



# Agenda for Integration

The Refugee Council

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## Foreword

As signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, we have a duty to ensure that those to whom we grant protection are able to attain a decent quality of life and are able to reach their full potential. However, refugees and asylum seekers make up some of the most marginalised and excluded groups within society. This is a situation that both refugees and society can ill afford.

Refugees and their community organisations have for years been articulating the barriers to real inclusion and integration. These are also well documented within a growing body of research. However, a policy commitment to refugee integration has come relatively recently with the publication of the Government's strategy *Full and Equal Citizens* in November 2000. This change is welcome as is the Government's commitment to work with the voluntary sector to take this important work forward. A significant challenge lies ahead to ensure that the national and regional strategies are successfully implemented to ensure that this work makes a real difference to the lives of refugees and the communities in which they live.

Integration is a term that can evoke different associations, but actually is a two-way process, which places demands on both on the receiving society and on the refugee. As such, integration is not assimilation. For the refugee, it requires a willingness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose his or her own cultural identity. In return, the host society should be prepared to accept refugees as equals and work to ensure they have the same access to resources and decision-making processes as the national population.

In a situation where it can take months, if not years, for an asylum application to be fully resolved, integration measures should not be deferred until asylum or leave to remain has been granted. To do so, could reinforce exclusion, for example by leaving refugee professionals de-skilled and demoralised by the time they have permission to work. This will only make the process of integration more difficult for them to achieve. We need to accept that although in some ways asylum seekers will justifiably be treated differently from refugees because of their status, a substantial number of them will be allowed to remain. The fact that some will not succeed does not mean that all should be treated as if they will not succeed.

Finally, in order to succeed, refugee integration must engage national, regional and local agencies and will require public, voluntary and community sector bodies to work together strategically. Rightly, the National Refugee Integration Forum has begun to adopt this approach. As lead agencies, the Home Office and the regional consortia need to continue to facilitate this way of working and ensure that it becomes embedded within delivery and monitoring frameworks.

# 1. Terminology and principles

## What is refugee integration?

The term integration can be an emotive term, fundamentally, it is, a two-way process which places demands on both the receiving society and on the refugee. As such, integration is not assimilation. The host society should be prepared to accept refugees as equals and take action to facilitate access to resources and decision-making processes in parity with the national population. On the part of the refugees, there should be a willingness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without requiring a loss of their own cultural identity.

We consider integration to be a long-term process starting from the time of arrival and often extending and concluded when the refugee becomes an active member of society from a legal, economic, social and cultural perspective. The length of this process will vary and for some refugees may extend beyond the first generation.

Integration is multi-faceted and should seek to create conditions for participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of asylum. It should also bestow a sense of belonging and membership in the host society.

The following principles are fundamental to integration<sup>1</sup>:

- **An inclusive and welcoming society is key for successful integration of refugees.** Political leaders should set the tone in public debate, and in particular work to counteract misinformation intended to create fear and mistrust of refugees.
- **The integration process must begin at the point of arrival.** It cannot be deferred until leave to remain is granted, the asylum process can itself take many months if not years.
- **Refugee integration measures should include asylum seekers** as well as refugees.
- **Responsibility for funding and co-ordinating refugee integration lies with national, regional and local government and related agencies.** The voluntary and refugee community sectors also have a significant role to play.
- **Ultimately, services to refugees should be delivered through mainstream frameworks.** But in some cases specialist provision may be

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<sup>1</sup> These principles are based on European Council on Refugees and Exiles' (ECRE) *Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe* (September 1999).

required. For example, health services for refugees as victims of torture and trauma may be delivered most appropriately as a specialist provision. In other cases specialist provision may be necessary to act as a bridge to the mainstream service.

- **Refugees must be fully involved in developing and delivering integration strategies.** The voluntary sector can help facilitate this by providing opportunities for refugee communities and organisations to represent their interests to service providers and decision-makers.
- **Refugees are a diverse group.** For example, our experience shows that unaccompanied refugee children, and those with other special or distinct needs are likely to require specific attention in policy development, service design and delivery.
- **Refugee integration requires co-ordination.** The elements of integration set out in this agenda are interrelated. For example, without secure and sustainable accommodation, labour market access can be impeded and vice versa. Such inter-dependence requires joined up policy and delivery and co-ordination across central and local government, and other sectors.

