



Impact Report

2019/20



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

Maurice Wren

Chief Executive of Refugee Council

Image: Refugee Council



This will be my last year as Chief Executive of Refugee Council as I will be retiring in late 2020 and I am very proud that 2019/20 was a year that saw the Refugee Council at its best, in so many ways.

We enhanced our mental health services around the country with new services established in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and existing services extended in Birmingham and Sheffield.

We were the proud co-hosts of the Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement (ATCR) with an annual conference in Geneva where the Refugee Advisory Group, comprising a dozen people who were mainly resettled in Yorkshire and supported by us, made its first, very impressive, appearance, delivering the first ever refugee statement to the ATCR.

On the campaigning and advocacy front, after three years of dogged pressure we finally secured game-changing improvements to the way the Home Office supports domestic abuse victims and survivor women in the asylum system.

Nothing demonstrates better the Refugee Council's ability to respond swiftly to the changing welfare and wellbeing needs of refugees in the UK, than our rapid mobilisation of a Covid-19 emergency service towards the end of our financial year.

Within a matter of days we were able to "open our doors" again for all of our core services through remote delivery of advice and support via the telephone, email or video platforms such as Zoom.

Though this Impact Report can only ever provide a snapshot of our work over the past year, I hope it conveys to you a flavour of the scope, the depth and the impact of what we have achieved.

I also hope that you, our vital supporters and donors, will draw satisfaction, and perhaps a little pride too, from the fact that so much of the work described in the report is dependent on your generous financial help.

I am delighted that Enver Solomon who has been CEO of the charity Just for Kids Law will be our new CEO leading the organisation to continue its vital work.

With 2021 shaping up to be a very difficult year for refugees in the UK, both politically and economically, your support for and endorsement of our work at the Refugee Council will be even more important.

Maurice Wren
Chief Executive of the Refugee Council

10,780 refugees and asylum seekers were supported

40.30%

Were children

663

People received employment training

1,195

People received crisis advice and support

2,300

People were supported to access health care

3,775

Unaccompanied young people were supported by our children's services

368

Adults received mental health therapy

289

Children received mental health therapy

207

Attended our destitution centre

2,270

Were helped to resettle in the UK

51,431

Hours were donated by volunteers

357

Children whose age was disputed received help with their claim

Mental health

We provided therapeutic support to 368 adults last year

"You have given me momentum and given me hope. When I have problems I will remember the sessions and think of small steps I can take."

Image: Alamy



People seeking safety in the UK are five times more likely to have mental health needs than the general population, and more than 60% will experience serious mental distress. However, they are far less likely to receive support.

Our specialist therapists deliver one-to-one and group support that is tailored to the unique cultural and experiential needs of refugees and asylum seekers and emphasises their innate resilience. With the help of interpreters, we build a safe, trusting environment where they are given a voice, listened to and supported to feel in control of their lives.

74%
reported
reduced feelings
of panic or
terror

72%
reported an
improvement
in experiencing
distressing images
or memories

96%
of those who had made plans to end
their lives reported they were less likely
to consider suicide.

We supported 289 children and young people on their therapeutic journey

Five years ago, we launched our My View project for young refugees who have arrived here without a parent or guardian, to help them to come to terms with the horrors they have witnessed and to start to cope with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), survivor guilt and shame. Last year:

77%
reported
reduced
thoughts
of hurting
themselves

85%
reported
feeling less
unhappy

96%
reported
improvement in
how distressed
they were by their
thoughts and
feelings

76%
reported feeling
there was someone
they were able to ask
for help

Image: Dreamtime

Tesfa fled his home in East Africa aged 14 to escape being forced to become a child soldier.

"When I first met Tesfa, there was a heaviness about him. He explained that a few weeks before news had reached him that a close friend had died while trying to reach safety.

Since then he had been very distressed, unable to sleep, and generally being overcome by a feeling of hopelessness. He had even started wishing he could just go to sleep and not have to wake again, something he hadn't felt able to talk to anyone about. I was careful to acknowledge his courage in sharing this with me and to let him know that this was not in any means an unusual response to everything that had happened to him.

Tesfa spoke about having headaches when he tried to forget the memories which intruded into his thoughts. How to manage memories became a large part of our work together. We explored their function and how forgetting the past may sometimes mean losing touch with good as well as bad memories. We started work on a timeline and using it as a way to reconnect with his childhood, reminding himself of who he was before he became a refugee.

In our final session, Tesfa was upbeat, telling humorous anecdotes related to when he first arrived in the UK which he seemed to enjoy sharing with me. We looked to his future together, acknowledging his resilience and strength and what he had learned."

