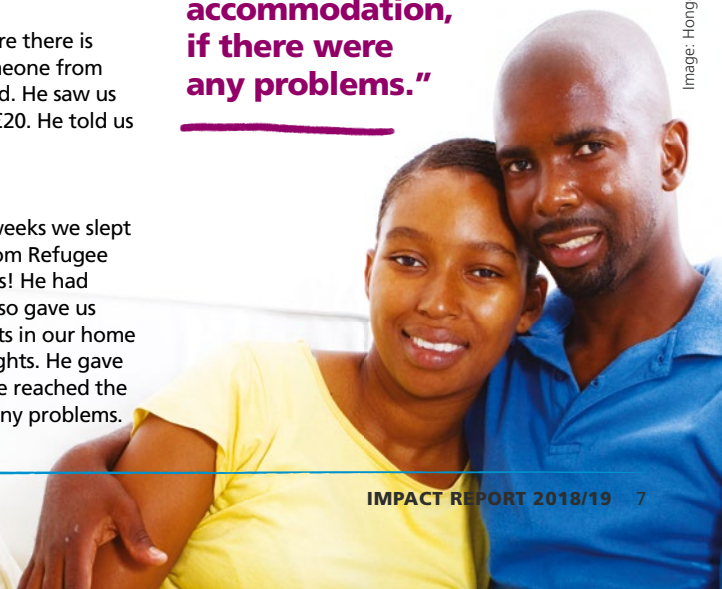


Image: Hongqi Zhang (aka Michael Zhang) | Dreamstime.com



# Supporting refugee children

Since 1994 we've been the only national service providing advice and support to children who arrive on our shores on their own. We help them through the asylum system and ensure that they are protected and represented. Last year most children were aged between 14-17 but 47 were 13 or under.

**A**longside this we provide specialist support for children who have been trafficked and a youth development programme that helps newly arrived young asylum seekers learn to cope with the many and varied challenges they face.

## Age disputes

Much is heard in the media about refugee adults claiming to be children. Far less is heard about the children who are wrongly assessed to be adults and the devastating impact that this can have on vulnerable and traumatised young people who came to the UK in the hope of finding safety.

Last year we supported 300 teenagers who we believed had been wrongly assessed as adults. This is much higher than previous years (in 16/17 we took on 172 cases). One of the reasons for this was a Home Office policy that allowed untrained officials, such as immigration officers, to treat children as adults if they thought they looked to be over the age of 18. Because of this many child refugees did not get a proper age assessment and were immediately sent to adult accommodation.

A large number of children were placed in adult accommodation in Derby and Liverpool. In response, we set up 'outreach surgeries' in the centres. We carried out our own assessment and then referred the young people to the local authorities who in turn treated them as children and placed them in care pending an age assessment by their own, trained social workers.

**It takes time for age disputed cases to be resolved. Of the 300 cases we worked on in 2018/19:**

**68%** have been accepted as children

**15%** are currently being cared for as a child pending further assessment

**16%** were deemed to be adults, have disappeared or their case is still outstanding for another reason

One of the reasons we were able to support so many children in Liverpool and Derby was the good working relationship we developed with the local authorities. They trusted our expertise and so we could liaise with them rather than having to resort to legal challenges or taking them to court to make them give the children a proper assessment.

Sadly this is not always the case and it can take months and sometimes years as we support the children.

## Hakim's Story

In November 2016 Hakim's father and brother were murdered by the Taliban. His mother gave people smugglers her entire savings to send Hakim, then aged 14, to safety.

Like most refugee children, Hakim did not have any official identification when he arrived in the UK in early 2017. He was judged to be an adult and placed in adult accommodation. In July he was referred to the Refugee Council and we took up his case.

In January 2018 the stress of the situation caused Hakim's mental health to deteriorate and he had terrifying nightmares in which he relived his experiences.

In March he found out that his mother, his last surviving relative, had died and his mental state got worse. He was admitted to hospital but the staff were unsure whether and how to treat him as he had neither child or adult status.

Refugee Council gathered evidence for Hakim's court case, scheduled for November. This had an impact on his mental health because he knew he would have to repeat, and relive, the reasons he had come to the UK. In late November 2018 the local authority agreed to accept that Hakim was a child and settled out of court.

