



From Sanctuary to Opportunity

A better future for refugees in
Bristol and the West of England

A research report from ACH Bristol and RAMP for the
Change Makers Project

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The Change Makers Project

The Change Makers Project is a 5-year collaboration between ACH and RAMP, funded by Comic Relief.

The aim is to identify strategic opportunities with the wider refugee sector to influence city-level and regional strategies.

Our aim is to ensure that all refugees have the opportunity to maximise their social and economic potential through person-centric policies.

ACH

ACH is a social enterprise comprised of a diverse group of strategists and researchers led by lived experience. We provide tailored integration services that not only help individuals, but also disrupt the systems that have entrenched inequalities in our society. We have a track record of delivering effective support services that give refugees and migrants the tools they need to succeed. Our tailored and agile approach allows us to respond to unexpected global challenges by engaging with new communities and their different needs. In 2021 alone, we have helped 1000+ people to achieve their personal goals and lead fulfilling lives in their new country.

RAMP

The Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy (RAMP) Project's vision is for the UK to have a world-class migration system which helps to create a successful and integrated society, and which is fair to all. RAMP helps political leaders to think more deeply and to collaborate more widely on migration, asylum, and integration issues to improve the quality and quantity of political debate and subsequent policy outcomes.



Terminology

As in so many areas of life, there can be great debate over the relative merits of different terms and phrases – refugee, asylum seeker, sanctuary seeker etc. For the sake of simplicity, this report uses the word ‘refugee’ to mean someone who is seeking protection in the UK, or who has done so in the past. This inclusive definition allows us to avoid the petty distinctions of the current system, and to focus our efforts on creating a city and region of sanctuary and opportunity for all.

Preface

Fuad Mahamed, CEO of ACH



I am delighted to introduce the first in a series of annual reports delivered through the Changemakers programme and supported by *Comic Relief* to review and develop the existing policy environment and identify drivers for change in relation to providing more effective support for refugees.


This report is timely, as a consequence of unfolding events in the Ukraine. We are now witnessing the greatest refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war. This recent development must be seen alongside the ongoing resettlement and integration needs of refugee communities from Afghanistan and Syria, amongst others. We must ensure that ALL refugees who flee war and persecution are treated equally, consistently and with respect.

Through Changemakers we can explore identify and build on the good practice which already exists and through working in partnership with others across the social, public and private sectors. In so doing we can develop new approaches to sustainable and constructive integration and resettlement of refugees and migrants.

We believe promoting human rights and guaranteeing safety are paramount and a central plank of our commitment as City of Sanctuary. We must also ensure that basic housing needs are met and pathways to employment and enterprise development are facilitated, if we are to enable refugees and migrants to build a better future for themselves and their families here.


It is anticipated many Ukraine refugees will settle in Bristol and the west of England, as we launch this report. We strongly believe these refugees and other forced migrants can and will become active citizens who will contribute to society and our economic life swiftly and effectively only if we provide an effective and good quality support offer. We look forward to working with our dynamic refugee and migrant support sector, our committed and dedicated public and health sector professionals and the enterprising innovative employers' networks that are a hallmark of this city and region.

If we do this together, we can build on our collective commitment to be not only a City of Sanctuary but a region of opportunity and in so doing, ensure a better future for all refugees in Bristol and the west of England.



Bristol, a city of sanctuary and a city of hope

Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol



'Migrants and refugees can bring fresh ideas, resources and perspectives that contribute economically, socially, and culturally.'

The movement of people makes cities what they are - places where people come together to share and exchange. Where people make safe homes and futures. But to share in the success of the city and to foster genuine integration, we need to have confidence in our identities and promote economic, social, political and cultural inclusion.

As you deliver The Change Makers Project as part of other great work in Bristol, let us remember that attitudes to migration are not just polarised, they are highly complex. Attitudes to migrants have hardened as populations across Europe and North America have turned to populist politicians and rejected globalisation, of which migration is a central part. But in Bristol we know that with the right policies and structures in place, migrants and refugees can bring fresh ideas, resources and perspectives that contribute economically, socially, and culturally.

Three global issues – the pandemic, racial inequality, and the climate emergency – show what we have in common as human beings is far more important than our differences.