Sarah, My View therapist

Supporting refugee children

Since 1994 our Children's Advice Project has supported children who arrive in the UK alone, seeking safety. Some have been trafficked to the UK, forced into sex work or to farm cannabis. Our service is the only one in the UK doing this crucial work - helping children navigate the asylum system, and ensuring they are protected and represented every step of the way. Alongside supporting these children directly, we work with carers and other professionals helping unaccompanied children.

Campaign victory: standing up for the rights of refugee children

For 25 years we have supported all children arriving alone in the UK fleeing war, terror and abuse. Every year we support hundreds of children who have been incorrectly age assessed as adults. The consequences for a child are profound.

After being age assessed as an adult, one child from Afghanistan had to leave his foster family, becoming destitute. Unable to attend school, see friends, or play with the cricket team he loved, his mental health rapidly declined. One day he tragically took himself to a train station, considering whether he should take his own life.

Through the courts, we challenged the Home Office policy that allowed immigration officials to deem someone an adult through only a visual assessment.

We provided expert witness statements, attended court and liaised with the dedicated solicitors and barristers to ensure that accurate and up-to-date information was available to them and to the court.



And we won. In May 2019, the Court of Appeal ruled that the Home Office's policy was unlawful as it failed to ensure that children are not mistakenly treated as adults.

Though the Home Office are appealing the decision, this victory will protect more refugee children, allowing many to rebuild their lives in safety.

Klevis's story

"Young people see Refugee Council like a great hope for the future. They are right."

Our Youth Development Project provides newly arrived young people with classes and social activities to help them begin or continue their education, develop social skills, build self-confidence and start to trust again. Klevis, from Albania, shares his story.

"I came to London when I was 15 years old. On the first week, I was very nervous. I did not know any word in English. My foster carer asked me if I want to go to play. She was saying to me about Refugee Council. When I heard that honestly I start thinking that she do not like me coz I am a refugee. When people hear the name 'refugee', they look or talk in bad ways. They seemed to be afraid of them.

After a while, my foster carer send me to Refugee Council. I can say that there my life begins.

I went in and I saw many children, happy and friendly.

I started going to Refugee Council five day a week. I went to every English, maths and other activities they do here. It was good to see young people laughing and having a great time. My favourite part was when I learned that they have a football session every Friday.

After going to Refugee Council for couple of months, I increase my confidence, my English and my knowledge about UK. I went to college and thankfully to Refugee Council I was ready for the academic year.

After I trained really hard in football, I started looking for a team. Now I am playing in really good level as a semi-pro football player.

Young people see Refugee Council like a great hope for the future. They are right. My future it seems to be bright, I do not have anything to lose. Thank you Refugee Council."