## 2. Current policy context

Refugee integration has risen up the policy agenda. Strategies have been developed by the Home Office and the regional consortia.

The Scottish Executive has an integration strategy and action plan, and the Refugee Integration Forum in Wales is in an embryonic stage. In addition, refugee integration now constitutes a major strand in the Home Office research programme, which includes a project to develop indicators to enable integration to be measured and therefore establish what works in helping refugees to integrate. Home Office and European funding streams are supporting a range of integration projects across the UK and some good practice is beginning to emerge.

## 3. The *Agenda for Integration*

### 3.1 Its purpose

The fundamental purpose of this document is set out what we consider to be the main priorities for a holistic approach to refugee integration - an approach that will have refugees at its heart and is underpinned by principles set out earlier in this document. It is also based on the Refugee Council's extensive experience of working with policy makers, practitioners and of course refugee communities. As such we hope this document will complement strategies developed by the Home Office and regional consortia but challenge all to be even more ambitious.

A great deal of work is already underway on projects and initiatives designed to promote refugee integration. We hope the *Agenda for Integration* will inform this and future practice. We also hope this document will assist others including those identified as key agencies, to develop the necessary frameworks to respond to the challenges of refugee integration.

### 3.2 Education

Education is vital and is the route to self-sufficiency and a new life. Forced by persecution to leave their own countries, refugee children often arrive in the UK traumatised or disorientated. For refugee children, integration should promote equality in education, enabling them to achieve at the same level, as a non-refugee child of similar ability would do. The inclusion of refugee children within mainstream schools is important for integration, bringing refugee and resident together in the school environment is an excellent opportunity to increase understanding and respect for each other.

### Recommendations

- The Department of Education and Skills should revise and increase the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, so that it incorporates a ring-fenced element targeted specifically at refugee and asylum seeking pupils. This should include funding for English language support for those with some fluency, home language teaching for particular underachieving groups, and a contingency element to meet the needs of large groups of arrivals within a particular local education authority (LEA).
- Access to education is a problem for many asylum seekers and refugees. To facilitate a quick and seamless entry into the system for children, LEAs and further education (FE) colleges should appoint a named contact, who has specific responsibility for co-ordinating admissions. NASS, as the dispersal body, should give LEA's notification of arriving families. In addition, admission

procedures should incorporate 'contingency places' for all families who live in temporary accommodation.

- LEAs should take a lead by having a written policy on refugee children that is informed by good practice guidance and the statutory duties and guidance of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. They should also employ dedicated refugee support teachers.
- The Government is concerned about ethnic minority achievement. Furthermore, the Race Relations Amendment Act places a duty upon LEAs and schools to monitor achievement. To inform and accelerate The Government's aims and fulfil the legal requirements, the Department of Education and Skills should develop ethnic monitoring criteria that will distinguish between refugee groups and make possible the tracking of issues of inequality, evaluate the success of programmes such as Sure Start and Connexions in relation to the needs of refugee pupils, and commission research on the educational achievement of refugee pupils.
- LEAs and regional consortia should facilitate and participate in regional refugee education practice networks which should incorporate, amongst others, representatives from schools, local councils, local health authorities, race units and most importantly, refugee community schools and organisations.
- Training and continuing professional development of teaching professionals and support staff should include raising awareness of the needs of refugee children and how to integrate them successfully into mainstream provision.

#### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **NASS**
- ⇒ **DfES**
- ⇒ **Commission for Racial Equality**
- ⇒ **Regional consortia**
- ⇒ **Local education authorities**
- ⇒ **TTA**

### **3.3 Employment**

Sustainable employment is arguably the key to integration of refugees in the UK. Access to the UK labour market, however, is a big challenge faced by almost all refugee jobseekers. Barriers to employment, include language, non-recognition of overseas qualifications, lack of familiarity with the UK job-search culture, employer attitudes and racism. As a result, the unemployment rate among refugees is unacceptably high. Recent research shows the rate to be between 36 to 90 per cent. This is by far above the national average for any disadvantaged

group in the UK. Once in work, refugees are more likely to experience poor conditions than other groups.