We are at the dawn of a decade when the decisions we make as a city and as society on how to address economic inequality, climate change, technological innovation, and political polarisation will shape our shared future for generations to come.

I challenge all communities, new and established, to ensure migration works for all. A Local Authority on its own cannot guarantee that someone seeking sanctuary will be able to thrive in their new community. But for Bristol we do have a corporate vision to *“play a leading role in driving a city of hope and aspiration where everyone can share in its success.”*

At both a national and global level we need to see more city-to-city cooperation. Cities and global networks of cities working together as equal partners in shaping national and international policy. We want to see global south / north cooperation at the city level. I’m encouraged by efforts now being driven by the Mayors Migration Council, a new initiative to support cities to become more influential at the global level.

I am proud to sit on the Leadership Board of the Council alongside mayors from across the globe, and together we are determined to make progress on expanding the role for cities. I hope this report sets a roadmap for the Change Makers Project and contributes to creating an inclusive city, which works for all.





Introduction

The war in Ukraine has changed the shape of the conversation about refugee protection in the UK.

While its final impact is yet to become clear, the movement of millions of people from within Europe has shocked the public imagination and forced a significant rethinking of the political systems which allow people to seek sanctuary here. After a tumultuous few years with the Syrian civil war, Brexit and the crisis in Afghanistan, alongside happening at the same time as the Nationality and Borders Bill, the current situation creates a huge degree of uncertainty about the future of refugee inclusion.

This research examines local and regional policy effects on refugees and identifies opportunities for positive change for better work and lives. Driven by the Change Makers Project - a collaborative initiative between refugee integration agency ACH and RAMP - the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy Project, it sets out views from those working in the sector.

Next Steps

Following the delivery of this report, the next steps will be to explore and debate the findings with partners to co-create the Change Makers Action Plan for 2022. We will partner with:

- People with lived experience, including refugees, community leaders, settled refugees and businesses.
- The wider refugee sector in Bristol, including Bristol City of Sanctuary and Inclusive Cities stakeholders.
- Employers and the private sector. We will explore opportunities to align refugee talent and potential with employer needs, within the limits of the five year Change Makers project, 2021-2026.

The report will be launched to a wide range of stakeholders in March 2022. After this, annual reports will be created through the lifetime of the Change Makers project, allowing us to assess our progress and to adjust our aims as the context changes.

The local context for refugees

Bristol became an official City of Sanctuary in 2010, joining a movement of around 120 cities and areas across the UK who are committed to this mission.

Bristol City Council is a key player in the founding and growing of Bristol's City of Sanctuary work:

'We support local organisations and individuals in Bristol and its surrounding areas to uphold Bristol's long standing tradition of welcoming and providing safety for all, including people seeking sanctuary fleeing from war, violence and persecution' (Bristol City of Sanctuary, 2022)

Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Strategy

In Bristol, there are many people and organisations working together and individually to do what they can for refugees and to influence and collaborate with policymakers and government bodies on a local level. Bristol City Council's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Inclusion Strategy 2019 and Progress Update 2020 identify five key areas to support Refugees and Asylum Seekers:

- Meeting Basic Needs
- Promoting Economic Inclusion
- Promoting Social Integration
- Building Bristol as a Safe Haven
- Influencing the System



Bristol City Council's Refugee Resettlement Team

The Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme 2016 to 2021 resettled 20,000 people in the UK, 328 of whom were resettled in Bristol. The Resettlement of Vulnerable Children Scheme 2017 to 2021 resettled 3,000 people in the UK, 106 of whom were resettled in Bristol.

From 2021, the new Home Office UK Resettlement Scheme was launched and 75 people have been resettled in Bristol. Following the Afghan crisis in summer 2021, 303 Afghan refugees have been supported in temporary accommodation in Bristol and 105 people have been resettled into homes.

Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP)

Bristol is home to the Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP), a collaboration of 16 refugee and asylum seeker support services located in Bristol and the immediate surrounding area. It was founded in 2019 and came into its own in 2020 during COVID-19, helping and supporting some of the most vulnerable people in the city.