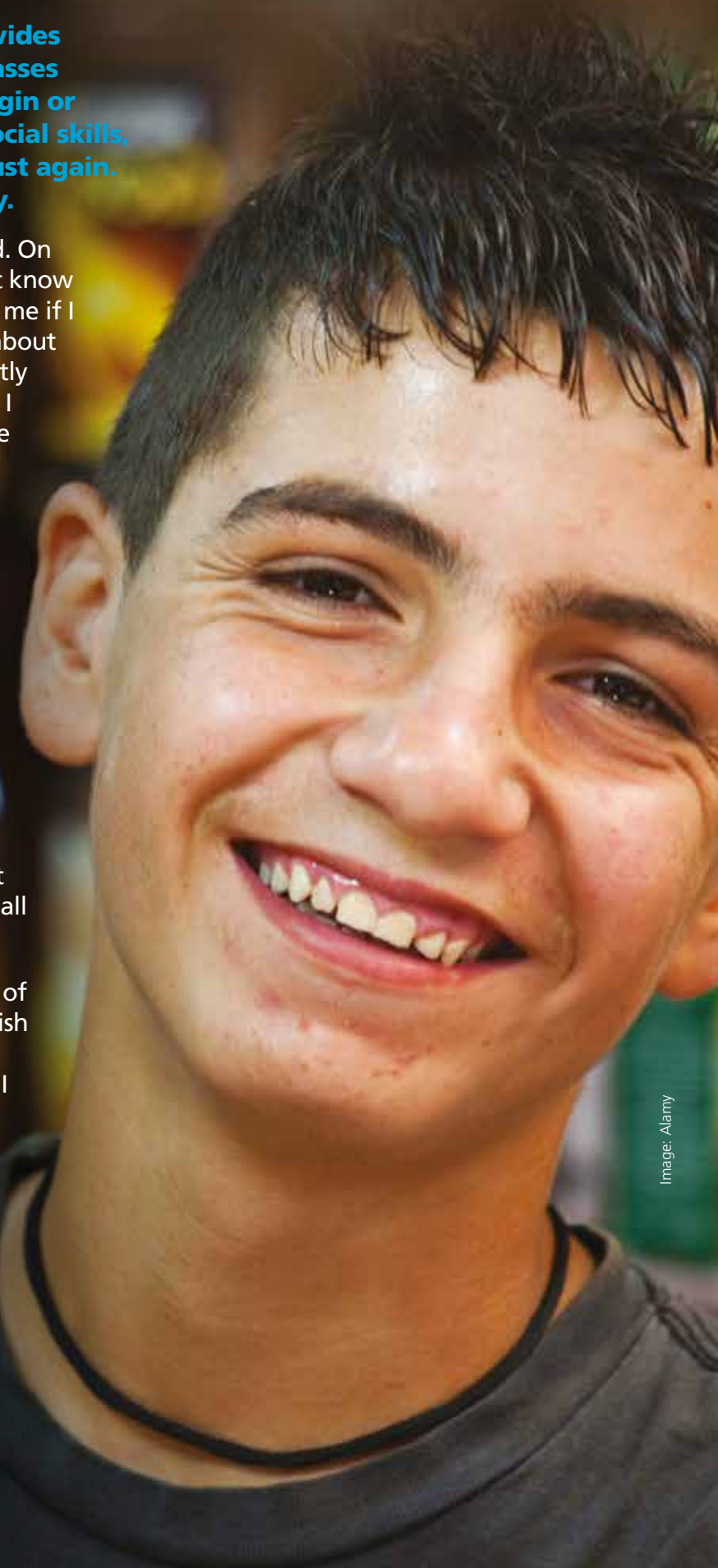


Image: Alamy

Helping refugees make a new life in the UK

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 works in partnership with local councils to provide a full support service for resettled refugees.

Sabrine, who was born in Sudan, is a Nuba Christian, a group that has been systematically persecuted by the Sudanese authorities.

In 2004 Sabine and her husband went to Lebanon where many Nuba people had fled to escape the violence in Sudan. In 2013 her husband deserted her and in 2016 Sabine was arrested and imprisoned by the Lebanese government as her residency permit had expired. The UNHCR decided that Sabine and her daughter Samira's lives were in danger if they were forcibly returned to Sudan and arranged for them to come to the UK.

Sabrine explained, "I was really happy when we landed at Manchester airport. I was looking forward to a new life and for Samira to get a better education and future.

We were met by Refugee Council and they took us to our new home. I knew that I would need help and Refugee Council showed us around and how to do things. Here in the UK things are not as simple as in the Middle East and they would always help whatever was the matter.

"I would like to thank the people who helped us. We are lucky to have a new life here"

I took English lessons and after about seven months I started to volunteer at the church. That stopped because of coronavirus and now I have a job in a school that has stayed open for children of key workers."

Samira was worried that people would not accept her. "I faced racism back in Lebanon. My mum used to always tell me 'don't let ignorant people tell you who you are and put you down. Make their ignorance your strength.' I got some racism at the school – they said so many things about me and about my mum. But that's stopped now because the school is very strict on racism."

"I would like to thank the people who helped us. We are lucky to have a new life here" said Sabine.



Image: Phil Taylor Photography

Crisis advice and support

When refugees are given the right to remain in the UK they have just 28 days to get benefits and find somewhere to live before the government evicts them from asylum accommodation. With limited English, an unfamiliarity with the UK system, and less than £6 a day in asylum support to live on, many newly recognised refugees end up living on the streets, immediately after being granted safety.

Helen from Eritrea, told us why the 28 day rule left her homeless, and how, with the support of Refugee Council, she is now studying to become a nurse.

I came to the UK in 2018. I got my status within four months, then I got my letter, telling me I had to leave my accommodation in 28 days. I didn't know what to do.

I was a rough sleeper for two weeks. Then a lady from the church referred me to the Refugee Council.

At the Refugee Council, my caseworker she helped me with everything, first, a place to stay. She told me and the other women where to go to college, where the job centre was and helped me to register with the GP and the dentist. At that time I didn't have my ID yet so I really struggled to get Universal Credit and my bank account.

In this time, I didn't wait around for my ID. I started to get English lessons and improve.

Can you imagine, I got my ID after five months of receiving my status!

"I was a rough sleeper for two weeks. Then a lady from the church referred me to the Refugee Council."

I started working in 2019 as a care assistant. I was a nurse in my country and I'd love to work as a nurse here. After hard work at college, doing Maths and Biology GCSEs now I am studying access to nursing!"



Image: Alamy

Helping refugees into jobs

Refugees have the legal right to work in the UK but many find it hard to get a job. Some fled war torn countries before they completed their education. Others are highly skilled professionals who struggle to have their qualifications recognised in the UK. They all have so much to contribute but need a helping hand to understand the systems and working culture in the UK and become financially independent.

