

# Change Makers

## 'From Sanctuary to Opportunity' State of the City Report 2023



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## ***“I come from” By Yehor (age 13)***

*I come from the Ukraine war.  
I come from my destroyed home.  
I come from a Ukrainian passport, my Ukrainian life.  
I come from Odesa and the Black Sea.  
I come from Kozacs and the strong Ukrainian people.  
I come from the words of Taras Shevchenko.  
I come from my blue and yellow flag.*

*I come from Bristol.  
I come from my new home, my new life.  
I come from cheering Manchester United.  
I come from fish and chips and borscht.  
I come from City Academy at day and Odessa school at night.  
I come from my new friends and my old friends.  
I come from a language I know and a language I’m learning.*

*I come from a hard-working father and loving mother.  
I come from my sister’s sunny smiles.  
I come from the United Kingdom.  
I come from Ukraine.*



# Change Makers 2023: From Sanctuary to Opportunity

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On behalf of ACH, RAMP, and Comic Relief.



*Our visual art collage workshop*

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*Our visual art collage workshop*



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Our CEO Fuad Mahamed

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## FOREWORD

Since the last From Sanctuary to Opportunity report was published in 2022, we have witnessed unprecedented waves of compassion for refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. In the UK alone, ordinary people have opened their doors to over 160,000 families impacted by the Russian invasion. Additionally, the UK government have welcomed over 160,000 Hong Kong nationals pushed out by the Chinese government's draconian "national security" laws.

A recent global poll conducted by Ipsos has found that British people had the third-most enthusiastic outlook towards refugees, just behind Spain and New Zealand.

The poll also found that 56% of Britons believed refugees make a "positive contribution", compared to 45% internationally. In addition, more than half (54%) of Britons felt that refugees should be allowed to stay, compared to 40% globally.

Support for refugees in the UK has actually increased over the last year, notably since some in government have stepped up hostile rhetoric aimed at asylum seekers through simplistic slogans such as "Stop the Boats". In particular, the poll found that 84% agreed with the statement that "people should be able to take refuge in other countries, to escape from war or persecution", a proportion that stood at 73% in 2021.

Despite these good news stories, there are unfolding tragedies. It has been estimated that 2,062 migrants died while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2022, a human tragedy that has largely passed unacknowledged by news platforms.

This year has also witnessed the horrific consequences of the conflict on Sudan where 1.8 million people have been forced from their homes and half a million have left the country.

The UNHCR now estimate over 100 million people have been forcibly displaced because and over 83% of these people are hosted in low- or middle-income countries.



The UK is home to only a tiny proportion of displaced people. We can and should do more. Despite the exemplary initiatives led by our government in relation to the resettlement of Ukrainian and Hong Kong nationals, this welcome has not been extended as generously and equally to others who have had no alternative but to flee their home in fear of their lives and the lives of their families.

We are proud that Bristol has played a key role with other cities in demonstrating our willingness to adhere to the UNHCR charter and provide all asylum seekers and refugees with a safe haven. As a city of sanctuary, our support through initiatives like the Welcome Hubs programme and innovation in meanwhile use housing are attracting national interest. The recent campaign of solidarity and fundraising support led by Bristol's Sudanese communities has been both exemplary and highly effective.

It is against this backdrop that we launch the second of the From Sanctuary to Opportunity reports as part of the Change Makers Project. Change Makers is a 5-year collaboration between ACH and RAMP, funded by Comic Relief which aims to identify strategic opportunities with the wider refugee sector to influence city-level and regional strategies.

Despite many negative stereotypes, the reality is that refugees establish enterprises that employ locals, generate commerce, and pay taxes. Young refugees enter the labour market to supplement an often-aging workforce.

There have been some ground-breaking initiatives in Bristol. From employment engagement with the health care sector to migrant business support led by ACH amongst other support organisations.



We know that refugees and migrants don't disrupt the culture of their host countries but enrich it. We know our communities bring different practices, foods, and religions, but most importantly even though there are differences between each culture, at the core our values are shared. We must ensure that ALL refugees who flee war and crises are treated equally, consistently and with respect.

Given the opportunity, they will lead self-sufficient and ambitious lives for themselves and their families. This Change Makers initiative is an essential step that ensures this objective is met.

**Fuad Mahamed CEO, ACH**





# Introduction

The challenge continues. From the ongoing war in Ukraine to the burgeoning conflict in Sudan. From climate crises in South Asia to human rights abuses in China. The plight of displaced people is no longer exceptional. The UNHCR has announced that for the first time in our history, 100 million people worldwide are fleeing their homes, most of whom find themselves in cities - not by choice, but by necessity.

Since last year's report, the Government has pursued several policies which will significantly impact the integration of citizens-in-waiting (refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced migrants).

The Nationality and Borders Act introduced a two-tier hierarchy of people seeking sanctuary; those who arrived through resettlement schemes and those who claimed asylum after arrival. While its alleged aim is to discourage irregular routes, its effects on integration will be detrimental. Those in the tier-two category will be limited by a temporary refugee status, trapping them in a state of precarity and immobility for up to 10 years with an 'open door' policy to deportation at any time.

This demographic will struggle to commit to setting up a business, starting a family, getting a secure job, or securing a house. This acts as a buffer to integration and social cohesion, not to mention the psychological impact of a life in limbo amongst a demographic for whom trauma is already endemic.

In March, the Government then introduced the Illegal Migration Bill which vows to eradicate human trafficking. Once again, however, this cloaks an arsenal of exclusionary and punitive policies targeting the most vulnerable migrants who lack an alternative safe passage. In testing the boundaries of international law, the Bill denies the right to seek asylum, the right to modern slavery protections, and the right to ever return to the UK following deportation.

Paradoxically, net in-migration is at record levels and the government's hostility to these newcomers has been selective. In the case of Ukrainians and Hong Kongers the welcome at both national and local level has been commendable. In addition to a default leave to remain, these citizens-in-waiting have enjoyed a well-funded resettlement scheme with safe routes, and Ukrainians have benefitted from housing programs and new integration support services. The Government's Welcome Programme for Hong Kongers specifically states its purpose, "enabling those on the BN(O) route to fully contribute economically and socially to life in the UK, enriching our society" (2022). Unfortunately this hospitality is not mirrored in other resettlement schemes. The Afghan resettlement counterpart remains beset with challenges, with almost 9,000 Afghans marooned in hotels nationwide, half of whom have been there over a year (Grierson & Sayal 2023).

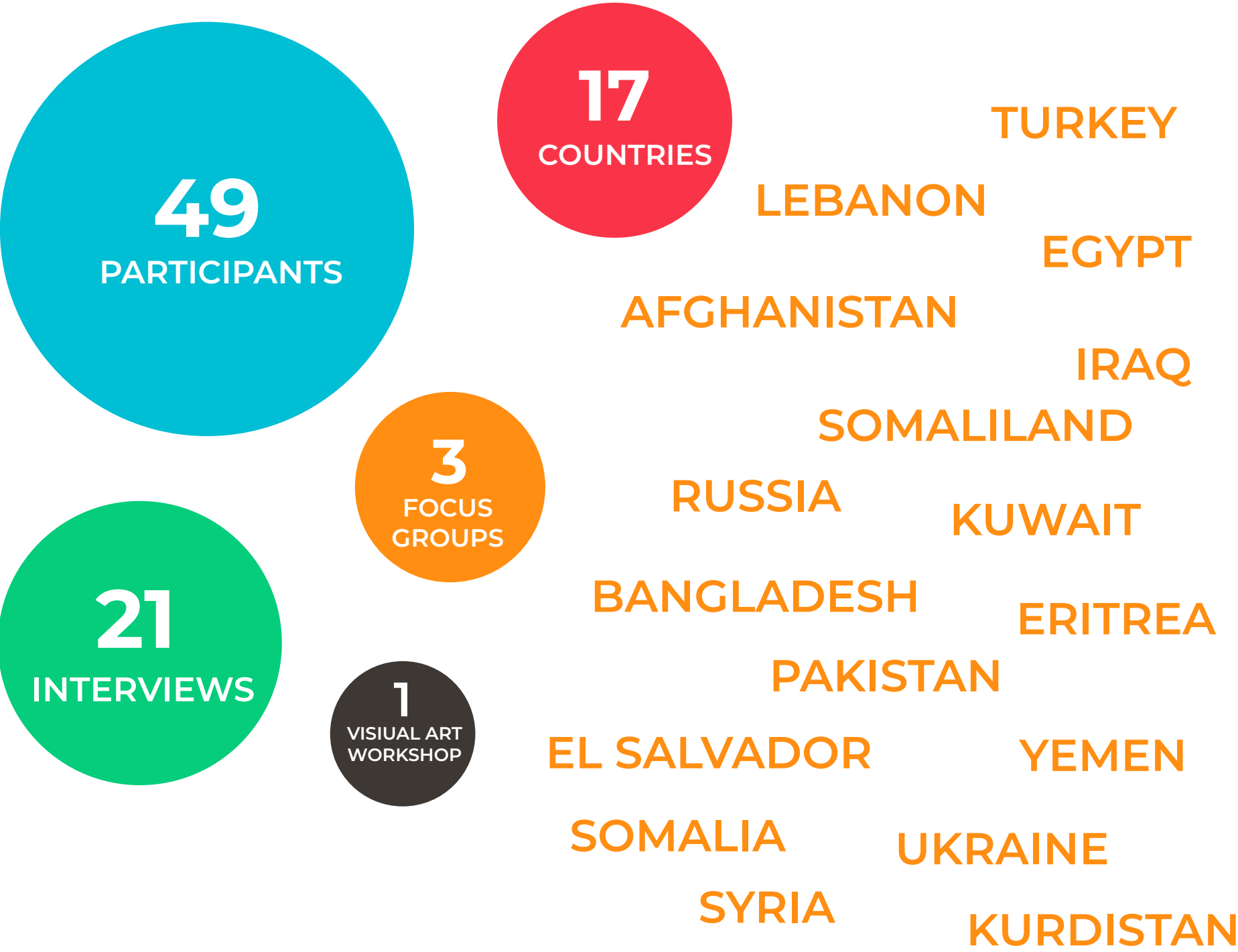
We would like to see the model of support for Ukrainians and the warm reception enjoyed by Hong Kongers replicated for all citizens-in-waiting. Consequently, while the environment remains hostile by design for so many others, this report and the research behind it seek to design-out this hostility at a local level by reimagining the narrative – from sanctuary to opportunity – and putting the voices of citizens-in-waiting at the heart of evidence-based research. In moving beyond the humanitarian cause of providing sanctuary towards the equitable cause of creating opportunity, this report outlines the social and economic arguments for meaningful integration.

