

SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES



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Impact Report

2017/18

Welcome from CEO Maurice Wren

When the Windrush scandal broke in early 2018, the full inhumanity of the Government's shameful hostile environment policy was revealed. The public was appalled and senior heads duly rolled, but for anyone with experience of the UK asylum system, what Windrush exposed was a familiar Home Office culture of indifference to the human consequences of its actions. As the then Home Secretary said at the time: 'the Home Office has become too concerned with policy and strategy and sometimes loses sight of the individual.'

This is the political and operational backdrop for what we do and is the reason why the work of the Refugee Council is so vital.

In this Impact Report we've sought to convey a flavour of how, in 2018, we supported and equipped over 8,600 people to overcome the many impediments and obstacles in their way to achieving protection and safety; how we advocated and campaigned for fundamental asylum reform in the UK; and how we sought to do justice to the confidence that you and many other supporters continue to show in us.

We unveiled a new three year strategy in which we restated the essential purpose of the Refugee Council – to change for the better the way refugees are welcomed and treated in the UK – and set ourselves four primary goals to guide and shape our work over that period:

- To enable even more people in need of refugee protection to benefit from our transformative services
- To sharpen the cutting edge of our public campaigns for meaningful asylum reform
- To champion the singular role of refugee-led organisations as powerful social integration agencies
- To work cooperatively with our peer NGOs on mobilising a powerful popular movement for change

A year in, we are making substantial progress as this report describes; having increased the number of people we've helped by 14%; having built up our advocacy and campaign capacity; having engaged and worked alongside a host of refugee communities across the UK; and having led a successful public campaign for changes to the harsh and restrictive rules governing refugee family reunions.

Of course we've not been acting alone, and little of what we achieved this year would have been possible without the generosity of our donors and supporters, the selflessness of our many volunteers, the commitment of our Trustees, the expertise of our partner and peer NGOs, the courage of the Parliamentarians who stand up for refugee rights and the determination of our many contacts in the media to counter the misinformation that so often corrodes the public discourse on asylum.

In the wake of Windrush and with Brexit looming, there has never been a better opportunity to reframe the way that we, as a country, treat those who seek protection in the UK. Public support for the principle of providing protection is strong and growing and the chorus of faith, civil society, business and political voices calling for the fair, dignified and respectful treatment of refugees in the UK has never been as confident and forceful.

Thanks to all our supporters and stakeholders, that's also true of the Refugee Council.



Maurice Wren, CEO

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We supported 8,642 refugees and asylum seekers



Unaccompanied children

Many of the children we support have endured appalling horrors. They have seen their homes destroyed, loved ones killed, been tortured or trafficked or forced to become child soldiers. They have taken long, terrifying journeys to reach safety.

All child refugees who arrive alone are referred to us. We provide them with advice and support to navigate the complex asylum process and deal with the many other issues they face.

Youth development

Our youth development activities gave 378 young people the chance to just be children again, something they have not been able to do for a very long time. They attended group activities where they could start to make friends and learn to trust again in a safe environment. We took them out on trips such as visiting a museum, getting a library card or to a music workshop at a local church.

Trafficked children

Most of the children we helped came from Vietnam. Commonly, girls from Vietnam are trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced to work in places such as nail bars for little or no pay. This year we have seen an increase in the number of Vietnamese boys being criminalised for forced labour on cannabis farms.

We supported **77** girls
and **28** boys.
Most were aged
between 15-17



Age disputes

Most refugee children arrive in the UK without official papers and sometimes local authorities don't believe that they are really children. Last year we supported 172 of those young people to challenge incorrect judgements.

57 were re-assessed as children
2 ran away
3 were assessed as adults
13 not resolved at case closure
97 are ongoing

Navid's story

When Navid arrived in the UK he was taken to a police station where he was interviewed by social workers. They felt his answers did not make sense and they doubted his credibility. He was assessed as being over 18 years old and placed in adult asylum accommodation.

Following concerns about his physical and mental health he was examined by a GP who found he had been repeatedly raped. His fear of adult men had made his stay in the accommodation a nightmare. He was too frightened to use the bathroom because there was no lock on the door and he had avoided making himself food in the kitchen for fear of being caught alone.

We arranged for him to have another age assessment. The social workers realised that his behaviour wasn't because he was lying but because he was profoundly traumatised and his original age assessment was overturned.

Navid now lives in a supported placement with other young people. He has a social worker and an immigration solicitor (both female) and receives help from a charity that works with people who have suffered torture and violence.



