

# Refugee Council Impact Report 2015-16



SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES



# Welcome from Maurice Wren, Refugee Council Chief Executive



Maurice Wren, Refugee Council, Chief Executive

In 2016 the Refugee Council marked 65 years of helping refugees. Since 1951, we've been there for people who have sought refuge in the UK; people fleeing some of the world's most infamous regimes and human rights abuses.

Today, with more people displaced by war and violence around the world than ever before, the Refugee Council is still needed and we are determinedly working to support refugees who have fled the most unimaginable horrors.

2015-16 was an incredibly challenging year for refugees in Europe and for those of us supporting them. Following our successful campaign to secure the introduction of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in 2014, we continued to campaign to expand the numbers who would benefit from the scheme. In September 2015 the Government

announced an expansion, pledging to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. We are proud that we are welcoming and supporting some of these families to rebuild their lives in the UK.

To those of you who already support the Refugee Council, it is your kind donations that have allowed us to carry out our life changing work over the decades. Thank you for helping us provide therapeutic care for traumatised child refugees; for enabling us to retrain refugee doctors who are now saving lives in the NHS; for helping us provide the advice and guidance that helps refugees return to work, and for helping us to carry out all of our other transformative and life enhancing services.

To those of you looking at supporting us, we hope to develop a lasting relationship with you during this critically important time for those who have fled danger across the world.

We also need to say a very special thank you to the hundreds of volunteers who supported our work throughout 2015-16. It is their dedication and expertise that has made our essential work possible.

With your help, we are able to remain committed to providing life changing support to refugees and asylum seekers. With your support, we also continue to fight to improve policy and practice in the UK, so that after going through so much, refugees can begin to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maurice Wren'.

**Maurice Wren**  
2016



# The Refugee Council

In September 2015 an image of the lifeless body of a little boy named Alan Kurdi shook the British public, and shone a light on a global tragedy – the greatest displacement of people since the Second World War.

Throughout 2015-16 our newspapers and televisions were filled with the stories of people making desperate journeys to Europe – of orange life jackets washed up on the shore, of babies lifted from the waves. In Britain, the Government committed to resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees and the work of the Refugee Council remained as important as ever.

At this time of crisis, the Refugee Council is one of the largest national charities for refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. We offer specific services to meet each of our clients' unique needs.



Families make desperate journeys to Europe

In 2015-16 we helped some of Britain's most vulnerable people, including survivors of torture and children traumatised by trafficking or the desperate journeys they have made without their parents.

We provided a warm meal, clean clothes and vital advice to asylum seekers sleeping rough with nowhere else to turn. We helped refugees find jobs, access training and find somewhere to live. We retrained refugee doctors and nurses so that they could use their skills in the NHS. We campaigned for a fairer, more effective and humane asylum system so that refugees can begin to rebuild their lives in safety.

**And we couldn't have done it without you.**



Parents seek safety for their children

## Key successes

- In 2015-16 we supported **5,588** refugees and asylum seekers, a staggering increase of **88%** on the previous year.
- Of those supported **3,658** were refugee children, alone in the UK without their parents.
- We took an important role in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and welcomed over **250** Syrian refugees in 2015-16.
- We expanded our Therapeutic Services, normally only run for adults, by introducing new work with children. My View is a therapeutic service which supported **187** children suffering post-traumatic stress.

*"The Refugee Council is a memorable place where I can go when I am feeling sad and forget what made me feel bad. This is the first place I used to go without an appointment or an invitation and the very first place where I had the unforgettable memories through playing, laughing, cooking, drawing, planning events. No matter how I say about how attached we are to each other, I won't be able to explain how much I love them."*

**A separated child comments on their experience of the Refugee Council's Children's Section**

# Services for children

The Refugee Council provides the only service to which all children who arrive alone in the UK are referred. For twenty years the Children's Section has been a one stop shop for these children, supporting them through making their asylum claim, and with homework clubs, maths and English classes, therapeutic services and social activities.



Children across the UK send messages of welcome to refugee children

**In 2015-16, we helped 3,658 children. This is an increase of 66% from the previous year.**

Many of the children we support have witnessed the killing of loved ones, some have been forced to become child soldiers, or have been trafficked and forced into domestic servitude, sexual exploitation or other forms of forced labour. Nearly all have undergone long, lonely and terrifying journeys. Many arrive traumatised and can be targeted by criminal gangs, or placed unlawfully into adult detention centres. Our Children's Section is there for all of these children.