Notably, the Government's consultation of its new proposals was deliberately designed to be inaccessible to citizens-in-waiting, with not one single question asking people about their personal experiences of fleeing persecution or seeking safety in the UK (Refugee Action 2022). This reflects a broader neglect of qualitative research evidence in the field of integration policymaking (Slootjes & Zanzuchi 2022: 4).



In contrast, our report is the product of four months of qualitative research using creative ethnographic methods. We conducted 21 interviews, 3 focus groups, 1 visual art workshop, participant observation, and a literature review. The primary research involved 49 participants representing 17 countries of origin. Namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Iraq, Kurdistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia, Somaliland, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Yemen. In addition to this, we also interviewed 10 people working in the refugee support sector, including welcome hub leaders, volunteers, ESOL teachers, housing officers, support workers, and career advisors, many of whom also come from a migrant background. To achieve diversity of participation, specialized focus groups were conducted with women, young people (18-25), and people who identify as LGBT+.

We recognize that not all citizens-in-waiting share the same experiences, barriers, and enablers, so it was imperative that we represent as many experiences as possible. Diversity of expression was also achieved by conducting fieldwork both in English and native languages, as well as through visual art.



- The Refugee Support Sector Workers
- Welcome Hub Leaders
- Volunteer
- ESOL Teachers

- Housing Officers
- Support Workers
- Career Advisors



The chapters in this report represent the most important factors of integration as reported by our participants: Housing, Health and Wellbeing, Education and Skills, and Employment.

However, it is worth noting that these factors are codependent. Having a secure home, a good job, and opportunities to progress affect people's health and wellbeing.

Equally, good health and wellbeing impact your ability to work and retain employment. As we argue in this report, integration must be holistic and services must not operate in silos, but rather in partnership and collaboration.



*Boat flotilla in support of Ukrainian migrants*

In each chapter we explore the barriers and enablers to opportunity, the levers of change, and our recommendations for action. You will hear from citizens-in-waiting themselves, in their own voices, as we journey through case studies, testimonies, visual art, and poetry. All names have been changed and identifying details omitted in respect of anonymity.



This report will argue that investing in citizens-in-waiting is not only the 'right' thing to do, but it also makes social and economic sense. As economist Giovanni Peri points out, not investing in citizens-in-waiting risks long-running costs in terms of lower employability, and higher probability of marginalization, crime, and associated health issues (Edwards 2022: 31). Unfortunately, the costs of lack of investment are used as a justification for legislative barriers to integration. Michael Clemens (Center for Global Development) likens this predicament to a dog chasing its tail; “‘We need barriers to integration, otherwise more refugees will come.’ Why shouldn’t more refugees come? ‘Because the ones already here are not integrating.’ Why aren’t they integrating? ‘In large measure, because of barriers to integration’” (Clemens 2022). Treating citizens-in-waiting as a burden rather than as an asset then conveniently becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby those who are judged by their economic contribution continuously face policies designed to restrict their economic potential.

In putting our money where our mouth is, this report has created opportunities for citizens-in-waiting through its very existence. We have supported two refugee-owned food businesses to provide catering to our participants, two refugee artists to facilitate art workshops, employed people of a migrant background to lead focus groups, and commissioned a graphic designer from a migrant background to design this final report. In addition to this, every single participant in this study was financially reimbursed, signposted to relevant services, and in some cases made new friendships and networks. Many of our participants also highlighted the benefits of telling their story and having someone listen.

Some of the most moving testimonies came from our visual art workshop:

*“At the beginning I felt a bit silly doing this, like what is this collage thing? And then as I was doing it, I realized how important it is to be able to express yourself this way. My friend has been unable to speak for so long, she has had all this pain inside her. That’s why when she did her collage she began to cry, because it was such a release. It is very therapeutic. We need this for our children too.”*

- Nadiia

Testimonies such as these confirmed the capacity for resilience, engagement, and determination that citizens-in-waiting engender. It also confirmed the power of being listened to.

This research has been an education for us all and we hope you are as inspired by the vast potential for opportunity as we have been - and act to make the West of England a region of social equity and opportunity.



# Rethinking Refugee

## CHAPTER ONE



*"I see hope as opening all the curtains so that the world can see our beauty."*

- Nataliia

## Introduction

*"Migrants and citizens are made, not born. And the making of these categories is a political process."*

- Bridget Anderson (2023: 1:00)

*"When the environment is hostile only a new ecosystem can possibly create conditions of care."*

- Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan (2021) 'The Vocabulary of Neglect'

Citizens-in-waiting are a demographic that are frequently spoken for rather than *with*, often represented in numbers and statistics rather than being empowered to speak for themselves. Numerical data, while useful, has its limits. At best, it presents a simplistic, birds-eye view while obfuscating the complex reality of lived experience. At worst, this function has too often reinforced the narrative of the hostile environment and been used to justify racialised policies for decades.

*As Finney and Simpson point out, "Numbers have misleadingly become central to fears and forecasts of the state of ethnic relations. Race and statistics are a potent mix and evidence expressed as numbers is central to claims about immigration, race relations and integration." (2009: 2).*

Alongside this, policies of exclusion draw heavily on the political differentiation of 'citizen' and 'other'. However, this distinction in which so much is invested is exposed, ultimately, as arbitrary (Hall 2010: 895). The Windrush Scandal of 2017 undermined citizenship when hundreds of citizens were evicted from their homes, denied medical treatment, lost their jobs, and in some cases deported when they couldn't prove their status.

Furthermore, with the impact of the climate crisis making British towns such as Fairbourne unlivable, an increasing number of prospective climate refugees will be British-born citizens fleeing homes in the UK. As this crisis unfolds, it forces us to de-exceptionalise displacement and consequently denationalise (and deracialise) the political distinction between 'citizen' and 'refugee'. The blurring of these social categories presents us with an increasingly false dichotomy.





*"I'm not a refugee [laughs] let's clear that up. I would like to be seen as a tourist because a tourist always gets to go back home."*

*-Daryna*

As we zoom out of the UK, we see our European neighbours from Ukraine fleeing war, further closing the proximity between "us" and "them". From Afghanistan, we see people escaping the Taliban as a direct result of assisting the British Ministry of Defence. From Hong Kong, we see people fleeing Chinese persecution as British Nationals Overseas. Taken together, it is imperative not only to welcome these people into our communities, but to call out the false dichotomy of citizen vs. migrant and we begin this here by not referring to refugees, asylum seekers, or migrants - but to citizens-in-waiting.

In our last report, we made the editorial choice to refer to all our participants, colleagues, and clients as refugees. We did this to resist the arbitrary and often harmful distinctions imposed on people seeking asylum from above. However, the term 'refugee' is a legal distinction with real implications such as the right to work, for example, and while most of our participants were comfortable with this label, for some it doesn't reflect their experience or preference of representation. Consequently, we have decided to adopt the term 'citizen-in-waiting' from Colin Yeo's *Welcome to Britain* (2020: xviii). This umbrella term more accurately represents our clients and functions as a statement of solidarity and inclusion. It recognises the value that migrants contribute to society and validates their right to a meaningful future.

While we may not have the power to change government legislation today, we can at least use the evocative power of language to empower our clients and colleagues.



## Rethinking Integration

Having reimagined the social category of refugee, we now turn to changing the narrative of integration. Integration can mean a lot of things to different people. As a contested term, some have even advocated for a replacement such as 'inclusion'. This is because the term 'integration' is too often concerned with supposedly 'unintegrated' minorities and marginalised groups, driven by national policy agendas which don't adequately take local context into account, and approached from the top-down, seeking to impose integration on people from above (University of Bristol 2022: 4).

However, as the University of Bristol's Everyday Integration Toolkit points out, the term 'inclusion' is passive, and doesn't adequately account for the agency of citizens-in-waiting. It is also a static term, while integration evokes an ongoing process. As such, we share the University of Bristol's definition of integration; a two-way, everyday process which happens at a local level, from the bottom-up.

**Two-way** refers to the fact that integration is not the sole responsibility of individuals. It's a symbiotic process which requires co-operation, empathy, and investment from the local actors that citizens-in-waiting encounter. The trope of "the more you put in, the more you get out" is true not only for citizens-in-waiting, but for the stakeholders and gatekeepers of opportunity.

**Everyday** refers to the power of routine, quotidian exchanges of life: at the school gates, at the workplace, in the neighbourhood cafes or events at the community centre. Integration always begins on the ground, at a local level.

**The bottom-up** nature of integration refers exactly to this and undermines the hostile legislative barriers of central Government. Integration, in this sense, is not an imposition but a collaboration.

## #RethinkingRefugee Campaign

The **#RethinkingRefugee campaign** began in 2015 as a reaction to the so-called 'refugee crisis portrayed in the media at that time.

We felt we needed to confront the language used to talk about citizens-in-waiting in the mainstream media, and challenge any stereotypes, misconceptions, or politically motivated rhetoric.

Through the campaign, we want to create a space to discuss how to change broken systems for citizens-in-waiting that restrict opportunities for people seeking refuge in the UK.

We believe that by changing the conversation, we can advocate and innovate for increased access to support, training and education that will in turn create the spaces and opportunities for people to thrive.

## Provocations

How can we cultivate a more inclusive environment?

What role does local policy play in making citizens-in-waiting feel valued?

How many examples of 'everyday integration' can you think of?



# Signs of Hope

## City + Refugee Event: 'Local Partnerships Leading to Global Impact'

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In echoing our vision of representation and meaningful integration locally, nationally, and internationally, we are proud to have joined Bristol City Council in a partnership with the Mayors Migration Council in the City + Refugee collaboration between Bristol, Kampala, and New York.

The event in December 2022 showcased partnership working between Local Government and refugee-led organisations. There were almost 1000 registrants from all over the world, including significant attendance from numerous UN Agencies.

The discussion profiled the opportunity for city government – refugee partnerships as an impactful response to forced migration and a promising example of development collaboration which is worthy of international profile and resources. It also provided a high-profile opportunity to promote the Global Cities Fund which supports cities, particularly in the Global South, to run projects aimed at improving migrant inclusion.

The event was held as part of a number of 'fringe' events related to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees Annual Dialogue which took place in Geneva and was focused on the theme of development co-operation.

### Speakers included:

**Gloria Asiimwe**, Executive Director, Makasi Rescue Foundation Kampala

**Erias Lukwago**, Lord Mayor, Kampala, Uganda; Mayors Migration Council Leadership Board Member

**Fuad Mahamed**, Chief Executive Officer, ACH United Kingdom, Bristol Ambassador

**Sana Mustafa**, Chief Executive Officer, Asylum Access  
**Şafak Pavey**, Senior Advisor, United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

**Marvin Rees**, Mayor, Bristol City Council, United Kingdom; Mayors Migration Council Leadership Board Member

**Samer Saliba**, Head of Practice, Mayors Migration Council (Moderator)

*"How do we create the conditions in a city where people can transition from people with needs to people with assets?"*

*- Mayor Marvin Rees*

*"We need to get away from seeing local actors as merely 'implementers' of trickle-down funding requirements. It's not efficient, impactful, or ethical."*

*- Sana Mustafa*



## Beyond Housing: Feeling at Home in Bristol

### CHAPTER TWO



*"There's always a light at the end of the tunnel but that period inside the tunnel seems long and full of sadness, failure, disappointment, stress, frustration, and anger. But if you pass all of them while staying strong you will get what you wanted. Always remember to lighten up your own lamp of hope!!! Remember you deserve to be loved."*

*- Doda*

## Introduction

Finding a house, or more importantly, a home is a key tenet of integration. Without a suitable home, citizens-in-waiting lack security, mobility, dignity, and the ability to contribute as independent members of society. Our participants reported finding a home as being one of the most important factors in their ability to integrate. Furthermore, many of the success stories we heard were notably reported by those with stable accommodation, indicating that those who have a home experience greater opportunity and prosperity. Unsurprisingly, therefore, having a home is a prerequisite to feeling at home in the city.

However, Bristol is facing a worsening housing crisis, recently named the most expensive city to live in the UK outside of London (Cork 2023: 1), and the 13th most expensive city in the world to build in (Arcadis 2023: 6). This brings acute challenges to everyone living in Bristol, but further compounds the marginalization of citizens-in-waiting. In thinking beyond housing, we consider the enablers and barriers of being 'at home' in Bristol, both in terms of finding stable accommodation and feeling part of a community. As reported by our participants, this chapter encourages you to think about the ways your organization can pull the levers of change.

### Did you know...

"New refugees are most at risk of homelessness"  
(Refugee Advocacy Forum 2022: 9)

"During 2022 numbers of individuals housed in Initial Accommodation hotels in the region have grown, representing a tripling of the number of people in the local area"  
(Bristol Refugee Rights 2022: 3)

ACH Provide 88 houses in Bristol to accommodate new refugees who risk destitution.



## Barriers

- ▼ Long waiting lists for social housing – Single adults wait several years for a room.
- ▼ Unaffordable private rental market – pushes citizens-in-waiting to the margins of the city in low-income, high-crime areas.
- ▼ Poor quality housing – many participants report damp, mould, vermin, and dilapidation.
- ▼ Unsafe cohabitation – being unable to choose who you share a room, house, or hotel with puts vulnerable demographics at risk.
- ▼ Discrimination - Landlords and Estate Agents reluctant to accept citizens-in-waiting. Exacerbated by the two-tier system introduced by the Nationality and Borders Act wherein deportation is a continuous threat for tier-two migrants, making landlords risk-averse.
- ▼ The 'right to rent' policy, which is part of a wider strategy to outsource immigration checks to civil society, requires landlords and estate agents to check the immigration status of potential tenants. This encourages covert discrimination wherein landlords avoid renting to anyone with a foreign name or accent as they assume justifiably that it may require extra paperwork.
- ▼ All of which maroon citizens-in-waiting to hotels or with host families where there is lack of privacy, cramped living conditions, and immobility for the unforeseeable future.

*"I'm limited to where I can live because I'm not willing to change my child's school another time. It's heartbreaking. My child had a really tough time adjusting. He is like a tree that you are just pulling out of the ground, removing his roots. And I tried hard to put our life together."*

- Daryna

*"The home office has been pressuring me about housing, telling me I need to find accommodation. But it is very difficult, and it is their responsibility to help me. I will be so happy to find a house and start my new life eventually."*

- Abdul

*"Landlords and estate agents stereotype refugees as 'undesirable'. Although 'No DSS' has been outlawed, there is still a hidden discrimination."*

- Housing Support Officer



## Enablers

For many people who have been forcibly displaced, their country of origin will always feel most like their true home. Dreams of peacetime and family reunions echoed through almost all our conversations. Despite this, citizens-in-waiting can and do foster a 'home away from home' under the right conditions. This involves three key factors:

**Safety & Security:** The stress of precarity can be a debilitating force, which is why meaningful sanctuary is a prerequisite to meaningful opportunity. To thrive as independent members of the community, citizens-in-waiting must be safe and secure in their housing situation. This means being mindful of cultural differences and conflicts when housing uniquely vulnerable groups.

**Proximity:** When asked about their aspirations for a future in Bristol, participants emphasized the importance of having a house next to the park, near the supermarket, near the school, near the mosque, "the important things" – for them, proximity to the wider community is important for integration. They want to no longer live on the margins, in the distance. They want to be included in social life. Many of those living in temporary accommodation such as hotels or with host families have been there for a year or more and understandably feel part of the local community; their children attending the local school, having a local GP, a familiar place of worship. This demographic feels a weight of anxiety about becoming uprooted once again to find an affordable home in a different part of the city. Rather than taking a 'beggars can't be choosers' approach, citizens-in-waiting must be supported to find stable accommodation which aligns with the integrative progress they have already made.

**Self-determination:** Beyond housing, citizens-in-waiting can feel at home in Bristol by being included as co-creators in the future of their city. This can involve volunteering opportunities, involvement in community projects such as the Bristol Commons, planting trees and crops in community gardens, contributing to events such as St. Paul's Carnival, exchanging cultural practices at the Grand Iftar, and being included in the design and implementation of city planning. This is an opportunity, not only for meaningful integration, but to depart from Bristol's problematic history of migrant exploitation and build social equity into the foundations of its infrastructure.







*"I'm lucky to have my own home with enough rooms for me, my wife, and children. This means I can celebrate Ramadan and Eid as I would in Afghanistan, which would not have been possible in the hotel."*

*- Taher*

*"To be honest when we arrived in the UK the government showed us very good hospitality. We were placed in a good hotel. A lot has changed since then, and we've been placed in a very good house."*

*- Firash*

*"Yes, of course I like where I live. It is a beautiful area and my neighbours have been very welcoming."*

*- Ismail*



## Women's voices



*"No, I don't feel at home here because sometimes [social services] frighten us that they are going to take our kids. Our way that we raise the children is different sometimes they see it wrong here in the UK. It makes me not trust them."*

- Asma

*"I don't feel at home here because sometimes I meet racist people. Especially on the bus."*

- Hibah

*"I have been living in the UK for 20 years and I remember the police wasn't good with me and have been racist."*

- Casilda

## Youth Voices



*"When I was younger, I didn't actually have much Somali influence around me. I was living in white middle-class places like Bishopston, we were the only Somali family. And you know, going into primary schools, well, I was the only black kid in the class."*

- Abdullahi

*"Because the price of the house was below the minimum, I had to go for it. I was still a student so I couldn't afford much. But there were gangsters outside and drugs everywhere. I just didn't know what to do. So, after a month of going through this hell, I had to take a step back and stop paying rent."*

- Ishan

*"Another place I was recommended was Henbury. But due to how far it was from every shopping centre in Bristol the distance just ruined it."*

- Abadir

## LGBT+ Voices



*"The biggest challenge for me is to stay unrecognized among other refugees. It's the same feeling here that I had where I came from, because I had to keep my sexual identity hidden. So, I have to do the same here because I don't want to live with anyone who might not accept me. Especially as we live in a hotel with around 300 other migrants who might come from a country that doesn't accept me, they might embrace this mentality. They might even hurt me. So, to avoid that I keep my identity secret, and my activities hidden. So even though I'm in a safe country, I'm still not safe."*

- Amir

*"My concern is where I will live in the future. I would like to know how I can get a safe place to live here, without dangerous or crazy neighbours."*

- Maxim

*"Before arriving in Bristol, I had been staying in a military base with no privacy, 15 people in each room. And before that at a hotel in London where I made some friends. But when I arrived in Bristol to be resettled in a house, I didn't know anyone. All the friends I made were in different cities. And because it was raining all the time I just stayed in my room and felt very isolated. Then I started to see that the money I was getting wasn't enough for food, so that made it difficult."*

- Fernando



# Recommendations for Action

## Housing

Utilising 'meanwhile spaces' that can be occupied at low cost by tenants as property guardians – This is most appropriate for single adults without children who otherwise would be waiting years for social housing (see Case Study 2).

Local Authorities to provide guarantees to landlords, as citizens-in-waiting often struggle to find guarantors or references after living in hotels or with host families for long periods of time.

The 'move on' support designed to assist Ukrainians in finding a new home must be extended to all citizens-in-waiting demographics.

Tenants' demographics must be represented in staffing - Citizens-in-waiting must be included in the design of services and in the decision-making process. This will cultivate better cultural awareness from frontline services to prevent behavioural misunderstanding and Othering. Organisations can achieve this by joining the Stepping Up Initiative.

Safe spaces – making sure that vulnerable demographics such as LGBT+ migrants are safeguarded and living in appropriate accommodation that is safe and accepting.

Many of these points of action were highlighted at the Raising Roofs and Firming Foundations event in February where over 90 senior housing leaders including many social housing CEOs and campaigners gathered to commit to eradicating racial inequality in housing.

We must continue to build on this dialogue.





## Community Building

Inclusion as a policy stance – Include citizens-in-waiting in the Levelling Up agenda's mission to “Restore a Sense of Community, Local Pride and Belonging”.

Increase engagement with community-building projects such as Coexist's Bristol Commons project, Community Kitchen, and the Living Soil Project. Initiatives such as these which mobilise and empower communities to create new spaces and events can give citizens-in-waiting a stake in their built environment and a sense of authorship in the future of the city.

To extend the Welcome Hubs - which have been a resounding success in creating a 'home away from home' for Ukrainians - to other citizens-in-waiting communities (see Case Study 1).

Organisations such as Bridges for Communities are already doing excellent work to foster a home away from home with their Walk with Me and Befriending programs.

## Provocations

Does the demography of housing organisations represent the tenants that they serve?

Are citizens-in-waiting empowered by their housing situation? If not, what can you do to empower them?

What initiatives can organisations adopt to include citizens-in-waiting as co-authors of policy and planning?



*The Raising Roofs and Firming Foundations event was a resounding success in mobilising social housing leaders to unite against racial inequality in the housing sector.*



## Signs of Hope “Meanwhile” Spaces

**C** At ACH we have a distinct empathy with the people we house. A significant proportion of our staff are from a range of refugee and migrant communities. We have first-hand insight into the challenges our clients face and therefore feel a natural affinity to the people we house; we have been in their shoes – we get it. Which is why we strive to do more by educating and innovating with new partners to create new solutions to help enable refugees thrive and prosper in our communities.

**A** One of the more innovative models we have developed over the past year is to pilot the re-purposing of buildings with meanwhile-use status as temporary accommodation for people with refugee status. In a first-of-its-kind in the city we have joined forces with FORE Partnership, Amicala, and Socius to transform a vacant building, Hampton Lodge, on a site awaiting planning permission, into 15 apartments for refugees in need of interim housing.

**S** Hampton Lodge offers essential “move on” highly affordable one-bedroom properties which are provided fully furnished and fitted with white goods, so residents have a highly affordable comfortable place to call home while they focus on securing full time employment. Ultimately breaking down the barriers of entry to work and housing which many migrants and refugees face.

**E** This initiative now provides homes for 15 refugees from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and eastern Europe, amongst many others, who have been granted refugee status in the UK. To ensure a level of stability, the residents will have a minimum lease of two years and be offered at least 3 months’ notice ahead of any future development works commencing.

**S** This partnership is most welcome and much needed. The current system of residential support for refugees is sadly lacking. Holes within the system and endemic short-termism often means refugees and migrants are passed around the system and fall through the many gaps. This makes the idea of settling down and integrating within a new society very difficult.

**T** As a result of this new model, we’ve already seen the first of the refugees based here secure full time employment. We are confident more will follow.



# Health and Wellbeing

## CHAPTER THREE



*"The tree represents the spring and that reminds me of hope"*

*-Sevilay*

## Introduction

Health and wellbeing are important factors in everyone's ability to live a full life, but it remains a significant barrier to the integration of citizens-in-waiting. All the participants in this study were extremely grateful for the National Health Service and praised the doctors and nurses who have helped them in times of need.

However, due to structural instability, long waiting lists, and cultural miscommunication, poor service provision (particularly in the field of mental health) still inhibits their ability to integrate successfully. In this chapter we consider the barriers and enablers of good health and wellbeing, as reported by our participants.

### Did you know...

"There is no evidence that refugees and asylum seekers use a disproportionate share of NHS resources, and migrants in the UK and elsewhere in Europe tend to use fewer services than native populations." (British Medical Association 2022)

"The Medecins du Monde Observatory Report, including 43,286 individuals from across Europe found that over half of those who reported "fear of arrest" as an obstacle to seeking healthcare, were in the UK" (Weller & Aldridge 2019)

"Most asylum seekers are entitled to emergency health care and with help from local voluntary agencies, can successfully appeal to have the bills removed. However, for asylum seekers who have been refused status, then costs can be incurred for emergency treatments and for maternity care. Families can be sent bills between £3-£5,000 and are unable to pay for these costs." (Bristol City Council 2017: 30)



## Trauma

Katie Hope of the Trauma Foundation South West points out that people seeking asylum who engage with therapy are more likely to be granted permanent status. Unfortunately, access to therapy is extremely difficult due to long, or even lack of, waiting lists. As such, there has been an increasing call in the support sector for a trauma-informed approach when serving citizens-in-waiting.

While this is a necessary and welcome development, caution must be taken to not assume trauma or essentialise citizens-in-waiting as victims. Medical anthropologists Fassin & D'Halluin (2005) explain that the narrative surrounding this demographic has, in recent years, shifted from a political to a medicalised gaze. This causes the social currency of citizens-in-waiting to rest more with physical and psychological injuries associated with trauma than their own testimonies and narratives (ibid). There is of course value in spotlighting the extra-ordinary struggles of citizens-in-waiting in the media to elevate the voices of those most marginalised to the eyes of the world stage (Marlowe 2010: 13), but this often risks a voyeuristic fascination with trauma which undermines the good intentions of service providers.

Moreover, a focus on trauma can unwittingly pursue a focus on the individual, while conveniently ignoring what institutions, particularly the healthcare sector, can do to better accommodate people from diverse backgrounds.

As such, it is important to remember that citizens-in-waiting are not vulnerable per se but rather they are made vulnerable and marginalised by structural inequality. Our focus, therefore, is not on how to tip-toe around traumatised people, but on how institutions and organisations can work to enable meaningful wellbeing without perpetuating a victimising gaze.

*"I feel that some people think we are here because we are weak, because we are fragile. But we are just looking for a chance."*

*- Fernando*

*"People who are refugees can find themselves quite quickly rising to a floating world either beyond or above politics, and beyond or above history - a world in which they are simply "victims." It is this floating world without the gravities of history and politics that can ultimately become a deeply dehumanizing environment for refugees, even as it shelters."*

*- Liisa H. Malkki  
(1995: 518)*



## Barriers

▼ Poor wellbeing among citizens-in-waiting is often determined by poor quality of life and lack of opportunities. Factors such as inadequate housing, unemployment, social isolation and loneliness all contribute to poor health outcomes.

▼ Support workers' jobs get harder as government funding for vital services is increasingly cut, rendering many of the services which would usually be signposted (such as dentistry and mental health) dysfunctional or obsolete.

▼ In many cases, the only time services are available is in an emergency. This also makes integration much harder as healthcare provision is a key part of refugees' engagement with the community.

▼ Waiting lists are long and patients who phone are kept on hold for hours – this causes both clients and support workers to waste time, when time is a precious asset for those on the verge of destitution.

▼ Due to waiting lists and times mental health support for citizens-in-waiting is almost non-existent, resulting in a high prescription of medicine. While this may be useful to some, many are not aware of what they're taking.

▼ Many participants complained of not being taken seriously by healthcare professionals, only to be admitted to hospital when conditions become life-threatening.

*"My hosts are very generous, and they don't kick me out, but I share a tiny bedroom with my child. It's been a year and I can see how it affects him. He has no privacy, for a year I have had no private space to be alone. We are always together. A person needs some space to be alone. My child's wellbeing has suffered a lot and I ended up having a very deep depression by January."*

- Daryna

*"I have finished with hope. I don't want to think about my future. Back in Russia I was always making plans for 6 months, a year, 5 years, a timetable for what I will achieve. But now, I don't want to think about it, and I don't want to plan nothing, absolutely nothing. Only after I get my interview [for leave to remain] I will decide what to do."*

- Igor

*"Our job is to help people integrate into society and to interact with the local community and engage with the services they need. That job becomes more difficult the less well functioning those services work."*

- Support Worker

*"We get very used to seeing the same four or five prescriptions due to the lack of alternatives available. And while many people will need this medication, an issue we see a lot in our risk assessments is people not understanding what medication they're taking or even what it's called."*

- Support Worker



## Enablers

**Friendship:** Loneliness and social isolation was reported among many participants, but among those with good social networks and community participation, wellbeing was reported to be good. Social initiatives by organisations such as Bridges for Communities and Bristol Hospitality Network were praised consistently. For LGBT+ citizens-in-waiting, Pride Without Borders provides fortnightly meet ups to facilitate new friendships and support.

**Opportunity:** Satisfaction with health and wellbeing was reported among people with jobs. Many citizens-in-waiting have turned their craft and culinary hobbies into small businesses which was reported as helping them to feel at peace.

**Awareness of rights:** Rights must be communicated to citizens-in-waiting as many face poor health as a result of not understanding what they're entitled to. From illnesses caused by poor living conditions to requesting a taxi from the hospital, understanding rights and complaints procedures can equip citizens-in-waiting with better health prospects.

**Access to therapy:** The elephant in every room was that therapy is incredibly difficult to access. With better accessibility to therapy or counselling, citizens-in-waiting can better achieve their goals.

**Interpreters and practitioners from countries of origin:** Interpreters are vital in assisting newly arrived citizens-in-waiting to achieve good health and wellbeing. Additionally, some who were able to access therapy found a cheaper alternative with less waiting lists than the NHS through practitioners from their own country, which proved to be highly valuable.





*“Making friends and getting to know people here has been the most important part of my success. This opens doors to education, helps your mental health. Without being engaged with the community I think you cannot do anything. You would be lost.”*

*- Mustafa*

*“Mental health support? We have family for that. At the beginning when we arrived my wife was very nervous and sad about changing the environment, losing her relatives. In Afghanistan we have a different culture. We have very good communication with our relatives, they come to our house, we interact a lot. So we didn’t seek out mental support, but I encouraged her that she will get better and luckily now she’s fine, she is active and goes to an ESOL course.”*

*- Firash*

*“We have very good wellbeing services in our hotel – we have a visiting psychologist, access to the gym and swimming pool, and a lot of sport activities. These are provided not by the hotel, but by different organisations. Also, the Walk with Me activity provided by Bridges for Communities is really helpful because it provides good company and an excursion away from the hotel.”*

*- Muhammad*

*“I’m also a candle maker, but I do that so I don’t go crazy. I don’t have any family or friends as I mentioned, so it makes me feel peaceful at times. It stops me from looking at the news. Of course, you can talk to your friends, but your friends are also wounded by the war. So that’s how I found myself making candles.”*

*- Daryna*



## Women's voices



*"Sometimes we need someone to guide us through some points that are unclear to make life easier for people who have health needs. Our English not bad, but not good enough to discuss symptoms and medical speech, and as a mom I am responsible for the children and spend all my time with them so that give me more pressure, no one can feel it."*

- Halimah

*"I started to take support in mental health, but some people scared me that if I continue will take the kids from me."*

- Fatema

*"I am scared to ask for help in mental health because they will record everything then the social worker will take it against me in the future then will affect my kids. If there is something with me they will blame me of negligence. I had kissed the manager foot one day to not take my kids from me when they miss understood me before. I need help but I am scared to ask"*

- Hibah

## Youth Voices



*"Well, especially as a young, Somali male who lives in Clifton I felt that the health care was easy to access especially as for the NHS, I did go to the GP in Clifton. I do feel when I was younger, it was a really did help accommodate, you know, my situation. For most of us, we feel the NHS has provided us with the necessary health benefits and safety that we need in society in general"*

- Abdullahi

*"I don't feel like there really was any judgement on my colour or anything else. They didn't judge me for who I was. They just cared for my health as they should."*

- Ishan

## LGBT+ Voices



*"I have HIV, and when I first came here the NHS gave me a lot of help and support and for me this was a big opportunity to live a healthy life. The Brigstowe HIV organization were also very friendly and helped me a lot."*

- Maxim

*"Mental health access was a disaster. When I first arrived, I had a very traumatic experience and I needed to talk about it. I was referred to Vitamins, also by my GP. It took 7 months to even begin a conversation with them."*

- Amir

*"For me it took 6 months!"*

- Maxim

*"When I did eventually speak to the therapist on the phone they would cut me off as soon as I said anything and just gave me very general advice about how I should manage my stress. They weren't interested in tackling the root cause of my trauma. It was horrible. I haven't been sleeping properly for 3 months now."*

- Amir



## Recommendations for Action

Trauma informed training - For all frontline staff to take a training course with the Trauma Foundation South West who provide expertise from 20 years experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers. Subsidised for charities and nonprofits.

Representatives from wellbeing and trauma support organisations as a permanent part of the hotel visitation package.

Community therapists and counsellors from countries of origin who can speak the native languages of people with trauma. If more practitioners can be identified, this would cut waiting lists and provide bespoke, culturally relative treatment to those in need.

Access to NHS dentistry in Bristol – Waiting lists have been closed since 2020 making it impossible to see a dentist in Bristol. This was a complaint among many of our participants.

Art-based workshops – Our visual art workshop was a resounding success and participants were grateful for the chance to express themselves creatively. They noted that this would be a rewarding experience on a regular basis to improve wellbeing for themselves and their children. Organisations such as Art Refuge and Bristol Refugee Festival are already involved in this work and additional signposting to these opportunities would be a welcome addition to support workers' repertoire of advice.

## Provocations

To what extent do citizens-in-waiting have agency in their quality of life?

In what ways might organisations perpetuate the trauma of citizens-in-waiting?

What measures could organisations adopt to prioritise the health and wellbeing of citizens-in-waiting?



## Signs of Hope Welcome Hubs

It's Thursday evening and the party at Hope Chapel is rocking as usual. The bouncy castle is packed with children, the face painter is in high demand, and ice cream is being consumed by the bucket load. Mums are hugging, chatting, and watching their children play. But amidst the joy and the laughter, moments of tenderness show that this is no ordinary kids' birthday party. A 2-year-old girl quietly holds the hand of the male volunteer manning the bouncy castle - she hasn't seen her Dad in 7 months since he was called to fight. As well as laughing together, the mums often shed tears as they talk about the homes they've left behind and the loved ones they worry for every day. This is the complex reality for Bristol's new network of 15 Welcome Hubs, serving the city's refugee communities and particularly the nearly 700 people who have arrived in the last year fleeing the war in Ukraine.

The Welcome Hubs emerged in the chaotic days in March 2022 after the Russian invasion of Ukraine when the UK Government announced its Homes for Ukraine Scheme. In Bristol, the Council's Refugee Resettlement Team began rapid preparations to upscale their capacity, whilst also seeking new partners from across the city. At the same time a large number of churches and other local community groups were asking what they could do, both to support those in their organisations who were going to be hosting Ukrainians and to enable those who couldn't host but wanted to volunteer their time. The Good Faith Partnership, a social consultancy that specialises in cross-sector partnerships, convened a conversation to bring these groups together, and out of that came the idea of a Welcome Hub model that could be replicated and adapted across the city.

The concept is a simple one: to be a Welcome Hub, a local group needs a clear Hub leader, a team of volunteers, a commitment to running regular events in their building, and a willingness to allow the Council and other organisations to use their Hub to offer specialist services where relevant. In return for stepping up in this way, Welcome Hubs receive a small amount of funding from the Council and co-ordination support from the Good Faith Partnership which enables them to learn from each other and to feedback effectively to the Council on what they discover and how they might need to adapt.

By plotting where the arriving Ukrainians were being hosted across the city, it was possible to ensure strong coverage across the now 15-strong network of Hubs, ensuring that everyone could access support, advice and companionship within their immediate neighbourhood.

The impact of the Hubs has been enormous. The results from a Bristol City Council survey tell us that of the Ukrainian arrivals in Bristol who completed the survey, 70% had attended a Welcome Hub and 97% rated the Hubs as a 'good' or 'very good' experience. The anecdotal evidence tells the same story: some Welcome Hubs have become such a crucial part of Ukrainian's support network that they get one or two buses across town just to stay connected with their hub once they move into their own home.

Welcome Hubs have been described as a 'home away from home', and crucially have allowed Ukrainians to grow in confidence and then offer their own support to the newer families.



*“There are 15 hubs in Bristol all set up exclusively for Ukrainians, which works great for them. But there’s a whole other side to that because of course there are refugees from many other countries. Humans are humans wherever they are from. My view is that if this Ukrainian crisis has opened the Church’s eyes to a deeper injustice that they haven’t looked at before then so be it, let’s dig into it. It needs to be addressed.”*

*- Hub Leader*

Welcome Hub leaders rated increased integration for their guests as a key impact of their Hubs, alongside improved wellbeing. For this reason, Welcome Hub teams have been keen to understand how this community embrace can be extended to other refugee and asylum seeker groups. Good Faith Partnership were able to use a consultation and report on ‘Extending the Welcome’ to convene the Bristol voluntary sector and faith groups supporting refugees together to explore this. Numerous Hubs are now considering how to use their ESOL lessons, drop-ins and volunteers to support wider groups through referrals and new work supporting asylum seekers in hotels.

We are excited to see the Welcome Hub concept being taken up and tested in other areas. Neighbouring South Gloucestershire is adapting the model for their more rural setting, whilst Sheffield are combining the Welcome Hub idea with their Warm Space network established in response to the Cost of Living Crisis. And in a recent report, the well-respected think tank British Future called for Welcome Hubs to become a core part of the UK’s national refugee support infrastructure.

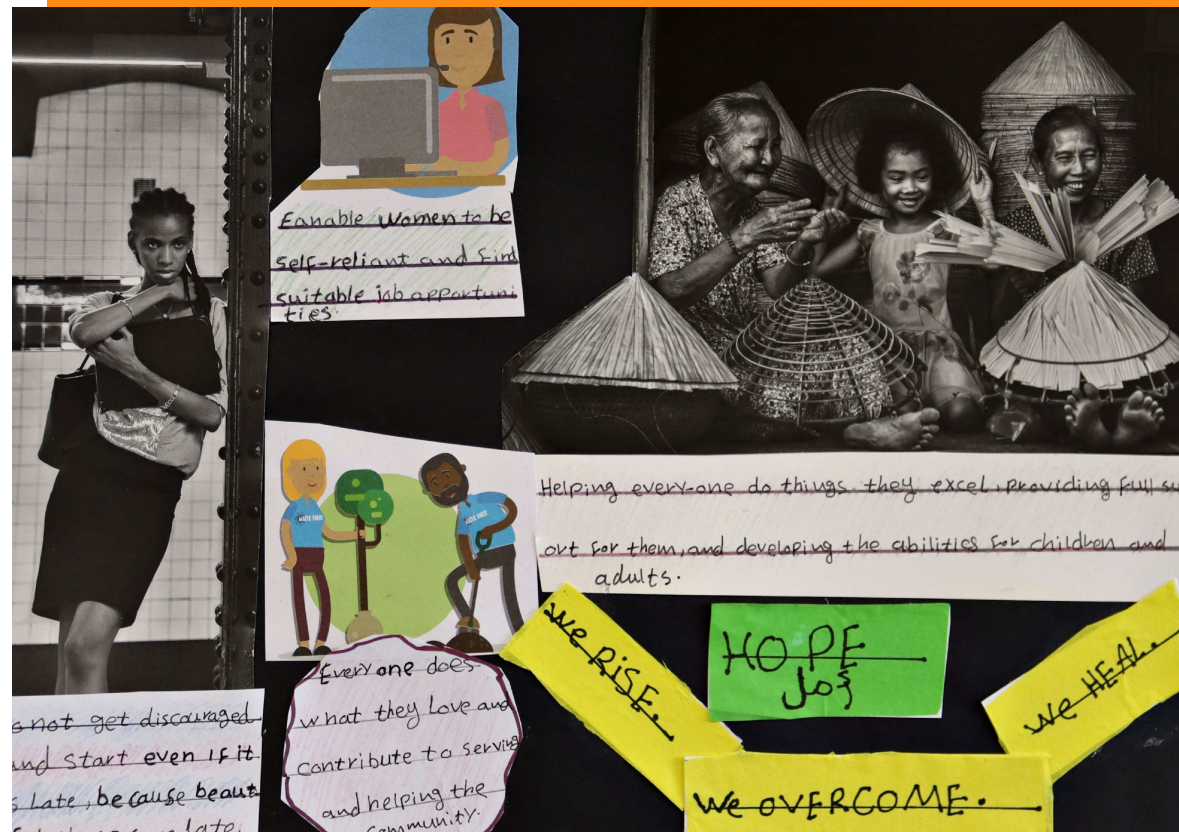


Bristol Cathedral's Welcome Hub English Class



## Education & Training

### CHAPTER FOUR



"This piece speaks of the chance and the opportunity for women. To find education and a job and be an independent woman in the future. For everyone to do what they love and contribute to serving and helping the community and never give up. For the children and families too, we must provide skills for them. The woman in the black and white has a sad impression because she thinks she has arrived too late. Even if you start late, the beautiful things come late sometimes. Don't give up. You will find your chance. أمل is the word for hope in Arabic."

- Dhekra

## Introduction

"When I first came to the UK, I didn't speak a word of English. I needed an interpreter to communicate with everyone. But I was determined. I went to every ESOL class I could find, four times a week. And now, a year later, I can communicate with anyone. I'm ready to engage with the job market any time."

- Mustafa

To understand the capacity for ambition and drive among citizens-in-waiting, go to an ESOL class or a vocational training course, where hundreds of people each week are investing time and energy into their own future, albeit an uncertain one. Despite this thirst for self-development, the majority of our participants cited a lack of educational opportunities as a barrier to their integration, particularly in English language. ESOL classes, while available, are slow-paced with students taking years to reach Level 3 which is a requirement for many entry-level jobs. As a result of this, many citizens-in-waiting choose to retrain and start their own businesses despite having earned bachelor's and master's degrees from their country of origin. In this case, vocational training courses offer clients the chance to learn about finance, marketing, and enterprise; providing the tools to take control of their future and create new opportunities for others. This chapter explores the barriers and enablers to education and training as reported by our participants.

### Did you know...

According to the 2021 census, 69 languages other than English are spoken in Bristol (Stone 2023).

"Men rate their language proficiency much higher than women, with 31% choosing Average for their writing skills, compared to only 23% of women" (Refugee Advocacy Forum 2022: 8).

"More women than men indicate the lack of childcare services preventing them from taking English lessons" (Refugee Advocacy Forum 2022: 8).



## Barriers

- ▼ Long waiting lists for ESOL courses – Some people wait up to 9 months for entry-level courses. This is lost time and potential.
- ▼ Inflexible ESOL hours – This causes some to drop out to pursue work. This starts a vicious cycle in which people are stuck in low waged jobs due to lack of English but are unable to improve their language after having gained employment due to a lack of evening classes and no other alternative. Working and studying must not be mutually exclusive.
- ▼ Lack of childcare – Particularly an issue for women who are unable to attend in-person classes due to childcare responsibilities.
- ▼ Funding eligibility criteria can exclude certain demographics. For example, the criteria for some business support and training courses only covers non-EU migrants, meaning that Afghan refugees (who were already British citizens) and Polish and Romanian migrants are excluded from this training.

*"I would like to get a job as a computer operator here, but my problem is English. English is the most important thing, but the English lessons are only two hours a week. I need to have classes every day to improve my English. Two hours a week is not enough."*

*- Ismail*

*"For all of the families here in the hotel their biggest problem is the bus passes. Because sometimes they can't go to the classes, and we have a limited budget."*

*- Sharbat*

*"ESOL can be difficult because when my wife a class I must be at the hotel to care for the children. The oldest goes to school but we cannot find kindergarten for the younger ones."*

*- Abdul*



## Enablers

**Accessibility** – Evening classes, free childcare, and subsidised bus passes will ensure that anyone who wants to progress can do so.

**Signposting** – As Firash notes below, signposting to relevant educational opportunities, both within and across organisations, can ensure opportunities are maximised.

**Volunteering and work placements** – A great opportunity to learn new skills while enhancing job prospects and gaining references.

**Childcare** – Ensures citizens-in-waiting, particularly women, can engage with training and education.

**A warm welcome** – Several participants noted how the friendliness of staff encouraged them to engage with training.



Syrian Students Day



*"I got a job which required a CSCS card to allow me access to the construction site. I had no idea how to get one of these as we never used them in Afghanistan. So, I contacted ACH and they were able to help me with this. Through getting to know them, they were also able to help my family with ESOL classes and my sons attended a 4-week employment course which taught them how to look for a job in the UK and how to use MS Word and Excel. So, ACH have helped us a lot."*

*- Firash*

*"I cannot get a job because of my status, but I am trying to get a scholarship to do my masters. Getting the chance to finish my masters makes me feel hopeful for the future. At least I will be able to say that something positive has come out of this whole experience with the Home Office. In the meantime, I benefit from volunteering with a lot of organisations; Borderlands, Bristol Hospitality Network, cooking sessions with the coexist community kitchen. I started learning sign language at Bristol City College. I started learning guitar."*

*- Amir*

*"I used to be a student nurse back in Syria. But I will not continue that here, it takes a lot of time, and I don't have that luxury. I'm interested in starting a food business. I do some training sometimes. So, every chance there's an opportunities for cookery classes I take it. I have worked with the coexist community kitchen many times."*

*- Mustafa*



## Youth Voices



*"I do feel there are some hidden biases that teachers have. I used to get targeted quite a lot by the teachers in school, you know, as a young black male."*

- Abadir

*"So going through school, every day it was hard. Spending eight hours, nine hours a day in school, just surrounded by people who looked at me differently, purely because of the colour of my skin and my name was hard to pronounce"*

- Ishan

## LGBT+ Voices



*"I am waiting a long time to find a place that will accept me on a course to do GCSEs. I worry that I am going to spend all my life studying."*

- Fernando

## Women's voices



*"Sometimes I don't get the best start because my baby is so small and also I am pregnant so I can't attend face-to-face classes"*

- Samira

*"The language problem is not fixed yet, slow response. In order to claim our rights, we need an English language. I feel there is discrimination against refugees who don't speak English."*

- Fatema

*"They gave remedial lessons to my daughters, to be honest they had helped me and my children a lot and they still support us."*

- Derifa



# Recommendations for Action

The integration of linguistic and vocational education – So that learning English and securing employment are not mutually exclusive, thus breaking the cycle of being stuck at the bottom of the ladder without the ability to climb it. I.e through 'English for Work' classes and work placements as a part of ESOL courses.

The use of APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), both certified and experiential, in all educational institutions in Bristol and the West of England, so that citizens-in-waiting may be recognised for their existing skills and abilities rather than be seen as 'blank slates'.

Intensive courses to fast-track beginners to an intermediate level.

Impartial funding – To ensure fairness and equality of access for all citizens-in-waiting.



## Provocations

How can organisations do more to ensure equal opportunities for personal growth and development?

What kind of partnerships could be fostered to help integrate learning and employment?

Do organisations recognise prior learning experiences from countries of origin when considering potential applicants?



# Signs of Hope

## Sima's Story

### CASE STUDY

Sima's love of sewing was first sparked by her father when she was a child. Her father was eager for Sima to learn a skill and encouraged her to follow her passions.

Sima's entrepreneurship journey started when she and her family were forced to flee their home country due to conflict in the 2000s. Sima has a supportive husband, who encouraged her to pursue sewing and tailoring as a career.

In 2009, Sima joined her husband in the UK, and started advancing her skills in alteration and repairing garments, learning from other women in London. This led to Sima starting her first business in 2011, renting a place and training other women to work alongside her.

In 2017, Sima and her family moved back to their home country, where Sima started a training institute for women in secret, against government restrictions on women's education.

*"If someone had an old sewing machine and they didn't need it, then I took it and fixed it and kept it for my students. I had some students, they could pay me some fees, but some students, they were really poor, they couldn't pay me anything. I took the money from the people who could pay me and I used it for the poor girls or ladies who couldn't afford to buy, notebooks or things for their course."*

- Sima

Sima had to leave her home country again in 2021. She moved to Bristol, a city she knew little about.

One day, Sima saw an advert for an ACH Careers and Enterprise event for people with refugee status and persuaded a group of other women to join her. At the event, Sima spoke to ACH Business Consultant Shalini and ACH's CEO Fuad Mahamed and told them all about her sewing experience.

From this encounter, Sima's first Sewing Course for ACH was created. Aid Box Community partnered with us to donate sewing machines to women taking the course, so they could continue learning and developing skills once the course had finished. Her pilot course was held at Docklands Community Centre, where students could learn the skills needed to run an at-home tailoring business.

Sima's second course was run with ACH and Refugee Women of Bristol, and expanded the service, to teach more women from a refugee background.

Now, Sima is also working for Bridges for Communities as a Sewing Coordinator and is working with ACH, Eastside Community Trust and Bridges for Communities to develop regular sewing courses for refugee women in Bristol. Sima is now able to work full time hours as a freelance Sewing Tutor, building her business whilst following her passion for sewing and women's education and enterprise.

This demonstrates the power of partnerships in education and training. It also shows how citizens-in-waiting can shape the delivery of courses, championing symmetry and symbiosis rather than a top-down approach to education and training.



# Employment

## CHAPTER FIVE



"Think of the past and the future; anything in our life can be changed. Never lose hope, keep going, and be ready for the journey. Keep praying and believing in Allah willing."

- Maria

## The Big Picture

In our final chapter we turn to employment, perhaps the most empirical measure of integration. Nevertheless, it must be noted that employment may not be meaningful or sustainable if the factors outlined in previous chapters are not satisfied. Like all members of society, citizens-in-waiting gain and retain meaningful work if they are housed, healthy, treated fairly, and supported in their educational development.

In our interviews, when we asked participants to tell us about themselves, the first thing people would frequently mention (after where they're from) was in what discipline they graduated...

*"I graduated from political science and law"*

*"I graduated in communications, business and accounting"*

*"I was a medical student in Afghanistan and graduated after 7 years training"*

*"I have a bachelors in mass communication"*

*"I have a masters degree in English language and literature, and a bachelors in management"*

*"I have a TV and Film bachelors, I studied animation too"*

*"I studied civil engineering"*

*"I trained in computer security"*

*"My degree is in diplomacy and international relations"*

*"I graduated from art school in my home city"*

*"My oldest son was in his final year of his architecture and engineering degree"*



This emphasis on prior learning signifies the importance placed on their identity as qualified, highly educated people. This revelation is soon followed by noting their previous occupations: from a film production manager, to a university lecturer, to an intelligence analyst, to a chemical engineer, to a nurse, to a glass blower, to a plumber, to a journalist, the list goes on. But despite this vast experience, citizens-in-waiting struggle to gain meaningful employment. As discussed in the previous chapter, a significant barrier to employment is language proficiency, hampered by the long waiting lists and slow pace of ESOL progress. But beyond this, citizens-in-waiting are disadvantaged by the lack of accreditation for their prior learning and experience. Qualifications are scarcely recognised and references are unobtainable due to the circumstances of displacement. Subsequently, many participants complained that the only work the Job Centre offers are low-waged, anti-social jobs such as warehouse work or housekeeping.

Consequently, many opt to retrain and start their own business, and frequently, become employers themselves. To meet this trend, ACH has been integral in securing partnerships across disciplines and sectors to train and support citizens-in-waiting in their business journeys, with a catalogue of success stories to date. This entrepreneurial zeal is a testament to the ambition and drive of citizens-in-waiting which must be celebrated. However, qualified workers are too often pushed into self-employment due to lack of opportunity in the waged sector as a result of discrimination, slow pace of ESOL progress, and crucially - lack of accreditation of previous certified and experiential learning. Rather than seeing citizens-in-waiting as 'blank slates', the labour market would benefit from capitalising on their abundance of existing skills and experience.

Since the Covid pandemic, the UK has seen a loss of 600,000 workers and 9 million people between the ages of 16 and 64 are now outside the labour market altogether (Partington 2022). To combat this, the Government has announced in its latest Spring Budget (2023) they will provide free childcare, increase support for benefit claimants, close the disability gap, support older workers to return to work, and increase the provision of education and skills. But little attention is paid to the hundreds of thousands of citizens-in-waiting, including the backlog of 160,000 asylum seekers marooned in statutory unemployment. This lost talent would be welcomed in sectors such as health and social care, IT and software, engineering, and education which suffer increasing labour shortages.

## Did you know...

"Asylum migrants are more likely to be in self-employment than the UK-born and close to 24% of the asylum migrants in self-employment have employees, compared with 18% of the UK-born" (Vargas-Silva 2019: 3).

The UK's Ethnic Minority Businesses make a significant economic contribution. An estimated 250,000 ethnic minority-led firms contribute around £25bn per annum to the UK economy and are more likely than non-EMBs to engage in various forms of innovation (CREME 2022: 6).

406 citizens-in-waiting were supported by the ACH Migrant Business Support Project in 2022 and 811 citizens-in-waiting were supported with career advice in Bristol through the ACH National Careers Service contract.

*Businesswoman supported through ACH MBS program*





## Barriers

▼ **Unrealistic eligibility criteria:** Entry-level jobs usually ask for at least a level 2 grade of English, if not level 3. For many roles this is an unnecessary standard and only serves to keep citizens-in-waiting out of the workforce. Given the opportunity, citizens-in-waiting will learn on the job and develop their English skills at work.

▼ **Anti-Social employment:** Warehouse jobs, night time jobs, housekeeping, and other back-of-house work may be suitable for some, but often restrict citizens-in-waiting to the margins of social life and provide little opportunity to improve their language.

▼ **Exploitative employment:** With little understanding of their rights in the UK, citizens-in-waiting are frequently exploited, working below minimum wage in unsafe conditions.

▼ **Tokenistic employment:** Employers hiring citizens-in-waiting to meet corporate social responsibility targets leads to poor retention of meaningful and increased precarity.

▼ **DBS:** Many fail DBS checks because of a lack of address and references. This is particularly an issue in the health and social care sector.

▼ **Accessibility:** Many citizens-in-waiting struggle to look for work without a home computer or laptop. On top of this, job applications can be difficult to navigate.

▼ **Lack of recognition for prior experience or qualifications:** Lost potential.

▼ **A lack of access to social networks, lack of social capital and understanding of the culture of work in the UK.**

*"We want the right job. Because in Afghanistan both of us had the best jobs, best salary. I'm trying my best to find a job but it is difficult. I have applied for many different jobs. But I keep getting rejected because I'm new here and I don't have any experience here, I don't have British qualification. We go to the Job Centre but they only offer me jobs in a warehouse. This job is not fit for me. I have worked for 16 years with the government, with computers. I graduated from political science and my wife from communications and management. If a person has knowledge and experience the government should provide jobs for us."*

- Zaid

*"I arrived here with a job but here in the UK the salary wasn't enough to survive here, I couldn't afford any kind of rent, so I had to leave. But little did I know how tough it would be to find a job or start your own business. It's really tough. I've been to so many interviews, but no one wants to hire me because I don't have any experience working in Britain or with the British system. I was a university lecturer for eight years. I have a masters degree in English language and literature, a bachelors in management, but for some reason it doesn't help me. Or, I don't know, maybe I just don't know how to use it here. So I continue being unemployed."*

- Daryna

*"I have devoted 20 years of my life and no small fortune to getting these degrees and doing this training, and what do they offer me? A Microsoft Word and Excel course. But I could teach that course! Then they asked if I'd want to change my profession, they call it a 'restart'."*

- Oksana

*"Never in my life have I been on benefits, I want to work!"*

- Ismail



## Enablers

APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning - both certified and experiential).

Partnerships such as the Refugee Employment Network.

Personalised career advice & tailored business support.

Integration of working and learning.

Equality of opportunity – levelling the playing field.

Intensive ESOL courses.

Routes to skills-shortage sectors such as health and social care.



*“For 6 months I have been financially supporting schools in Afghanistan that teach girls for whom education is prohibited by the state. Alongside this, I provide sewing machines for women to make clothes who would otherwise be unable to work, enabling them to have a reliable income. I am now starting an Afghan food business with the help of ACH so that a percentage of the business’s profit can continue to support these women and girls.”*

*- Taher*

*“After two months of being in the UK I went to a job fair and met some representatives from Brunel Care. They took my CV and they offered me a job as a procurement officer. I didn’t have the exact experience in procurement, but I used to work as a project manager in Afghanistan, so my previous work was relevant to this position. Yesterday was my 1-year anniversary at the organization. I’m very happy there. I have a very good manager and I’m able to study for my masters while I work.”*

*- Daud*



## Youth Voices



*"You know, there's a lot of faith nowadays. There's a lot of black youth programmes, a lot of black owned companies, a lot of Asian companies, a lot of programmes as well. A lot of internships, you know, owned by like black professionals. So, you know, I see a lot of potential in the future with ethnic minorities accessing their dream workspaces."*

- Yusuf

*"Where I work, well, there are only two black guys. I don't feel comfortable at my workplace. I feel like the only reason I got employed recently is to even out their percentages."*

- Abadir

## LGBT+ Voices



*"I have hope that I will find a job in my profession. I am a journalist but also a researcher, I've done social research for several NGOs. I see there is a lot of this kind of work in Bristol. But my English needs to improve."*

- Maxim

*"I had a goal, but when I came here, I had to change. Because we are in limbo, just waiting for that letter inviting me for a second interview [for leave to remain]. And after that I will have to wait longer for a decision. So, it's difficult to plan your life like this."*

- Maxim

## Women's voices



*"I cannot work because I care for my young children, the youngest is 3 years old. But I have dreams to become a chef and cook Afghan food."*

- Samira

*"I have a problem with housing because I live in a temporary safe house [shelter for abused people]. I want to apply for a job, but they don't accept me because I have no address or any correspondence with hospital, school, or GP. I don't have any support or advice, the job centre has sent me to the green way business centre but no help. I am able to work but I can't because I need a reference and house address. The job centre couldn't help me."*

- Hibah



## Recommendations for Action

DBS outcomes to be challenged – Brunel Care have begun challenging DBS decisions rather than accepting them, with positive outcomes. They argue that hotel addresses must be accepted, and employment references must take displacement into account.

Personalised recruitment processes – So that citizens-in-waiting don't fall through the cracks of eligibility criteria which don't apply to them.

The adoption of 'buddy' roles in workplaces – To combat discrimination and support professional development.

Resilience as an asset – To prioritise the characteristic of resilience over criteria such as Level 3 English.

The use of APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), both certified and experiential, in all educational institutions in Bristol and the West of England, so that citizens-in-waiting may be recognised for their existing skills and abilities rather than be forced to retrain.

## Provocations

How can organisations benefit from hiring citizens-in-waiting?

What measures could be adopted to ensure the existing skills and experiences of citizens-in-waiting are maximised?

What partnerships could be fostered to promote the integration of learning and employment?



## Signs of Hope NHS Recruitment Pathways Event

In April, ACH hosted an event to improve recruitment pathways and retention of the local refugee population in the Health and Social Care sector.

The event was attended by representatives from the NHS and North Bristol NHS Trust, alongside several NHS partners such as Burnel Care and other local refugee support organisations.

After a series of talks about the demographic of citizens-in-waiting in Bristol and the benefits of employing them, breakout discussions provided an opportunity to bring the barriers of employment to the attention of employers and created a space to work in partnership to overcome those barriers.

Several representatives committed to reviewing the accessibility of their recruitment process (including challenging DBS outcomes), and explore wrap-around support such as English for Work and cultural awareness.



*Team building exercise*



## Conclusion

This report has illuminated the experiences and insights of nearly 50 citizens-in-waiting, alongside many others in the support sector, to set the foundations for our ongoing project. In moving beyond the humanitarian cause of providing sanctuary towards the equitable cause of creating opportunity, we have outlined the social and economic arguments for meaningful integration. We have advocated for a two-way integration process that begins on the ground, at local level, rather than imposed from the top-down. This has been reflected in our research methodology through co-productive, creative methods of research. We have prioritised local voices and experiences rather than numbers and statistics, which too often serve to distance policy makers from the recipients of their policy, particularly in the case of citizens-in-waiting and ethnic minorities in general.

Each chapter has challenged assumptions and practices in its respective field and laid out the barriers, enablers, and recommendations for meaningful integration. In *Rethinking Refugee*, we have challenged some of the ways we talk and think about citizens-in-waiting and uncovered the unconscious biases that manifest in our language. Language has an evocative power that affects policy, as we have seen in the relentless 'Hostile Environment' campaign. We suggest instead that we see citizens-in-waiting not as "unskilled" or "blank slates" but as valuable assets with a wealth of experience and qualifications that can enrich our communities.

In *Beyond Housing* we considered what it means to feel at home in the city. Based on our participants' experiences, we identified three key factors: Safety and Security – the base level of needs for anybody to thrive, including the basic right to privacy; Proximity – to live in close proximity to social life and feel a part of the local community; Self-determination – to be included in decision making as co-creators of their life in the city. When these three factors are satisfied, citizens-in-waiting feel at home and are better able to thrive autonomously.

In *Health & Wellbeing* we looked at a range of factors that impact the wellbeing of citizens-in-waiting, with a particular focus on trauma. While we acknowledged that citizens-in-waiting are disproportionately affected by adverse experiences, it is also true that medicalised labelling can have a stigmatising effect. Many of our participants were concerned about being portrayed as 'weak' or 'vulnerable'. We therefore advocate for a trauma-informed approach by frontline services which doesn't assume trauma by default or perpetuate a victimising gaze.

In *Education & Training* we highlighted many of the challenges citizens-in-waiting face in obtaining meaningful progress. These included the slow pace of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses, lack of childcare, exclusive funding criteria, and the disunion of learning and employment which forces citizens-in-waiting to choose between getting a job and going to a class.



As such, we recommended the integration of linguistic and vocational education (i.e. through 'English for Work' classes and work placements), intensive ESOL courses to be made available, and the use of APL (accreditation of prior learning) to ensure education institutions meet citizens-in-waiting where they're at, rather than starting at the bottom.

In *Employment & Enterprise* we outlined the diverse spectrum of experience and qualifications which citizens-in-waiting bring to our city which too often go unrecognised. The lack of accreditation for prior learning and experience, alongside unconscious bias in the waged sector and slow ESOL progress, forces citizens-in-waiting into self-employment. Consequently, citizens-in-waiting are more likely to be self-employed than the general population and are more likely to employ others. While this is a testament to the drive and ambition of citizens-in-waiting, the labour market would benefit from capitalising on their abundance of existing skills and experience rather than seeing them as 'blank slates'. Consequently, we recommend personalised recruitment processes, alternative processes for acquiring DBS certificates, and most importantly, the recognition of prior learning and experience through APL.

However, it is important to note that the topics of each chapter are symbiotic. Having a secure home, a good job, and opportunities to progress affect people's health and wellbeing. Equally, good health and wellbeing impact your ability to work and retain employment. Consequently, we argue that integration must be holistic and services must not operate in silos, but rather in partnership and collaboration.

Enablers to meaningful integration across the board frequently relied on the integration of services. The Welcome Hubs, which have provided a 'home away from home' to hundreds of Ukrainians, are the result of a partnership between Bristol City Council and 15 churches, facilitated by the Good Faith Partnership. Hampton Lodge, a vacant building transformed into 15 apartments for citizens-in-waiting, is the result of a partnership between ACH, FORE, Amicala, and Socius. Houria Café, where migrant women and survivors of modern slavery are trained in cookery and sell their food, is a collaboration between Eastside Community Trust and Houria. The Accelerated Cooking and Entrepreneurship course, where citizens-in-waiting can train in both catering and business simultaneously, is the result of a partnership between ACH and Co-Exist Community Kitchen. These are just some examples of the many successful partnerships which must be used as models of best practice in the sector.

Having set the foundations of this project in the lived experience voices of citizens-in-waiting, we have demonstrated the importance of listening, actively and democratically, to those who we work with. The report has also demonstrated the value of qualitative data in integration policymaking more broadly. Our next iteration will shift focus to the stakeholders in housing, wellbeing, education, and business and we are grateful to Change Makers' funding, flexibility, and time to achieve this important research. We will carry forward this report's insights to build social equity into the infrastructure of integration services. The enablers and barriers identified here will provide guidance on how to steer a course and pull the levers of change. We hope you will join us on our journey to make Bristol and the West of England a region of opportunity.



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*Celebrating Ali's House move-on day*