The organisations making up the BRASP Partnership are: ACH, Aid Box Community, Borderlands, Bridges for Communities, Bristol City of Sanctuary, Bristol Hospitality Network, Bristol Refugee Festival, Bristol Refugee Rights, British Red Cross, Bristol Signing Support, Project Mama, Refugee Council, Refugee Women of Bristol, Southern Brooks, The Haven, Trauma Foundation South West.

Housing, homelessness and poverty

Refugee Action describes a UK wide housing crisis, of supply, demand and quality, all of which can directly affect refugees.

"I've worked in this area of work for nearly 20 years. And I've never seen it as bad in terms of the housing and the accommodation that people are experiencing. Our partners across the sector are also reporting very similar things. We are very, very worried that there is going to be some catastrophic incident at some point, somewhere in the country."

(Tim Naor Hilton, Chief Executive of Refugee Action, 2022).

As several of our interviewees pointed out, refugees live in a wider context of individual and systemic racism, with localised and national problems that vary from city to city, all of which contributes to the massive challenges people may face (on arrival in the UK).

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and Poverty

The No Recourse to Public Funds Partnership Working in Bristol's Key Findings document (2021) highlights some of the ways in which No Recourse to Public Funds drives people into poverty and homelessness.

With the 'Everyone in' policy of Spring 2020, 400 people who were previously rough sleeping were accommodated, including more than 75 people with NRPF. It also describes how in ordinary times refugees or people with No Recourse to Public Funds can face challenges and systemic issues when trying to engage with statutory homelessness services, which aren't designed with them in mind.

Housing shortages

Refugee Welcome Homes in Bristol describe the challenges and barriers many refugees face:

"The majority of people who have had their asylum claims accepted and subsequently are given refugee status struggle to find accommodation after they leave their Home Office accommodation. Covid-19 has exacerbated this situation, closing down or reducing capacity in many of the night shelters, leading to street homelessness among refugees. Refugees struggle to find private rented accommodation as they face multiple barriers"

Some of the barriers also include:

- New refugees do not have the required landlord's reference, having not been allowed to rent as an asylum seeker.
- Having not been allowed to work as an asylum seeker, new refugees do not have the required employer's reference nor the money saved for the necessary deposit and the payment of rent in advance.
- New refugees often have not yet established community or family networks in order to provide themselves with a guarantor for rent. A guarantor needs to earn a sufficient amount of money to be considered and this can prevent people from finding a suitable guarantor.
- New refugees can lack knowledge of their housing rights and of confidence in navigating the complexities of the private rental market, housing system and UK benefits. Landlords are not always aware of refugee tenants' status and assume they cannot rent to them or the stigma attached to refugees who are sometimes incorrectly considered as 'illegal immigrants'.
- Most landlords are unwilling to accept tenants receiving housing benefits.
- Refugees can initially struggle to find employment in sectors outside of low-paid, zero-hours contracts in the gig economy; this financial instability prevents them from being able to rent privately.
- Language barriers can make it difficult for refugees to understand potential landlords and to make themselves understood by potential landlords.

The Housing opportunity

With all the individual and systemic challenges that may affect a refugee, there are some positive opportunities, with people and organisations, like Refugee Welcome Homes, and many others, working hard, though often with limited resources.

The 'Everyone in' policy

The ACH Housing Team has recently been working together with the wider refugee sector to provide move-on accommodation for refugees moving on from the emergency, everyone-in housing during COVID-19. This also included working closely with Home Office emergency accommodation and with Clearspring's Ready Homes provider:

"With COVID-19 the UK government introduced a unique policy to give everyone a bed every night, to support those who were homeless, including people with no recourse to public funds. This included dedicated bed spaces, including women only provision, with wraparound support. It would be good to see a more longer-term approach like this employed."





Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing sat alongside housing as the top priority for our research participants.

In Bristol, Black South West Network-led research “The Future Of The Bristol Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector Beyond Covid-19” (2021) reported mental health, digital exclusion and financial insecurity as the top three things their research participants were worried about, including both the mental health of individuals in global majority communities, and of global majority staff in community, social enterprise and frontline organisations.

The health and wellbeing problem, including mental health and safety

Refugees in particular have multiple extra levels of vulnerability due to their status, or lack of status (if still seeking asylum). Their basic needs such as housing, food, health and safety, and financial security are then at risk, putting individuals and families, including children separated from their families, at severe risk, in an emergency or crisis situation. They may have pre-existing health needs on top of the trauma from what they are fleeing, trauma from their journey/s, and the trauma/stress of arriving in a foreign country without language or means to access support.