## In 2015-16:

- We supported **164** children who had been trafficked.
- Our Age Disputes project is the only project in the UK with a focus on visiting children in detention to help them demonstrate their age and secure their release from detention.
- We supported **292** separated children with maths and English classes, a busy programme of homework clubs, as well as drama, art, and music sessions.

- Our My View project supported **187** children through one to one counselling, therapeutic creative work and group activities.
- We provided **249** children who arrived at our new reception centre in Dover with a hot shower, clean clothes and a warm meal.

*"I came in contact with the Refugee Council Children's Section on my first day in the country. I received utter kindness and care. I was only 15 years old. I will never forget the support I received. I have now graduated from university and am working as a nurse. Thank you to the Refugee Council for saving my life."*

**Young girl supported by our Trafficked Girls' Project**



A child supported by the Children's Section draws their traumatic journey

## Qasim's Story

My View is one of many of the Refugee Council services available to children like Qasim. Qasim fled Ethiopia alone. After a horrific journey he arrived in the UK. He was 16 years old, alone and traumatised – experiencing severe anxiety, insomnia and flashbacks.

He came to the Refugee Council for one to one therapy sessions. As a result, Qasim's sleep dramatically improved and he ended the sessions happier, calmer and more in control of his mental wellbeing.

Thanks to the support of the Refugee Council, Qasim is thrilled to be back in college. He is working hard to build a life for himself and is looking forward to the future.



# Refugee resettlement

The majority of the world's refugees are unable to travel far beyond the borders of their home country and live in refugee camps for many years. Indeed, many children have lived their entire lives in such camps. Refugee resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a country in which they have sought protection to a third country which has agreed to admit them. The Refugee Council receives funding from the Government to work in partnership with local councils to provide a full support service for resettled refugees.



In 2016 Hull celebrated 10 years of welcoming refugees through the Gateway Protection Programme

Through our resettlement work we support resettled refugees to find housing; access education, training, and employment opportunities; to register with health services and access many other services which enable people to begin to rebuild their lives. Our aim is to ensure that resettled refugees are able to live independently by the end of the 12 month programme.

The Gateway Protection Programme has been the UK's contribution to the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) global

resettlement programme since 2004. In 2016, we celebrated with councillors, local people, partners and refugees as Hull marked **10 years** of welcoming refugees through the Gateway programme.

In 2015-16, the Refugee Council supported **552** resettled refugees, including refugees welcomed through the Government's pledge to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020.



# Therapeutic Services

The Refugee Council's specialist Therapeutic Services provide one to one and group therapeutic sessions for traumatised people who have survived experiences including torture or sexual violence. In 2015-16 our impact included:

- Our London Powerful Women project helped **99** women through one to one counselling, a mother and toddlers group and a creative focus group.
- In Luton, Leeds and Birmingham we supported **198** people with crisis interventions, weekly counselling sessions or therapeutic group work.
- In London we supported **177** people with therapeutic services including one to one and group therapy.

*"This [therapeutic support group] has been very, very helpful. It is a good group and it has changed my life. If I don't come to the group I feel sick and I feel sad. Maybe one day I won't come to this group but I hope other people like me will go and it will help others. I hope this group goes on to help more and more people. Before I was very, very sad and I thought I should die. It has changed my mind. I was thinking bad things for my life – I thought there was nothing for me and I was nothing. But in the group I feel these women love me. It has changed my life and I hope it will help many people."*

**Patricia, a woman who found support and empowerment through the Creative Focus group, a confidential psycho-social group where women with similar experiences can learn and share with others.**



Therapeutic counselling can help parents and their children cope with a new life in the UK

© Shutterstock

# Helping refugees integrate

Many asylum seekers have to wait for months or even years for their refugee status. When it finally comes, this recognition should provide a sense of safety, relief and hope. However, newly recognised refugees are given only 28 days find a stable source of income, accommodation and receive identification documents (including a National Insurance number) before all support is withdrawn. This almost impossible task results in many refugees facing destitution and homelessness.



With the help of the Refugee Council, refugee health professionals requalify to use their skills in the NHS

The Refugee Council's Integration Service supports newly recognised refugees to make the challenging first steps towards integrating in the UK.