While we are delighted that Hakim finally got recognised as a child we cannot give him back the years of care that he has missed.



Image: Alamy

# Helping refugees into employment

Refugees have the legal right to work in the UK but many find it hard to get a job. Whether they were forced to flee before completing their education or are highly qualified professionals we have a programme to help them.

**A** total of 138 people attended our Starbucks partnership programme which helps refugees prepare for an entry level job and gives participants a guaranteed interview as a barista at the end of the course. The partnership is a shining example of how employing refugees can benefit a company as well as the employee as Russell Butcher,

Senior Manager, Education & Skills at Starbucks explains.

"We are overwhelmed by the success of our partnership with Refugee Council. In the last 18 months over 85% of all candidates interviewed, Starbucks deemed as job ready whilst over 65% of all candidates we've hired are still in work 12 months on. Those sustainability and retention figures are much

**Last year we helped 462 people develop the skills they needed to find work**

higher than our business normal providing a real return on investment for the work that we are doing."

## Refugee Community Organisations

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) are run by and for refugees and support refugees to become more integrated into their local areas.

Last year we helped 400 RCOs in many different ways from fundraising classes to networking opportunities; as a result of our 'community conversations' attended by 19 Congolese RCOs, the first Congolese Community Forum in London was created.

In October, we published a report 'A Bridge to Life in the UK' which highlighted the important role refugee-led community organisations play in supporting refugee integration.

RCOs have a huge wealth of knowledge and expertise but their voices are rarely heard by people in power. Following the publication of the report we received funding from the City Bridge Trust to create a London RCO Advocacy Forum. The forum will provide space for RCOs to come together and speak directly to policy and decision makers in London.

## Last year we helped 69 health care professionals

**E**ven highly skilled professionals can face challenges finding employment. Building Bridges is our partnership with the NHS which helps refugee health care professionals re-qualify to UK standards. This is a rolling programme which supports about 50 people at any one time for however long it takes because, as Mirawais's story shows, requalification can take years.

"I left Afghanistan because I was targeted by the Taliban and there were attacks on my family. I tried to move to another province but it did not help. I realised that we had to leave. Our nearest neighbouring country was Pakistan and we would definitely not have been safe there! But where to go? I had been a student in the UK so it made sense to claim asylum here because at least I knew the language.

Without Refugee Council it would have been almost impossible to requalify. They have helped me in so many ways; with language classes, fees for the exams, clinical placements and in finding employment through the Clinical Apprenticeship Scheme. The staff were always friendly and supportive and provided a lot of moral support.

**"Without Refugee Council it would have been almost impossible to requalify."**

Even so, the process took years because I could not study full time. I was a parent of small children and I had

to find work so that I could support my family. At times it was bumpy. Trying to earn a living when the landlord wants to raise the rent again and studying is not easy but I was always confident that one day I would do it. I always thought 'I will finally get there. I will be a doctor again.'

I am currently working in a London hospital although my long term plan is to become a GP. That means another three years' training but it is similar to the kind of doctor I was in Afghanistan."