Our Focus Group listed the following health and wellbeing challenges:

Existing trauma from experiences and journeys are often not addressed.

Not feeling safe enough to deal with trauma.

The asylum system can perpetuate trauma.

Long waiting lists, language barriers due to lack of translation services can take a toll on people's health.

One size fits all approaches to mental health and health care.

Language around mental health often has specific (very unfamiliar) vocabulary.

Lack of understanding of (individual/refugee) needs and language barriers leading to misdiagnosis.

An overwhelmed system and team at The Haven (Bristol health and mental health provider for refugees and asylum seekers).

Numbers of people in temporary accommodation in hotels for long periods of time.

Isolation, being placed in poor accommodation or if their claim is refused people can become destitute and homeless.

Mental Health

A research interviewee in the legal sector who works with refugees and asylum seekers noted:

“A lot of clients I see have quite severe mental health problems, and those things can be exacerbated by the fact that people can’t work or choose where they live, or improve their standard of living.”

Isolation and loneliness

Isolation and loneliness can be acute, particularly when refugees first arrive in the UK e.g. refugees can be housed in hotels, sometimes for several months, without money, food or contact.

Even when a support agency tries to connect with and support those people (in the hotels and temporary accommodation), language and cultural barriers can get in the way. For example, when people arrived from Afghanistan in Bristol during 2021, women often stayed in their rooms, whilst the men came down to talk. ACH therefore tried an alternative, creative approach to engaging with the women in a more social setting, forming women only groups, and organising female support workers and presentations.





The health and wellbeing opportunity

There are many organisations in the UK working hard, often through volunteer efforts, to support refugees. ACH has a goal of helping refugees as early as possible with multiple barriers, to prevent them ending up with worse life, work, and health prospects than they arrived with.

The role of interpreters and translators, and education of frontline staff in public services was highlighted by some research participants as an area of opportunity - to avoid potential confusion, miscommunication, and misdiagnosis, whether the result of language or cultural barriers or both.

Our focus group highlighted how wellbeing could be seen as different to 'health' and has a massive impact on the ability to function and navigate day to day. Mental health and wellbeing is crucial to integration and navigating the daily challenges of navigating a new environment. In Bristol there are organisations like Bridges for Communities who facilitate wellbeing activities like befriending and walking groups.

There is also more specific public health support for refugees mentioned by several research participants. The Haven in Bristol are specialists in health care and trauma support, they are an incredible organisation with people going way above and beyond.

They need more support and funding. In a wider national context of a public mental health system struggling in terms of funding and effectiveness even before the global pandemic of COVID-19, funding existing health and wellbeing for refugees, especially those most vulnerable, with multiple, complex health and mental health needs can be a vital route for surviving and living in Bristol.

Education and Skills

The education and skills challenge - barriers for refugees


Refugee learners of all ages face multiple language and cultural challenges, on top of their own individual potentially traumatic experiences, both current and past, and any pre-existing health or other challenges.

ESOL provision

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is currently run by national government and local/combined authorities. Sometimes the provision can be limited. For example, as soon as someone gets a job, even if it is a low-paid or entry level job, their free ESOL support can disappear, which can hamper further progress due to financial and time challenges, making it unaffordable and inaccessible.

Sophia White's Master's Thesis (2021) *"An investigation into the value of informal and experiential learning with Syrian refugees in the ESOL context"* outlines some of these multiple complexities and limitations of the current ESOL provision, as well as proposing alternatives and improvements. These include:

- Formal vs. informal learning opportunities - sometimes the curriculum and timetable of ESOL classes can be quite rigid, and focused on things like citizenship. Attendance is required regularly on fixed days each week. The research found that informal learning opportunities which happened around other social and practical activities like gardening or cooking, could provide valuable language practice, in a less pressured setting, which greatly helped people who were already facing trauma.
- Inflexible timetabling was an issue for some, e.g. classes clashing with immigration interviews. More flexible delivery and access could help with this.
- Once someone is in work they no longer qualify for free ESOL and may not be permitted (by employer) to continue attending their ESOL classes, which can mean any English language development drops off. In addition they may then have to pay, and not be able to afford the fee.
- Funding for ESOL has varied with a 60% drop 2010-2016, "already struggling ...



providers have seen their capacity cut and vital courses slashed” (Gordon Marsden, 2018 via Sophia White’s Thesis). ESOL offerings are not consistent across the UK.