## **Recommendations**

- Individuals should be allowed to work whilst waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. Permission to work should be granted to dependants as well as the principal applicant.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should set up a national refugee employment working group to develop, implement, monitor and review a strategy for further education, training and employment of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.
- Jobcentre Plus should:
  - consider measures to increase the involvement of the refugee voluntary agencies and refugee community organisations in government initiatives aimed at promoting employability;
  - establish a system to make available authoritative refugee unemployment and employment figures in the UK;
  - support refugees into work through personal development plans for refugees who wish to improve their employability to access the labour market;
  - and ensure personal advisers are well trained to deliver a high quality service to refugee clients.
- The regional development agencies (RDAs) should ensure their FRESAs support the learning, skills and employment needs of refugees.
- The voluntary sector and trade unions should disseminate information to employers and refugee communities about rights of refugees in employment.
- The DWP should commission research to identify the barriers faced by refugees seeking self-employment.

## **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **DWP**
- ⇒ **Jobcentre Plus**
- ⇒ **Regional development agencies**

### **3.4 Post-16 education and training**

Participation of refugees and asylum seekers in post-16 education and training is hampered by a multiplicity of barriers. Refugees and asylum seekers are at risk of social exclusion and action is needed to help them to overcome it.

#### **Recommendations**

- The Learning and Skills Council should widen access to quality ESOL learning programmes for asylum seekers and refugees by
  - producing a directory of ESOL learning programmes and publicise it to increase demand for and ensure access to available learning opportunities;
  - co-ordinating provision of ESOL to refugees and ensure providers work in partnership to improve availability and take up of ESOL learning opportunities at all levels;
  - funding community-based ESOL provision for refugees especially in deprived areas.
- The National Learning and Skills Council (NLSC) should ensure that its strategies on equality, diversity and widening participation address the learning needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- The NLSC should review the eligibility criteria for learner support funds to ensure they do not discriminate against asylum seekers and people with humanitarian protection status or exceptional leave to remain (ELR).
- The criteria for asylum seekers to access vocational programmes such as modern apprenticeships, should be relaxed so that they can retrain in preparation for work in the UK.
- FE providers should review their widening participation strategies so the learning needs of refugees and asylum seekers are met.
- Higher Education (HE) institutions should develop strategies to improve access, retention, achievement and progression of refugees and asylum seekers. Requirements to pay overseas student fees should be reviewed.
- Information, advice and guidance services for adults should ensure their services respond to and meet the specific education, training and employment needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Connexions partnerships should work in partnership with refugee agencies to support the education, training and employment needs of 13-19 year old

asylum seekers and refugees. The specific difficulties faced by unaccompanied refugee children should also be addressed.

- Jobcentre Plus should improve the accessibility of vocational training programmes for refugees, their retention, achievement and progression to the labour market by:
  - promoting the training programmes to and motivating refugee jobseekers through outreach work in refugee communities;
  - auditing refugee-specific projects, services and job creation schemes to ensure their availability and assure their quality;
  - involving employers in the design and delivery of these vocational training programmes.
  - Funding projects to support refugees to start and sustain their own businesses.

#### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Jobcentre Plus**
- ⇒ **National and regional learning and skills councils**
- ⇒ **Connexions partnerships**
- ⇒ **Information, advice and guidance service providers**
- ⇒ **Universities**

### **3.5 Volunteering and mentoring**

Volunteering is recognised as a route into employment, and an opportunity for refugees to gain UK employment experience, acquire or develop skills and obtain UK references. For asylum seekers, without permission to work, volunteering can provide them with a purposeful activity, give them an opportunity to contribute to their new communities, maintain their self-esteem and motivation as well as gaining experience, knowledge and skills.

Mentoring is key to helping refugees and asylum seekers to make the transition to employment. Mentoring schemes can help refugee professionals to learn from UK professionals, gain essential knowledge, skills and work experience, and adapt to the UK working environment.

#### **Recommendations**

- The Home Office, regional consortia, and the voluntary sector should promote volunteering for asylum seekers by:

- providing funding for projects to encourage volunteering for asylum seekers;
  - funding a campaign to encourage asylum seekers to volunteer and support local organisations and communities;
  - encourage organisations providing volunteering opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to share good practice;
  - establish a system for calculating the financial impact of asylum-seeking volunteers on local businesses and communities;
  - publicise the contribution of refugee and asylum-seeking volunteers during the annual National Volunteering Day.
- Job Centre Plus should ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are able to access mentoring schemes suitable to their employment aspirations.

**Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **Jobcentre Plus**
- ⇒ **Regional consortia**
- ⇒ **Voluntary sector**

**3.6 Housing**

Secure, safe and sustainable accommodation is fundamental for refugee integration, so much else will depend on this, including the ability to take up employment and education opportunities.

Integration must be addressed within the context of dispersal to ensure that the aims of the two policies do not undermine each other. Transition from the asylum process to life as a refugee is a key stage for integration. During this time, refugees face complex emotions following receipt of a positive decision and, at the same time, are moving on from the NASS support to secure their own accommodation and support. The notice period remains inadequate and continues to be a barrier, particularly as the actual period of notification is rarely a full 28 days.

**Recommendations**

- The dispersal process should support integration through the following measures:
  - NASS allocations should take greater account of the particular needs and circumstances of individual households.

- The NASS accommodation portfolio post 2005 should encompass greater involvement by social and specialist housing providers in order to deliver housing that can meet the needs of diverse nationalities, cultures, households and special needs (including older people, women and disabled people).
- Approximately two thirds of asylum seekers being supported by NASS are actually living with friends, relatives or other contacts in the community. Research is needed to know more about the conditions in which people are living.
- There is a specific need for improved co-ordination and support around transition through the following measures:
  - The Home Office should produce a new 'Welcome to Britain' leaflet in refugee languages. This should include information on housing, as well as essential services, such as jobsearch and benefits claims, and should be sent out along with the letter granting refugee status.
  - NASS should implement the recommendations of pilot projects in Leicester and Derby to explore giving refugee families the option of their NASS home as their permanent home. NASS and the regional consortia should consider rolling out these pilots to other refugee households.
  - A national insurance number should be allocated at the same time as leave to remain. The pilot being operated in Liverpool should be rolled out nationally.
- The Housing Corporation, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit should take into account the special needs of cluster areas in their capital investment plans. Some cluster areas already have a growing shortage of affordable housing, while in most parts of the country funds will be needed, for example for large family housing or adapted housing
- Regional Consortia should contribute to the production of Homelessness Strategies (Homelessness Act 2002) raising the needs of refugees. The planned *Code of Guidance on Homelessness and Allocations* must highlight refugee housing issues and guide local authorities. The ODPM should take responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and, if need be, enforcing the targets.
- The housing needs of refugees should be pursued within the OPDM action plan 'addressing the housing needs of Black and Minority Ethnic People' (September 2001) at a local level. It is vital for all local authorities, and not just the cluster areas, to address the issues the action plan highlights.

Regional consortia should make sure their local housing authorities know about the action plan.

- Regional housing boards should ensure that regional housing strategies reflect the needs of refugees within their areas.
- The ODPM should fund innovative ways of increasing housing supply for refugees, for example refugee hosting schemes, registered social landlords (RSL) leasing schemes, and rent-guarantee schemes.
- Local authority allocation policies and housing supply strategies should take into account the importance of safe, secure accommodation and integrated informed and prepared communities.
- Some refugees will need more long-term tenancy support. Vulnerable tenants should be recognised for Supporting People (SP) funds. The ODPM should map refugee needs and monitor take up of SP funds by refugee related projects.

#### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **NASS**
- ⇒ **ODPM**
- ⇒ **Regional consortia**
- ⇒ **Regional housing boards**
- ⇒ **The Housing Corporation**
- ⇒ **local authority housing departments**

### **3.7 Health**

The physical health of asylum seekers on arrival is generally good. However, surveys reveal that health is likely to deteriorate after arrival and caused by physical, and environmental factors. Even though refugees, asylum seekers and their dependants are entitled to health services, they are not always able to access these, due to barriers such as language and a poor awareness of entitlements.

#### **Recommendations**

- The Department of Health (DoH) should lead on developing a strategic response to the health needs of refugees. The DoH should designate a team with responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers to work with strategic health authorities, NHS trusts and primary care trusts (PCTs).
- The DoH should collect and disseminate examples of good practice in working with refugees and asylum seekers.