Refugee Cricket Project

Our Refugee Cricket Project helps children and young people to recover from the traumas that have brought them here as well as to support them through all stages of their asylum claims and with welfare issues. For those who have got refugee status we help them with the challenges of adulthood and independence, including helping them with access to further and higher education and training.

From the project leader's diary

Tuesday:

A lot of the day is spent with Haroon who Social services moved out of foster care and into independent accommodation the day after he turned 18, despite the fact Haroon believes he is 16 and this is subject to a challenge in the courts. Haroon was not provided with any subsistence allowance, any bedding or other household essentials. That night he did not feel able to stay at this accommodation and instead slept at his mosque. Another work in progress situation.

Wednesday:

After six months of really hard (and unfamiliar) work very ably supported by a dedicated volunteer, four clients and one volunteer pass the assessment day and are now ECB [England and Wales Cricket Board] Level 2 cricket coaches. We are so proud of them.

Friday:

Off to the Upper Tribunal where, in barely any time at all, our client's application for permission to appeal the rejection of his asylum application is granted. Later on we hear that a client has been granted Refugee Status by the Home Office. Amazing!

Antonia, Refugee Cricket Project lead (volunteer)



Mental health services

For children

We supported 260 children and young people to come to terms with the horrors they have witnessed and to start to cope with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), survivor guilt and shame. We helped them to find their voice in a safe and non-judgmental setting, to express their distress and acknowledge their emotions, to begin to develop trust in others again and build strength and resilience.

56%
said that they
had reduced
thoughts about
suicide or hurting
themselves

78%
showed
improvement
in sleeping

73%
felt less
unhappy

For adults

We provided mental health support to 469 adult refugees and asylum seekers through one-to-one counselling, telephone counselling and group sessions.

From a case worker's notes

"A was referred to me as she had a panic attack in a Refugee Council briefing soon after arrival.

She witnessed a number of traumatic events both before and after she fled with the family. She had an arranged marriage which she terminated after a few weeks due to his behaviour towards her. She reported auditory and visual hallucinations and had some suicidal thoughts and self-harming behaviour.

She has used therapy well to process the impact of the conflict/abusive relationships and no longer has hallucinations/suicidal thoughts. She still has some anxiety, but her panic attacks have significantly reduced. She is nearing the end of her work with me, and is at college and beginning to enjoy her studies. We are due to have three more sessions, and I have extended the 12 sessions by three to ensure that she sustains the work we have done together, given both her vulnerability and age."



Helping refugees make a new life in the UK

Some refugees are selected for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) if they are considered to be particularly vulnerable, their lives are at risk, they have specific additional needs or there is no foreseeable hope of them returning home.

Many refugees who are resettled are survivors of torture or other forms of violence. We welcome them and make sure they get all the support they need to settle in to their new communities.

About Ali, Fatima and their children

“The day we got off the plane in the UK we had one suitcase with everything we owned in it. It was snowing and very cold. It was wonderful to find Hannah from Refugee Council waiting for us.

She took us to our new flat and showed us how everything worked. We were like little children. We had to be taught everything. How to get on a bus, what to say to the driver, what number bus to go into town, where to find halal shops, where the mosque was. Then things like setting up bank accounts, registering with a GP and how to pay for things at a supermarket.

Refugee Council helped get the children into nursery so we could both go to college and do English classes. They helped us a lot in every way. They have helped us feel independent.

Hannah told us ‘We are here for you. If you need anything you can always call us.’ It’s like when you are very thirsty and someone gives you a drink of water.”



The Syria Grant Fund

The Syria Grant Fund, provides small grants to refugees from Syria who have been resettled in the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. The grants are provided for education, employment and training. This £1 million Fund was made possible through the generosity of Goldman Sachs Gives.

To date, 921 grants have been made, enabling people to set up their own business, attend university, access employment training and English language courses – all steps towards being able to live with dignity and independence in the UK.

How a small grant made a big difference

When Abdulrazak arrived in the UK in 2017 with his wife, Manal, and their young children, the couple dreamed of setting up a mobile phone repair business in their new home town. Thanks to the Syria Grant Fund that dream became a reality.

They’ve set up business at home with Manal taking calls and booking repairs and she’s now able to answer basic questions as well as give accurate quotes. She’s also begun advertising the business and keeping the books.

“It is very important to us not to depend on the welfare benefits of this country. We want to give a good example to our children so that they grow up knowing the meaning of hard work. We want to pay taxes and make contributions to the national health. We want to give back to this country which gave us so much. Our children are proud to tell their friends that both their parents are working.”