- In terms of policy and funding there is not currently consistent monitoring of any aspect of ESOL, nationally or locally, which means its impact (or lack of) is not fully known.
- *“There seems to be little recognition that these learners may suffer from trauma, violence and chronic stress”* (Sophia White, 2021). The thesis suggests a benefit of training more ESOL tutors in teaching people with trauma.

Digital literacy, digital skills, equipment and digital exclusion

The ‘digital divide’ is the disparity between those who have access to digital technologies (internet, Wifi, laptops, mobile phones) and those who have limited access. This divide existed before the pandemic, but has been exacerbated by COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 and the closure of community facilities, e.g. libraries.

The Future Quest Project *‘is focused on providing the skills essential to helping 13-18 year olds across Bristol into Higher Education’* (Future Quest, 2022). Working with Ablaze (charity) at secondary level, they provided a mentor programme for disadvantaged students. Their research found that some students (e.g. in full-time education, teenagers) had no or limited access to digital equipment and internet, and no or limited space in which to do homework and revise, other times due to several family members living together, as well as other individual factors which can limit their learning.

There are lots of charities, groups and CICs who were already working to support young people (and families) with digital skills and address the digital divide before the pandemic, who then stepped up during the lockdowns. In the ‘We Cannot Walk Alone’ event by Furaha Asani (June 28th, 2021) they mentioned how this kind of knowledge and access (or lack of access) to it can affect precarious migrants. *“Isn’t that part of the hostile environment? The fact that this information is readily available...and some people don’t have the privilege of knowing how and where to access this information.”*



Employment, Employability and Enterprise

When it comes to refugee employment, our survey respondents (those working with refugees) said they were most worried about:

- Limited work options.
- The Right to Work and the delay to get it (12 months or more).
- The type of work and the limits of being stuck in low-paid or zero hours contracts.
- No specific legislation determining that an employer has to allow a refugee person to attend ESOL classes, as well as little or no provision for digital skills classes taught by native speakers. Refugees often drop out of their ESOL lessons before they are finished in order to enter employment. This leaves them open to being manipulated and abused (i.e. Modern Slavery) or become stuck in poorly paid jobs.
- Pathways for training and employment.

Refugees stuck in low paid employment

Refugees (and migrants) are over-represented in the hospitality sector, which has been hit hard by the pandemic. Migrants are also more likely to be on non-permanent contracts (Office for National Statistics, 2021c). People with temporary contracts or less secure work arrangements have been more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic.

Barriers to employment

Barriers highlighted by our research participants include:

- Non-inclusive job adverts
- Lack of flexibility of employers re language, skills, and qualifications requirements
- Digital access, literacy, equipment



And all of this currently sits with the added challenges of:

- COVID-19 - The pandemic and its associated extreme health, business, and life challenges, including severe illness and higher rates of death amongst global majority people.
- Systemic and Individual Racism - the systemic racism and inclusion and diversity challenges global majority people face, e.g. daily microaggressions, as well as lack of promotion.
- Technology championed as a major sector of growth both in skills needs and shortages, and in business possibilities. However, the access to and progress in technology and related roles remain dominated by a white, male majority.

The Employment and Employability opportunity | A good job, not any job

Our research highlighted the change making potential of finding not just any job, but a good job. The default and definition of 'integration' in the UK government's eyes seems to be simply finding a job, which is potentially limiting for refugees, who generally get stuck in a low-paid or entry level jobs.

Respondents would like the Change Makers project to focus on:

- Creating employment pathways linking refugees to rewarding careers.
- The right to training and work.
- Right to Work will help integrate with local community.
- Help with employability preparation while they are still asylum seekers.
- More opportunities for training and more pathways for using existing skills.
- Support those with lived experience to develop their own networks and organisations.