- NASS should provide a co-ordinated approach on pre-dispersal details of asylum seekers to receiving health authorities in the area, particularly those with special needs to facilitate link-up to primary care services for a comprehensive health assessment, continuation of health care and allocation of appropriate accommodation.
- The DoH should commission a longitudinal study on the health of asylum seekers and refugees from the point of arrival and well into settlement. The collected data should be used to inform commissioning and delivery of health services to asylum seekers and refugees.
- PCTs and NHS trusts have duties under the Social Care Act 2001 to consult and involve patients and public in the planning and designing of health services. Refugee communities as NHS service users should be consulted and involved so services can be planned and designed to meet their needs.

#### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Department of Health**
- ⇒ **Primary care trusts**
- ⇒ **Strategic health authorities**
- ⇒ **NHS trusts**
- ⇒ **NASS**

### **3.8 Mental health**

Asylum seekers and refugees have been identified as suffering from high rates of mental problems resulting from traumatic experiences in countries of origin, from the process of flight and often the stresses and strains of the post-migration environment. Experiences of anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder are common for this group, however, mental health and social care services are often ill equipped to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

#### **Recommendations**

- PCTs should encourage health assessments for newly arrived asylum seekers who may not be in the induction centres and ensure that those requiring specialist health services are referred appropriately. For example, survivors of torture and organised violence should be able to access long-term medical care, therapy and counselling.
- PCTs should ensure that mental health services in their areas are accessible, appropriate, and culturally sensitive to respond to the different mental health issues.

- Refugee communities should be consulted on how to address low uptake of mental health services by refugees and asylum seekers with mental health needs.
- PCTs and local strategic partnerships should create opportunities for networking between refugee community organisations and statutory services.

**Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **Primary care trusts**
- ⇒ **Local strategic partnerships**

### **3.9 Unaccompanied refugee children**

Most unaccompanied asylum seeking children have undergone extremely difficult experiences. Whilst many will show remarkable resilience in surviving their experiences and improving their life chances, this will only be possible with support, assistance and inclusion from the time of arrival.

Many unaccompanied children wait for years for the outcome of their asylum application causing considerable uncertainty and distress for the child, as well as difficulties for those planning the care of that child.

#### **Recommendations**

- Where it is evident at any stage of the asylum determination process that an unaccompanied child cannot be returned, and refugee status cannot be granted, he or she should be granted indefinite leave to remain.
- The decision made on a child’s asylum claim must be in their best interest and offer a realistic durable solution to their situation. An independent legal guardian should be appointed to every unaccompanied child.
- All unaccompanied children recognised as 'children in need' should be provided with accommodation as outlined in Section 20 of the Children Act, and afforded all the protection of legislation and guidance, including after-care provision.
- All unaccompanied children under 18 should be assessed and dealt with by staff trained and/or experienced in children, rather than seen as destitute asylum seekers.
- Social work training courses should introduce a module on 'working with unaccompanied children'.

- Children whose age is disputed must be fully supported as children whilst the dispute is resolved. An assessment of age should be part of a full assessment and in accordance with current guidance. The child should be given the benefit of the doubt.
- Services to unaccompanied children should not be dependent on the child's financial status or entitlement to state benefits.
- Grant payments to local authorities that care for unaccompanied children should be set at reasonable levels. Distinction should not be made on age grounds, but on relative cost of care packages.
- All unaccompanied minors should be entitled to equal treatment under legislation and provision of leaving care services.
- The provision of leaving care services to unaccompanied refugee children should take into account the specific difficulties faced by young people turning 18.

#### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **Department for Education and Skills**
- ⇒ **Local authority social services departments**
- ⇒ **Commission for Social Care Inspection**
- ⇒ **Social work training organisations**

### **3.10 Disabled people in refugee and asylum seeking communities**

The presence of disabled people in refugee and asylum seeking communities is often overlooked and evidence points to a range of unmet personal care needs.

- Research around disability is much needed in order to devise a suitable strategy for the successful integration of disabled refugees into UK society.
- The Home Office should collect and publish data about the prevalence of disability amongst principal asylum applicants, dependants and those granted leave to remain.
- The disability voluntary sector should reflect the needs and experiences of disabled refugees and asylum seekers through their service delivery.
- Disabled asylum seekers who do not qualify for community care services should also be assessed and appropriate support made available by NASS.

### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **NASS**
- ⇒ **Department of Health**
- ⇒ **Local authority social services departments**
- ⇒ **Disability voluntary sector**

### **3.11 Older people**

The experiences of older people within asylum-seeking and refugee communities have not been extensively researched. Yet from experience we know that they are less likely to work or speak English and more likely to face isolation and loneliness. They are a client group which is difficult to reach.

#### **Recommendations**

- The Home Office should collect statistics of principal asylum applicants, dependants and those granted leave to remain who are over the age of 60.
- Research needs to be commissioned about the experiences of older refugees.
- The Department of Health should ensure that the needs of older refugees are reflected in the National Service Framework for Older People.
- Health and social care service providers including voluntary organisations supporting older people, should ensure that their services are accessible to older refugees.

### **Action - key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **Voluntary organisations working on older people issues**
- ⇒ **Department of Health**

### **3.12 Advice and information**

Asylum seekers and refugees depend on timely and accessible advice and information in order to navigate their new environment and to take control of their lives. The intense and insecure nature of asylum status means that advice and information needs at this time will be particularly acute. These needs will remain after the asylum phase as evidence suggests that information barriers still exist in the way of access to employment and education opportunities and services many years after status.

## **Recommendations**

- Information should be accessible in appropriate community languages.
- Access to good quality legal advice at all stages of the asylum process must be available to all asylum seekers.
- Access to good general advice services, such as to Citizens Advice Bureaux, local authority advice services, should be available to enable refugees and asylum seekers to enable them to work their way through the systems and processes and be able to build up a new life in the UK.
- The capacity of refugee community organisations should be developed to enable them to meet advice and information needs of their communities. Many refugee community organisations carry out this work often without support and recognition.
- Community Legal Service partnerships (CLSPs) should map provision of advice and information to refugees in their local area in order to identify service gaps and develop action plans to meet these gaps.

### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Community Legal Service partnerships**
- ⇒ **Citizens Advice**
- ⇒ **Local authorities**

## **3.13 Community development**

Refugee communities and community organisations have a crucial role in promoting successful integration. They are well placed to understand the barriers that refugees face. Refugee communities have become an important form of self expression for refugees. They are also providers of advice and services to members of their community. Refugees and their community organisations should be involved as widely and directly as possible in developing integration strategies service design and delivery. Despite this valuable role and huge potential, refugee community organisations are often constrained by resources and issues of capacity.

## **Recommendations**

- The capacity of refugee community organisations should be supported through the following:
  - Training and support on issues of organisational development such as financial management, resource-raising, project planning, managing volunteers, lobbying and networking should be provided.

- Funding bodies should evaluate the accessibility and take-up of their funding by refugee community organisations and ensure that publicity and information is available in appropriate community languages. They should ensure that funding criteria and application processes are clear and inclusive. Core funding is particularly important to enable development of refugee communities.

- Refugee community organisations should be involved in the development of Integration policies and strategies as well in the design and delivery of services.
- Opportunities should be made for refugee community organisations to foster links with policy makers, service providers and funding bodies.

**Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office (Active Community Unit and Refugee Integration Unit)**
- ⇒ **NCVO**
- ⇒ **Local authorities**
- ⇒ **Regional development agencies**

### **3.14 Regeneration**

High levels of unemployment and poor access to services are two aspects of the social exclusion experienced by refugees. This is compounded by the fact that there is a significant overlap between the dispersal areas and the 88 most deprived wards identified by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. However, given their skills and demographic profile, refugees can help to regenerate deprived areas.

- Regeneration strategies and funding streams should be take into account the specific needs of refugee communities.
- Local strategic partnerships should actively seek the involvement of local refugee community organisations.

**Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Neighbourhood Renewal Unit**
- ⇒ **Local strategic partnerships**
- ⇒ **Regional development agencies**

### **3.15 Public debate and public attitudes**

There is widespread concern about the nature of some of the coverage of asylum and immigration issues by the media. Assertions such as the UK being a 'soft touch' reinforce myths and negative stereotypes about asylum seekers and refugees.