- The Refugee Advice project supported **355** newly recognised refugees to obtain essential identification, open bank accounts, look for a place to live and access health services.
- Our Private Rented Scheme provided advice and information to **367** refugees who were facing homelessness.
- We supported **136** refugees to secure employment, access training or education, or find a voluntary position to gain work experience.
- Our Refugee Healthcare Professionals project helped retrain and support **42** refugee health professionals to qualify for employment in the NHS.

## Refugees share their thoughts on the Refugee Council Integration Service

*"I would like to thank the Refugee Council for helping me and people like me, thank you for understanding what we go through and for helping me be here today. You never send people away, you are always there for us and I am so grateful."*

*"They made an incredible difference in my life. I was lost, sick and homeless. They welcomed me with a smile, they supported me, they provided me with a hostel, they gave me advice on everything. I thank the Lord for having met them."*

## We asked refugees supported by the Integration Service: "What would you have done if the Refugee Council were not there?"

*"I would have been homeless and lost."*

*"I would have been left helpless. I have no idea of what I would have done."*

*"I don't know how to put words together to describe the Refugee Council. The Refugee Council has been hugely important in helping refugee doctors to get back to their profession – and to benefit the NHS with our skills. This is such a worthy investment. Fahira, who runs the Refugee Health Care Professionals project, knows exactly what the needs are. She is an incredible woman and has supported so many refugee doctors and nurses back to work. I am so looking forward to using my skills to benefit the country that gave me a new life, a life in safety."*

**Dr. Charles Dotou is a Consultant Obstetrician Gynaecologist, who has just retrained to work as an NHS doctor thanks to the support of the Refugee Council.**



# Destitution Services and access to healthcare

## Supporting people who are homeless and destitute

In 2015-16 the Refugee Council Destitution service supported **237** people to access immigration advice, laundry and shower facilities, hot meals, advice and therapeutic support.

## Helping refugees access health services

People seeking asylum suffer disproportionately with illness as they often face poverty, social isolation and low

self-esteem – all barriers to a healthy life. The Refugee Council is working with the Department of Health to help refugees and asylum seekers access health services and get confidential advice.

The Health Access for Refugees Programme (HARP) operates in six locations; Doncaster, Hull, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Sheffield and Wakefield. HARP relies hugely on fantastic volunteers, who are all from refugee or asylum seeking backgrounds themselves.



HARP health befrienders visit the beach with people they are supporting



# Advocating on behalf of refugees

The Refugee Council's Advocacy Team adopts a range of methods to influence policy and practice – fighting to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. These include: research, public campaigns, policy influencing, parliamentary lobbying and media work. We work on a huge range of issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK – some public, high profile issues and others that have a huge impact on the lives of those who seek safety in Britain, but never make it into the public eye.

We contribute to the public debate in the media around refugees with a calm, measured and well informed voice. In 2015 our print and online media coverage has increased 170% on 2014 levels and 326% compared to 2013. We made the front pages of the Independent and Guardian, as well as being quoted in the Daily Mirror, Independent, Mail Online, the BBC and The Times. We were also featured on a variety of BBC programmes including the News at Six, the World at One, the Victoria Derbyshire programme, as well as BBC Radio 1 and Radio 5 Live. Throughout the year we spoke regularly on refugee issues on Sky News and the BBC News channel.

## Safe and legal routes to protection

In 2015-16 thousands of people lost their lives crossing seas, looking to Europe as a place of safety. We tirelessly campaigned for safe and legal routes for refugees to reach safety – such as resettlement, family reunion and humanitarian visas.

After years of campaigning and shining a spotlight on this issue, in September 2015 we welcomed the Government's decision to expand the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme, pledging that the UK will welcome 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020.



Author JK Rowling shows public support for Refugee Council campaign

## Fighting to reunite families

In the past year, families making treacherous journeys across Europe were often separated, and ended up living in different countries across the continent. In 2015-16 we continued to

press the Government to develop and publish guidance on the Dublin III regulation to enable families to live together as they seek asylum. This regulation particularly helps separated children to be reunited with their parents or other family members who can look after them.

## Support for pregnant women

We have been working for many years alongside Maternity Action to improve the lives of pregnant women seeking asylum. During the last stages of their pregnancy, women can be moved to different asylum accommodation, breaking their links with friends, family and maternity support. As a result of our joint report and campaign #DignityInPregnancy, the Home Office released revised guidance in February 2016, which means pregnant asylum seeking women, and those who are new mothers, can be more stable and better supported.