Crisis advice and support

When an asylum claim is granted, refugees are given just 28 days to secure an income and somewhere to live before the government evicts them from their asylum accommodation. We supported 742 newly recognised refugees to take the challenging first steps towards integrating in the UK. This includes things like obtaining essential identification, opening bank accounts, finding somewhere to live and access to health services.

Homelessness support for refugees

Many newly granted refugees find themselves homeless and destitute precisely at the point when the Government accepts they need protection. A survey carried out in 2017 showed that none of the responders had found secure accommodation by the time they had to leave asylum accommodation and 57% ended up sleeping rough or in a hostel or night shelter.

“Why was I given protection, then made homeless?”

Tarek asked his Refugee Council advisor.

In April 2016 the Home Office granted Tarek the right to remain in the UK and 28 days later he was forced to leave his asylum accommodation. He ended up homeless, living on the streets and it was 12 months before he found out about the Refugee Council.

We guided Tarek through his options, helping him apply to the Home Office for a one-off integration loan and to charities for the money he'd need for a deposit and first month's rent. We also approached housing providers until, at last, we found a private landlord with property to rent.

On the first of December 2017 Tarek paid the deposit on a one year tenancy and was very happy to finally have somewhere he could call home. He has enrolled himself in English and Maths classes and is getting ready to finally go to university which was always his long-term plan.

Employment

Refugees face huge challenges in getting a job. Barriers include limited English, being out of work for years for example, having lived in a refugee camp before coming to the UK, and a lack of knowledge of the UK job market. Everything from writing a CV to interview clothing is unfamiliar.

We run a range of employment training programmes including one that helps health care professionals meet NHS requirements and register with the General Medical Council so that they can get a job in the health service. In 2017 Starbucks and the Refugee Council launched a pilot project to help refugees gain the skills they need to get a job as a Starbucks barista.

561
refugees
attended
a training
course

Sam's story

“It was a perfect life for me before the war. Then the bombing started. My school was bombed. Some of my friends died. That was the last time I had any schooling. I was 12 years old.

When I started the Starbucks course I was scared a bit because I have not studied anything since I was 12. But the trainers made it simple, asked simple questions so I could make a simple answer.

And I got the job. My first days were hard but I have been there five months and now I help train new staff and I am studying coffee art. I can create a flower and a heart. I am training to do a swan. I love doing it.

I have so much making up to do for all the time I have wasted. I want to live. I lost years of my life. I am making it up now.”



99% of those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness had their problems solved

Advocacy and Engagement

Our Advocacy and Engagement teams work hand-in-hand with our services to drive change and improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers.

Family Reunion

We've been campaigning to change the refugee family reunion rules to expand the family members that are allowed to join refugees in the UK, and to give refugee children the right to bring their families which is currently not permitted. At the moment adult refugees can sponsor close family members to join them but refugee children can't. The UK is one of only two countries in the EU that bans child refugees who arrive in the UK alone from bringing any relatives to join them, even their parents.

In January 2018 we published a research report, 'Safe but not Settled', in partnership with Oxfam, on the impact of family separation on refugees.

We supported Angus MacNeill MP with a Private Members Bill on refugee family reunion which, despite not having Government support, passed its Second Reading in March. 131 MPs from all parties voted for the bill (the minimum for a bill to be passed to the next stage is 100). Thousands of our supporters helped to make this happen by contacting their MPs and urging them to attend the debate and vote for the Bill.

Refugees without Refuge

Getting refugee status should be a time of relief and rejoicing for asylum seekers but, for many, it's a time of enormous stress because they have just 28 days before they are forced to leave asylum accommodation and their weekly allowance of £37.75 is stopped. When people are granted refugee status they are issued with a Biometric Residence Permit which along with a national insurance number is required before they can access benefits or open a bank account or get a job.

In September 2017 we published 'Refugees without Refuge', commissioned by the Guardian, a survey of refugees who had been granted refugee status since 2016.

- Almost a quarter (24%) waited for six weeks or more to receive their Biometric Residence Permit.
- 22% waited more than four weeks for their National Insurance number.

Thanks to our lobbying the 28 days only starts once the Biometric Residence Permit has been issued and, in January 2018, the Home Office agreed to print National Insurance numbers directly onto the Permits.

Angus MacNeill MP



© Angus MacNeill



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Supporting refugee community organisations (RCOs)

We help RCOs obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources they need to deliver integration services to refugees. 412 RCOs received information, 51 RCOs and 17 non-RCOs received training, 32 non-RCOs including eight trusts and foundations attended our seminars aimed at raising awareness of the role RCOs play in refugee integration and strengthening their relationships with funders and other stakeholders.