Training for 'forcibly displaced tech talent'

IT - Paz.ai is a unique platform targeting "*forcibly displaced tech talent*" to "*train professionals looking to adapt their knowledge and experience to the needs of the global tech industry*" (IT-Paz, 2022). They look for highly talented people, who happen to be refugees, and connect them with training (on the platform) and employers. (<https://www.paz.ai/>)



Stepping Up and Horumar - Leadership and management programmes

Bristol also has the Stepping Up programme *"an award-winning program for excellence in diversity and mentoring"*, which helps candidates progress through higher and next levels in their leadership careers. And Horumar, *"A leadership programme designed by and for Somali women in Bristol."* Horumar, which means "going forward", was set up after a council BAME course failed to attract people from one of the city's largest ethnic groups. Founder Zahra Kosar said the main aim was to *"increase women's confidence and career opportunities".*

The enterprise and self-employment opportunity

Supporting newly arrived people from Afghanistan - Bristol, 2021-2022

Reaching people as early as possible is important to help them then navigate their employment journey and the many challenges they face in getting set up logistically in a foreign country, with limited or no language and financial means.

Working with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) team in Bristol, ACH have prepared and are delivering a comprehensive package of employment support for people from Afghanistan who were evacuated last year. These sessions included information on how to gain employment through: understanding the UK labour market and the job search, application and selection process, information on self employment and entrepreneurship. The programme has offered a self-employment programme for Afghan women. The women ACH has worked with are excited that they can develop businesses working from home, and the programme gives them the resources they need. These women have informed their friends, and as a result a programme for a new cohort of Afghan women will begin shortly.

In Bristol, the enterprise space is exciting, and rapidly changing. As well as the more traditional institution-supported spaces (Engine Shed, Future Space, Natwest Accelerator), it is now seeing new enterprise and incubation support services and spaces e.g. ACH's Migrant Business Support (MBS) programme for entrepreneurs from a migrant background to looking to create or advance their businesses. MBS aims to support 500 people over two years, working in partnership with the West of England Combined Authority and the University of Bristol. The Black South West Network incubator and business support space coming in 2022 to the Coach House, will provide more specific support and investment that global majority founders may need and not find in the existing traditional models.

Change the narrative

#RethinkingRefugee

The problem with the narrative - stereotypes, stories and biases


Words themselves have meanings attached to them, including through stereotypes and attention given by the media. For example, the words 'integration' and 'refugee' in the UK may well conjure up stereotypes of people fleeing across the channel on dinghies, and perpetuate a humanitarianism and saviourism view, the possibility and hope, alongside the trauma of channel crossings and death.

Care for Calais highlight one of the key negative narratives that is so unhelpful:

"Refugees are absolutely not illegal immigrants. They don't want to enter our country illegally – the problem is that they have no choice. If you come from a country that is at war or under oppression it's unlikely that country will issue you with a passport or visa, so you have no legal way to travel."

(Care for Calais, 2022)





Our research participants highlighted the following challenges related to changing the narrative:

- Stop seeing people as a threat, see them as an asset, as individuals with their own stories, own futures and own dreams.
- The rhetoric from politicians and some parts of the media is not helpful, and it creates hostility and a hostile environment.
- These young people are going to be the solicitors, doctors of tomorrow. What does it mean for them to see those images? We need to ensure that we try to build that culture of welcome, and accept that we are different.
- Don't waste time debating border control. It makes integration for those already here very difficult. If refugees see those images, on top of the trauma and pain they have already gone through, it can be huge. They need healing, a safe space, not a humanitarian response (alone).
- Another voice not heard often is the British people (majority) who are compassionate and kind.

The #rethinkingrefugee opportunity - Change the narrative

ACH created the #rethinkingrefugee campaign in 2015 to campaign for positive change in storytelling and narratives. This work is ongoing as they seek to work with others to change a broken system and focus on refugees as individuals, with their own talents, aspirations and skills.

Research participants' suggestions and hopes for changing the narrative included:

- A message of welcome from the city to all newcomers.
- The contributions of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds being celebrated.
- Understanding and defining what sanctuary means to those welcoming new arrivals and those seeking sanctuary so that initiatives can be co-created.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted a wide range of issues and opportunities in regards to refugee inclusion in Bristol and the West of England.