## Work with parliamentarians

During the passage of the Immigration Act 2016 we worked closely with parliamentarians and partners to push amendments relating to, among other things, immigration detention, asylum support and refugee family reunion. We were able to get some concessions on proposed changes to asylum support for families as well as new judicial oversight of immigration detention.

We supported MPs to secure a parliamentary debate on a report written by the All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) on Refugees and on Migration on the use of immigration detention. The House of Commons then agreed to the report's recommendations for reform, including introducing a limit on the length of time that an individual can be detained, and looking for alternatives to detention.

## Support for refugees with disabilities

We helped one of our resettled clients to challenge the discriminatory rules that had denied refugee children like her access to disability benefits. With our pressure, in March 2016 the Court ruled that this discrimination was unlawful. Our client can now access the support she needs, as will many other resettled refugees with disabilities.

## Better care for women who have experienced sexual violence

We worked with the Home Office to improve support for women seeking asylum who have experienced violence either in their home country or in the UK. We trained and supported Home Office officials to signpost or refer women who have disclosed that they have been affected by violence, so that they can be supported by specialist services.

# Refugee Council supported by the Guardian and Observer Christmas Appeal

In 2015, the Guardian and Observer Christmas appeal raised £2.6 million thanks to the generosity of 22,500 readers. This was the most successful Guardian and Observer Christmas appeal to date. The funds were split by six organisations providing vital support to refugees, including the Refugee Council.

We were heartened and inspired not only by the thousands of donations – but also by the support of those who are willing to lend their name and their voice in support of refugees.

Thanks to the amazing outpouring of public support we can continue to be there for refugees – helping them to find homes, employment and support them to rebuild their lives in safety.



A mother and baby pictured on their journey to Europe

© Katie Barlow

## Our Board of Trustees

A special thanks to our Trustees who gave their time voluntarily to guide and assist us in all the work we do. This year we said goodbye to some members of the previous board of trustees and welcomed some individuals who had not worked with us before. We are grateful to them all.

### Andrew Halper (Chair)

Chair designate from  
26 May 2016

### Richard Foster (Chair)

Until 24 November 2016

### Nick Whitaker

(Honorary Treasurer)  
Appointed 30 October  
2015

### Heather Foster

(Honorary Treasurer)  
Resigned 30 October  
2015

### Graham Abbey

Resigned 26 September  
2015

### Mabrouke Alloune

Resigned 28 October  
2015

### Sirak Hagos

Resigned 26 May 2016

### Karen Kavivi Harrison

Appointed 26 May 2016

### Hussein Hassan

Resigned 26 May 2016

### Andrew Hine

Appointed 26 May 2016

### Benjamin Hopkinson

Resigned 26 May 2016

### Vaughan Jones

Aneil Jhumat  
Appointed 26 May 2016

### John Kerr

Appointed 26 May 2016

### Anne-Marie Lawlor

Stella Maravanyika  
Resigned 26 May 2016

### Anne McLoughlin

Appointed 26 May 2016

### Salah Mohamed

### Rachael Orr

Appointed 26 May 2016

### Ernest Rukangira

Resigned 26 May 2016

### Rita Paulino

Resigned 26 May 2016

### Jan Shaw

Resigned 28 October  
2015

### Lyndall Stein

Appointed 26 May 2016



# Our Finances

The financial position of the Refugee Council has improved significantly over the last year. Our supporters, whether individuals, trusts or foundations, have been generous, enabling the organisation to expand the scale of its work in response to the demand.

Total expenditure increased from **£5.4 million** to **£5.9 million** with expenditure on our Children's Section and Resettlement rising in line with the increases in grant income to those areas.