This can lead to tensions within communities, attacks on asylum seekers and refugees, and have an adverse impact on the ability and willingness of different communities to connect and engage with each other. It also contributes to the growing trend of negative public perceptions across all communities about asylum including a consistent overstating of numbers in the UK. For example, a recent poll for MORI<sup>2</sup>, on average respondents thought that 23 per cent of the world's refugees were to be found in the UK, but the real figure is 2 per cent.

#### **Recommendations**

- Good community relations should be supported through dissemination of accurate information about asylum seekers and refugees and through the creation of opportunities for refugees and host communities to resolve issues of tension through dialogue.
- The Press Complaints Commission should monitor and enforce compliance with their guidance for reporting on asylum and refugee matters.

#### **Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office (Community Cohesion Unit)**
- ⇒ **Press Complaints Commission**
- ⇒ **Regional consortia**

### **3.16 Racial harassment and community safety**

Dispersal has introduced asylum seekers to communities and neighbourhoods across Britain. Not all have been prepared for their arrival with the consequence of over 1000 reports of racial harassment which asylum seekers reported to NASS in the first eighteen months of dispersal. Successful integration requires that refugees feel safe within communities, have the confidence to report incidents of racial harassment and the trust in the relevant authorities to act in their best interests.

- Community safety partnerships should actively involve refugee communities and refugee community organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Mori Poll February 2003.

- Crime and disorder strategies should reflect the experience of refugees as victims of crime including racial harassment.
- Police authorities should change their ethnic monitoring criteria to enable them to monitor racial harassment incidents affecting asylum seekers and refugees.
- Police and local agencies should establish alternative mechanisms for reporting racist incidents such as third-party reporting systems.
- Local multi-agency strategies should adopt approaches for prevention and supporting victims.

**Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **Home Office**
- ⇒ **Police authorities**
- ⇒ **Local authorities**

**3.17 Women**

The experience and needs of refugee women are often distinct and frequently overlooked by policy makers and practitioners. As women, refugees may have faced persecution related to their gender such as sexual violence and exploitation but left to grapple with asylum procedures and reception arrangements that are not sensitive to these experiences. Socially, refugee women are more likely to experience isolation and poor access to employment and services.

- The Home Office should collect and publish statistics which show numbers of female asylum seekers and dependants and number of women granted refugee status as main applicants and dependants
- The Home Office should monitor implementation of the Gender Guidelines and report annually on progress
- NASS and the ODPM should ensure that accommodation providers consider issues of safety and isolation in respect of refugee women licensees and tenants.
- Domestic violence services should take into account experiences of refugee women.
- The DWP should carry out a skills' audit of refugee women and develop a strategy for increasing their inclusion within the labour market.

- Higher and further education providers should ensure that the experiences of refugee women are addressed in their inclusion strategies.

**Action – key agencies:**

- ⇒ **The Home Office**
- ⇒ **DWP**
- ⇒ **ODPM**
- ⇒ **Accommodation providers**
- ⇒ **Domestic violence services**
- ⇒ **FE and HE providers**

## 4. Promoting the *Agenda for Integration*

The Refugee Council will promote the principles and recommendations set out in this agenda by ensuring that refugee integration remains a high priority.

To embed this work into our core business, we will draw up an action plan of key activities to further the principles and recommendations set out in this document. Specifically, we will do the following:

- Lobby Government to keep refugee integration high on the policy agenda and advocate for our recommendations to be implemented by the relevant policy makers and practitioners
- Work with the regional consortia to develop and implement the regional integration strategies
- Develop and review our services to ensure that they are responsive to the integration needs of asylum seekers and refugees
- Work with voluntary and statutory bodies to increase their capacity to carry out refugee integration projects
- Support refugee community organisations through capacity building activities to ensure that the voice of refugees informs refugee integration policy and delivery
- Disseminate information about refugee integration projects
- Identify and promote good practice models
- Hold training and development activities across the country
- Promote this agenda within the National Refugee Integration Forum and its subgroups
- Use evidence from our direct service delivery and development work to formulate policy proposals that improve refugee integration
- Learn from the experience of other countries
- Work in partnership with other refugee support organisations to promote this agenda

We will constantly review our work to ensure that it is informed by the views and the participation of refugees and asylum seekers.