Tackling these issues, and seizing these opportunities, will require the efforts of many people and organisations working in partnership wherever possible. For the Change Makers project, our task is to identify where our particular and focused efforts can be used to generate the maximum possible strategic benefit and systemic change. As a result, we have drawn out the following three key themes from this research which will guide the work of the project over the coming year.



1

Building regional capacity

The Change Makers project will focus a significant proportion of its efforts in building collaboration at the regional level, exploring what could be required to move from a 'City of Sanctuary' to a 'Region of Sanctuary'. This will involve:

- Partnership work with the West of England Combined Authority, sharing expertise and insight on how the powers of Combined Authorities can be used to support refugee inclusion.
- Relationship building with the new NHS Integrated Care System, exploring opportunities to increase capacity within areas of healthcare that are crucial for refugees but are currently experiencing chronic shortages or waiting times.
- Making connections between voluntary sector organisations across the region, sharing intelligence and resources so that support can be as accessible as possible.

2

Pathways to meaningful employment

This research has highlighted the importance of employment as a key focus of efforts on refugee inclusion. This includes efforts to remove barriers to work for asylum seekers and refugees, whether they are legal, practical or cultural in nature. But at a time of significant labour market and skills shortages, we must increase our ambition beyond helping refugees to get 'any job', and look instead to create pathways to meaningful work. Using a 'pathways' approach can be helpful in focusing our efforts not just on one or two individual interventions or projects but rather on systemic change which can impact people's ability to progress in work over the long term.

3

Closing the Two-Tier Gap

The Nationality and Borders Bill represents a deliberate attempt to further extend the gap between the quality and quantity of support for refugees who arrive in the UK via a resettlement programme and those who claim asylum after arrival. This research has found widespread opposition in Bristol and the region to this 'two-tier' system, and to its extension through the Bill. This does not of course mean that we should seek to avoid engaging in the systems of support for resettled refugees. Instead the region should organise itself to maximise the opportunity that the resources now coming through national Government to support resettlement can also then flow over into wider benefits for all refugees.

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Appendix 1:

Research Approach and References

Methodology

In November 2021-December 2021 ACH conducted a series of short, sharp research. This included using the following formats

- One-to-ones
- Focus Group
- Desk Research
- Survey

Research Context

This research and report was conducted in November 2021-January 2022, within the ongoing COVID-19 uncertainty and challenges it causes for both human, health and survival, as well as business and organisational challenges.

Questions

- Please describe your current experience working with refugees,
- What is working well? (In Bristol/ your city/ place of work)
- What are you worried about?
- What are you hopeful about?
- How do we end the cycle of poverty for refugees and migrants in Bristol?
- What needs to change?
- What issues?
- What opportunities are we missing as a city?
- (Anything you've not mentioned already about) What should Bristol be proud of?
- Any initiatives/ stories/ you'd like to highlight?
- What would Bristol as a City of Sanctuary look like if you were in charge?
- If you had a magic wand what would you do?



Reflections

- Looking at ending cycle of poverty and low paid employment for refugees, what are the top 3 things we need to work on?
- Barriers that need to be addressed?
- Could you tell me about a person or programme/ that inspires you? Most innovative approach you've seen here or elsewhere?
- In summary, thinking about the question - how can we end the cycle of poverty and employment - for refugees - self-sufficient lives/ meaningful work and ambitious lives - the biggest problem to solve?
- Or the most important thing you want highlighted in this State of the City Report, for ACH Changemaker project to work on?
- Best thing Bristol as a city/ we can do to solve that?

Appendix 2:

Definitions

Refugees

The definition of a refugee according to The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is:

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that an individual who has applied for asylum meets the definition in the Refugee Convention. At this point they will ‘recognise’ that person as a refugee and issue them with refugee status documentation. Usually refugees in the UK are given five years’ leave to remain as a refugee. They must then must apply for further leave, although their status as a refugee is not limited to five years. For the purposes of this strategy, the definition of ‘refugee’ also covers those who have received refugee status in a country other than the UK and subsequently moved to Bristol.

Asylum Seeker

A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in the UK but whose application has not yet been concluded.

Refused Asylum Seeker

A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision.”

Note: This is an extract taken directly from the Appendix - Definitions in the Bristol Refugee Inclusion Strategy 2019