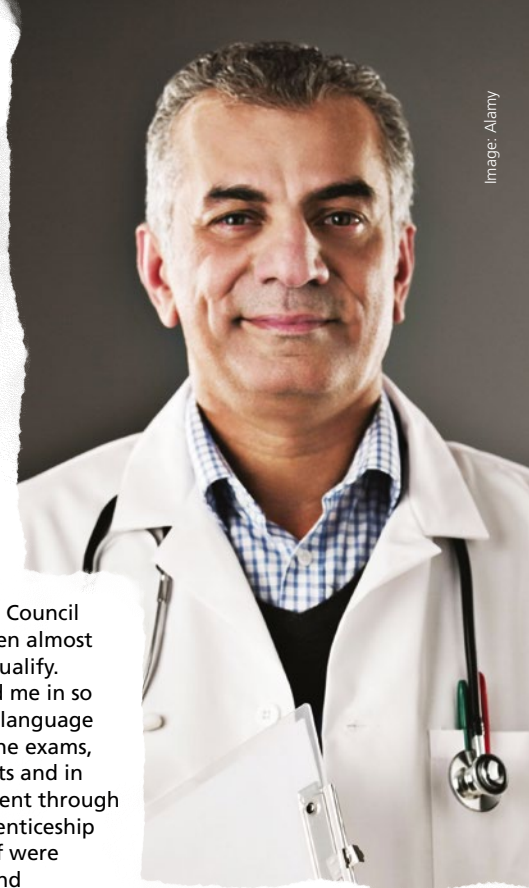


Image: Alamy



# The Syria Grant Fund

In 2017 thanks to a £1 million grant from Goldman Sachs Gives we launched the Syria Grant Fund to provide small grants to refugees from Syria who have been resettled in the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

**T**he Fund has been an enormous success and is positive proof that small grants can make a big difference. In all 2,235 grants were made before the Fund closed in October 2018.

Driving grants were the most popular request. These helped people get a UK license so they could apply for driving jobs and were invaluable to people in rural communities, with limited public transport, so that they could drive to where the jobs are.

School uniform grants were the second most popular request. "Without grants for school uniforms the families we support would struggle to pay for them. Due to the benefit cap especially, our families are finding it more difficult to pay for uniforms which leaves little to budget with and often incurring debt." (British Red Cross, Wales)

Work related grants came a close third. Mohamed worked as a baker in Syria and wanted to undertake a course which would

update his skills so he could find similar work in the UK. A grant of £163 covered the costs of a one day bread making course and his train travel to attend. He is now working as a pizza maker and no longer claiming Job Seeker's Allowance.

**Last year we made 1,325 small grants to help refugees access education or give them a better chance of finding a job:**

- 39%** Driving
- 17%** Children's school uniforms/extra-curricular activities
- 17%** Employment
- 11%** English language
- 8%** Travel costs
- 5%** Education
- 4%** Other

## Ayham's Story

Ayham was just 16 when he fled Syria and he admits he hadn't planned on make-up as a career. But he ended up working in a hairdressers in Egypt where he was befriended by a make-up artist who taught him the ropes.

When he was resettled to the UK it seemed the obvious

thing to look for similar work. Ayham always felt confident that he would eventually get a job although he admits it was tough waiting for responses from employers. But his perseverance paid off and he's now working for a company with studios throughout Yorkshire and Humber.

Ayham says he feels pretty happy now, "It's a new beginning. I enjoy meeting people and I am using my skills. I've even got models to do tutorials on and I've posted some of them on YouTube. Just type my name in, Ayham Khazna, and you can see my work."

# Advocacy and Engagement

Our Advocacy and Engagement team works hand-in-hand with our services to drive change and improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum.

## Family Reunion

Over the last year we've been working with other charities on the Families Together coalition, calling on the government to expand the refugee family reunion rules to allow more refugees to be reunited with their family members, and to give child refugees the right to bring their parents to the UK.

## Protecting women at risk of domestic abuse

We've been working hard to improve the level of protection available to women seeking asylum at risk of domestic abuse.

In July 2018 we published a research report in partnership with the Asylum Support Appeals Project highlighting the lack of safe accommodation and support available to women seeking asylum. The report called for a number of new safeguards to be put in place to protect those at risk of abuse.

Following the publication of the report, we worked with the Home Office to revise their internal guidance, and managed to secure many of the safeguards we had been calling for, including a ground breaking new funding mechanism to allow women seeking asylum at risk of abuse to access specialist refuge accommodation and support services.

## Improving Refugee Integration

In September we published a joint research report with the UNHCR and the Scottish Refugee Council looking at the integration barriers faced by newly recognised refugees from the Eritrean community. Alongside the report we worked with the officials from the Home Office and Department for Work and

Pensions to establish a new working group, bringing together NGOs and senior officials to facilitate onward dialogue on these issues.

## The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement

The ATCR is an annual event organised and co-chaired by UNHCR and a different country each year. We were proud to be selected by the Home Office as their NGO co-chair to plan and deliver the event in 2019.

In March we co-chaired a three-day conference in Sheffield. The event was attended by representatives from governments and NGOs from 20 countries to share learning and improve integration support programmes for resettled refugees.