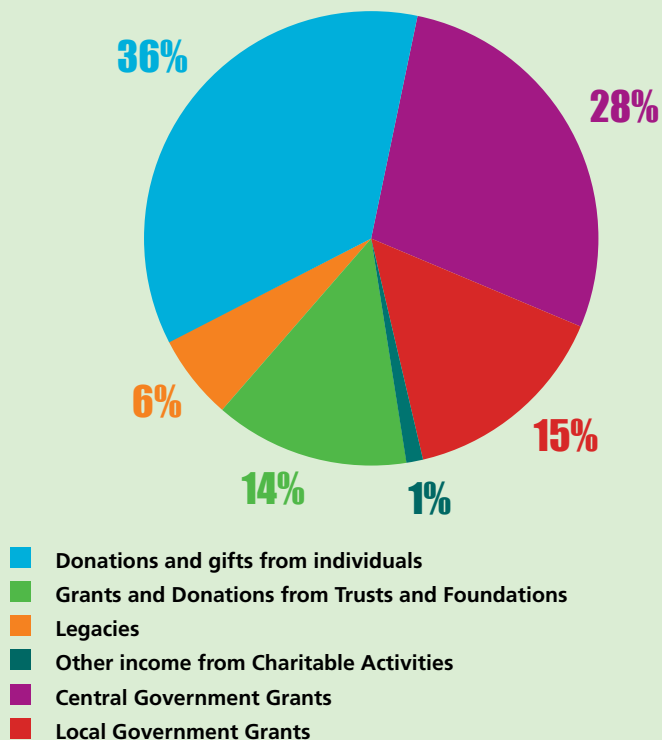
Overall income grew by **37%** from **£4.6 million** to **£6.3 million**, the first time that income has grown since the 2009/10 financial year. This growth resulted from an increase in gifts and donations from individuals, which increased from **£1.3 million** to **£2.2 million**, including over **£420,000** as our share of the Guardian's Christmas appeal.

Income from Trusts, Foundations and Statutory sources also increased. This included funding from the Home Office for our Children's Panel work and from Local Authorities to provide integration support to Syrian refugees.

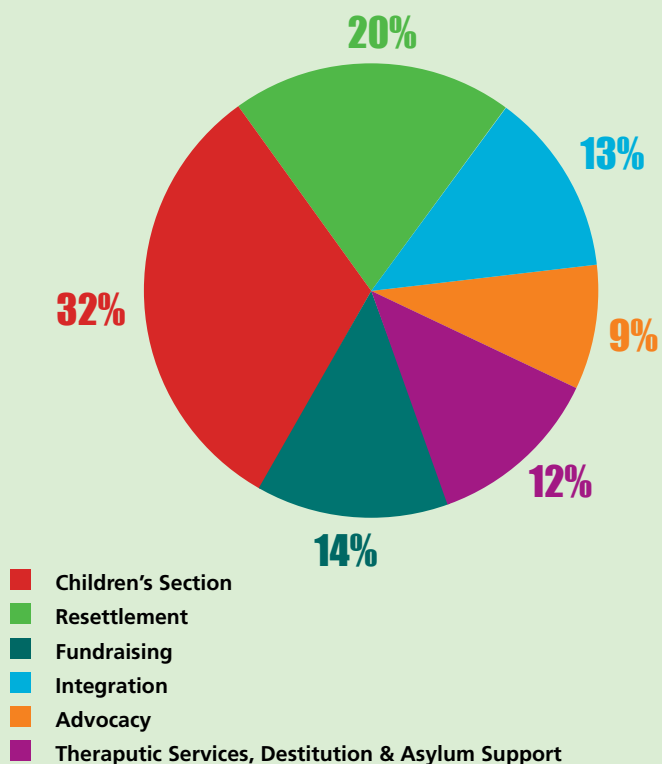
Unrestricted reserves rose from **£1.1 million** to **£1.6 million** and are now in line with Trustee expectations on the level of reserves needed to ensure long term stability.

For our full accounts including all these transactions and further explanation please see: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/about\\_refugee\\_council/annual\\_accounts](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/about_refugee_council/annual_accounts)

## Last year, 56% of our funding\* came from individuals, trusts and foundations



## 86% of our funding\* is spent on our charitable work



\* Note – these numbers exclude the amounts in relation to surplus office accommodation that we let out and the impact of pensions accounting changes.

We are hugely grateful for the help given by supporters and volunteers in 2015-16, which has made a real impact on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, at a time when there are more people displaced around the world than at any time since the Second World War.

Thank you so much for your ongoing support.

Contact us at [supporter@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:supporter@refugeecouncil.org.uk) or call 020 7346 1205

Please keep in touch with our work on  Facebook and  Twitter

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)



**Photo Above:** © Refugee Council  
Refugee Council Staff and Volunteers March at 'Refugees Welcome March' September 2015.

**Front Cover Photo:** © PA Images  
A Syrian refugee carries his child after they arrived from Turkey to the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos, on an inflatable dinghy, with another boat in the background.

To protect their identities, some of the names and images of clients in this publication have been changed.

**British Refugee Council** (commonly called the Refugee Council) is a registered charity No.1014576 and a company registered in England and Wales No.2727514.  
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