43,375 volunteer hours were donated

Volunteers came from all walks of life from retired therapists providing mental health support, to students on social care placements, to past Refugee Council clients, to local people who help in so many different ways from arranging trips or hospital appointments, giving English language sessions and befriending. Volunteers play a vital part in supporting our destitution drop-in centre.

Destitution and asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable people in society and they are often misrepresented in the media. The UK asylum process is complex and frequent changes to legislation can make it hard to understand. We help them to navigate the process and support them along the way.

As well as providing advice and support, we sign-post people to other organisations and run a drop-in centre where people can get a wash, a change of clothes and a meal.

Our supporters are amazing

Our impact is greater because of our supporters. We could not do it without you.
Thank you!

7,962 people and 161 organisations

donated the money that funded the services that helped to improve the lives of **8,642 refugees and asylum seekers.**

Held RefuTEA parties and bucket collections

Left us gifts in their will

Made donations in memory of loved ones

Swam, cycled, walked and ran to raise money

Responded to our appeals and made regular donations

Organised their own fundraising events

Donated their time to raise money, like the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor Edward Gardner and violinist Hilary Hahn.

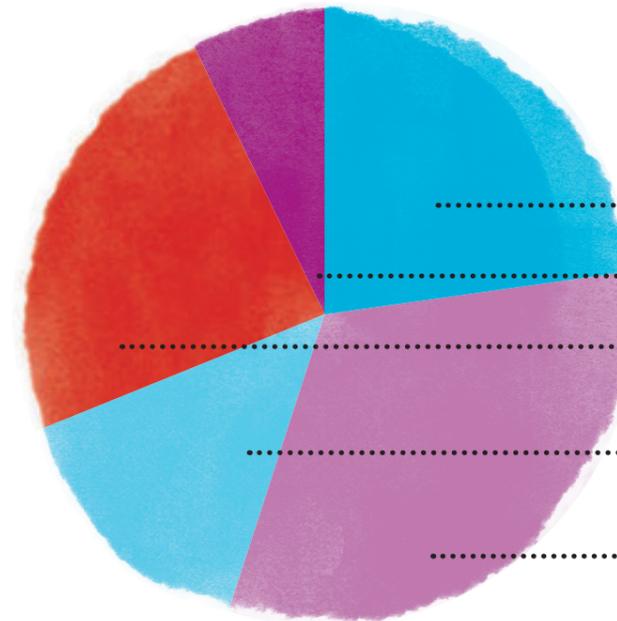


Finances

Thanks to the continuing generosity of our donors we raised £8,550,000. This does not include £1.5 million from Goldman Sachs which was received in the previous year and will be spent over three years through the Syria Grant Fund and an employment training programme.

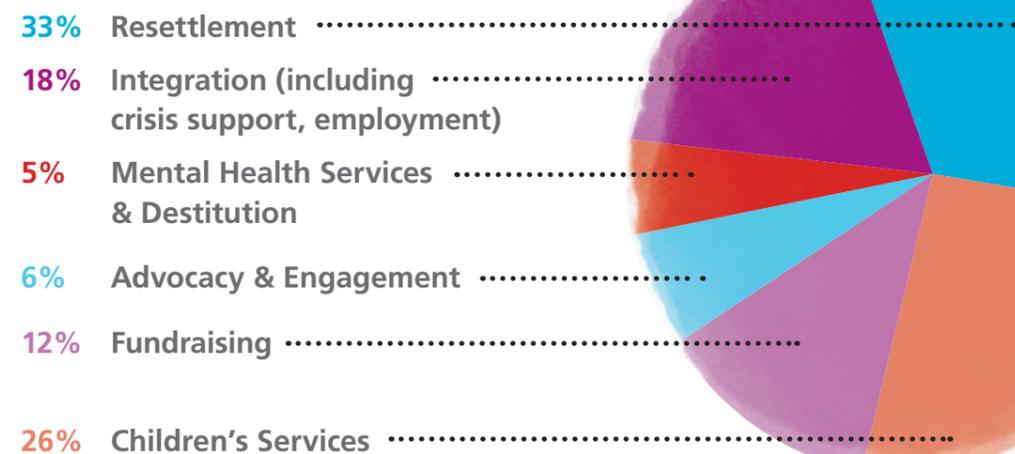
Income

45% of our funding came from individuals, trusts and companies



Expenditure

88% of our funding is spent on our charitable work



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 explanation of these figures please visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/about_refugee_council/annual_accounts

SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING REFUGEES



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

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Please keep in touch with our work on Facebook and Twitter

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk



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