In previous years there has been little involvement from refugees themselves. We brought together a group of resettled refugees to participate and speak at the event. This meant that 2019 saw the highest level of refugee participation in the history of the event. Delegates from across the world highlighted the value they gained from the insight and experience of resettled refugees.



Image: Refugee Council

# Thank you to all our AMAZING DONORS

Together you have made a huge difference

**7,817 people and 107 organisations**  
donated the money that funded the services that helped  
**8,527 refugees and asylum seekers**



Image: Netsuke

**HARRIET AND RACHEL**  
organised a supper club  
in aid of the Refugee Council  
and cooked up a delicious  
Indian feast



Image: Olympia Auctions

**EDMUND DE WAAL**, best-  
selling author and ceramic  
artist, auctioned 79 netsuke  
to raise money for the  
Refugee Council

**MYRTLE, ROGER AND  
JUDITH** were amongst  
those who remembered the  
Refugee Council with a  
gift in their wills

**NIGEL, GRAHAM, GEORGE,**  
Pauline and Angela and  
thousands more people  
responded to our appeals

**FRED** asked for donations  
to the Refugee Council  
instead of presents for his  
70th birthday



**NEIL** and many others held  
Facebook fundraisers  
for the Refugee Council

**JANE, SABINA,  
YASER AND DUNCAN**  
and thousands of  
people like them made  
monthly donations

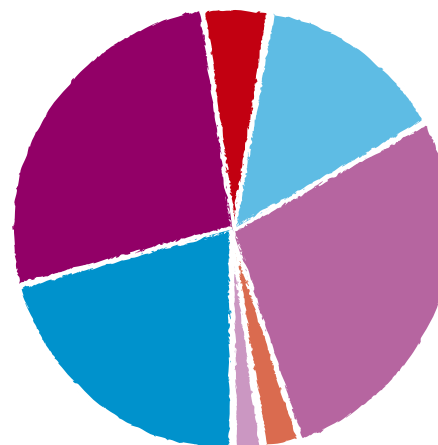


Image: Cyclist, Juliet Molteno

**JAMES, JULIET AND  
BRIAN** completed the  
Prudential RideLondon-  
Surrey 100 bike ride

## Finances

Thanks to the continuing generosity of our donors we raised £10,566,000. This does not include £1.5 million from Goldman Sachs Gives which was received in a previous year to be spent over three years through the Syria Grant Fund and an employment training programme.

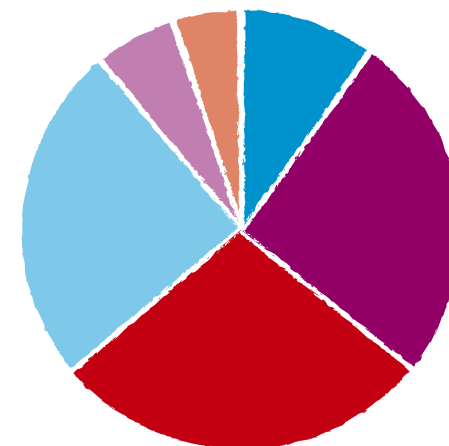


**45% of our funding was from individuals, trusts and companies**

- 21% Central government grants
- 27% Local government grants
- 5% European community grants
- 14% Grants and donations from trusts and companies
- 28% Donations and gifts from individuals
- 3% Legacies
- 2% Training

**90% of our funding is spent on our charitable work**

- 10% Fundraising
- 26% Children's services
- 28% Resettlement
- 25% Integration (including crisis support, employment)
- 6% Mental health and Destitution
- 5% Advocacy & Engagement



The figures in the charts don't include rent on office space which we let to other charities. For our full accounts including further details and an explanation of these figures please visit [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports-and-accounts](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports-and-accounts).



## Contact us at

The Refugee Council, PO Box 68614, London, E15 9DQ  
**supporter@refugeecouncil.org.uk** or **020 7346 1205**.

Please keep in touch with our work on Facebook and Twitter  
**www.refugeecouncil.org.uk**.



We take safeguarding extremely seriously so some of the names and photos in this Impact Report have been changed to protect identities.



**SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES**