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# From Sanctuary to Opportunity

Change Makers State of the City Report 2023

22nd June 2023

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report here:



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report is the product of four months of qualitative research using creative ethnographic methods with refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants (or 'citizens-in-waiting' as we have referred to them). We conducted 21 interviews, 3 focus groups, a visual art workshop, participant observation, and a literature review. The primary research involved 49 participants representing 17 countries of origin. The aim of the research was to establish the enablers and barriers to integration in four key areas: Housing, Health & Wellbeing, Education & Training, and Employment & Enterprise. We then gave several recommendations for each of these fields, followed by case studies of best practice.

## Rethinking Refugee

### Why 'citizens-in-waiting'?

This year we made the editorial decision to refer to all our participants, clients, and colleagues who are refugees, asylum seekers, or other displaced migrants, as 'citizens-in-waiting'. This term is adopted from Colin Yeo's *Welcome to Britain* in which he argues that we should recognize the contribution newcomers make to society, irrespective of their legal status. We believe in this term as a statement of solidarity and inclusion which validates our participants' right to a meaningful future in the UK.

## Beyond Housing: Feeling at home in Bristol

### Barriers:


- Long waiting lists for social housing.
- Unaffordable private rental market.
- Poor quality housing.
- Policies such as the 'Right to Rent' make landlords risk averse, leading to covert discrimination.
- 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.

### Enablers:

- **Safety & Security:** 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.
- **Proximity:** To live in close proximity to the wider community is important for integration. To be included in social life.
- **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.

### Recommendations:

- Utilising 'meanwhile spaces' that can be occupied at low cost by tenants as property guardians.

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- Local Authorities to provide guarantees to landlords, as citizens-in-waiting often struggle to find guarantors or references.
  - 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.
  - 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. We must build on this dialogue.

## Health & Wellbeing

### 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.
- In many cases, the only time services are available is in an emergency.
- Waiting lists are long and patients who phone are kept on hold for hours – this causes both clients and support workers to waste time.
- Due to waiting lists for mental health support there is 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.

### Enablers:

- Friendship: 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.
- 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.
- Access to therapy or counselling.
- Interpreters and practitioners from countries of origin.

### Recommendations:

- 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.

## Education & Training

### Barriers:

- Long waiting lists for ESOL courses.
- Inflexible ESOL hours – This causes some to drop out to pursue work.
- Lack of childcare.
- Funding eligibility criteria can exclude certain demographics.

### Enablers:

- Accessibility – Evening classes, free childcare, and subsidised bus passes will ensure that anyone who wants to progress can do so.
- Signposting – 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.
- A warm welcome – Several participants noted how the friendliness of staff encouraged them to engage with training.

### Recommendations:

- The integration of linguistic and vocational education – So that learning English and securing employment are not mutually exclusive.
- 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 ESOL courses to fast-track beginners to an intermediate level.
- Impartial funding – To ensure fairness and equality of access for all citizens-in-waiting.

## Employment & Enterprise

### Barriers:

- Unrealistic eligibility criteria: Entry-level jobs usually ask for at least a level 2 grade of English, if not level 3.
- Anti-Social employment: Restricts citizens-in-waiting to the margins of social life and provide little opportunity to improve their language.
- Exploitative employment: Due to little understanding of their rights in the UK.
- Tokenistic employment: Leads to low retention rates.
- DBS: Many fail DBS checks because of a lack of address and references.
- Accessibility: No home computer or laptop, job applications can be difficult to navigate.
- Lack of recognition for prior experience or qualifications: Lost potential.



## 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.

## Recommendations:

- DBS outcomes challenged – Brunel Care have begun challenging DBS decisions, arguing hotel addresses can be accepted, and employment references to 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.
- 'Buddy' roles in workplaces – To combat discrimination and support development.
- Resilience as an asset – To prioritise the characteristic of resilience in job criteria.
- The use of APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), both certified and experiential, in all educational institutions in Bristol and the West of England.

## Conclusion

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.

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.

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.