**663 people
attended an
employment
training
course**

We run a range of employment training programmes including one that helps health care professionals meet NHS requirements and register with the General Medical Council so that they can get a job in the health service.

Between October 2009 and March 2018 we helped re-train

**372 doctors | 42 pharmacists
69 dentists | 25 biomedical scientists
4 physiotherapists | 83 nurses**

**It costs over £220,000 to train a new doctor in the UK
but only around £25,000 to re-train a refugee doctor.**

"I am a speciality trainee in obstetrics and gynaecology, working as a registrar in George Eliot Hospital in Nuneaton at the moment. It's what I always wanted to do because I'm finally able to give back to the society that gave me refuge but also because I could not picture a way for me to be happy without getting back into clinical practice."

Dr Saad Maida

For over a decade Refugee Council has been working with Health Education England to help medical professionals retrain in the UK. As part of the programme, refugee doctors are offered a place on the Clinical Apprenticeship Scheme (CAPS) administered via the Professional Support Unit. This enables them to undertake a supernumerary placement for six months. The scheme includes topics as diverse as the nuances of culturally appropriate communication skills for working effectively with different groups of patients and colleagues as well as providing supervised and supported work-based learning and training.



A survey, carried out in 2019 contacted doctors who had been through the scheme, found that 94% of responders were still working in the NHS.

Helping refugees access healthcare

This year HARP helped 2,300 refugees and asylum seekers access health care they were entitled to.

The complexity of the NHS, difficulties registering with GPs, unwelcoming atmospheres and discrimination are just some of the challenges that refugees face when trying to access healthcare as Rose McCarthy who runs our Health Access for Refugees Project (HARP) explains.

HARP helps refugees and asylum seekers understand what to do if they or their families are unwell. To do this, we totally depend on our brilliant volunteers, most of whom are themselves from a refugee background.

We run workshops to provide information and give practical support such as helping them to register with GPs, midwives, dentists and so on. The volunteers also accompany refugees and asylum seekers to medical appointments and advocate on their behalf where necessary.

As well as helping refugees access health care, our volunteers have helped deliver awareness training on barriers to healthcare to 3,500 professionals and helped create an e-learning module for 18,000 midwives.

Sethu was destitute and pregnant when I first met her at one of our weekly drop-ins in Leeds. I encouraged her to attend an antenatal class I teach. We helped her write a letter to the hospital and arranged for her to have a doula. That's a trained companion who's not a health professional but supports people through health situations such as child birth.

When she was 38 weeks pregnant she was moved from Leeds to Bradford where she did not know anybody. Just days after she arrived the hospital decided to induce her as she had gestational diabetes so she had to give birth alone without her doula.

After she gave birth, a HARP volunteer shopped for Sethu, helped her register with a new GP and to get a birth certificate for her daughter.

Sethu became a HARP volunteer, first supporting another mum, and since then she's helped many others get the health care they need, has spoken at a midwifery conference and participated in research into the impact of destitution on pregnant migrant women.

Image: Alamy



Advocacy & Engagement

Our Advocacy & Engagement Team work hand-in-hand with our services to drive change and improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum.



Image: Refugee Council

Family Reunion

We have continued working with other charities on the Families Together coalition, calling on the government to expand the refugee family reunion rules to allow more refugees to be reunited with their family members, and to give child refugees the right to bring their parents to the UK.

Together we delivered a petition of 75,000 signatures to the Home Secretary to change the rules. We published the *Without my Family* report with Amnesty and Save the Children. We also launched a heart-rending animation, *Without my Mum*, which won the 'best use of video' Third Sector Digital Award. The animation illustrates the impact of children being prevented from reuniting with their family members.

The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement

The ATCR is an annual event organised and co-chaired by UNHCR and a different country each year. We were proud to be selected by the Home Office as their NGO co-chair to plan and deliver the event in 2019.

In July we held a very successful two-day conference in Geneva, attended by over 300 delegates from 30 countries. We made improving refugee participation a priority during the year and five members of the Refugee Advisory Group we helped to establish attended the conference bringing the number of refugee participants to a record level. The group also made ATCR history by delivering the first ever 'Refugee Statement' during the opening session, calling on the international community to do more to increase the number of resettlement places made available and to improve resettlement processes and integration outcomes. The UNHCR were so impressed by the Refugee Statement that they have committed to making it a permanent fixture of the ATCR in the future.

London RCO Advocacy Forum

We recruited 14 Refugee-led Community Organisations (RCOs) to be the Refugee Council's co-production partners for the creation of the London RCO Advocacy forum which is funded by the City Bridge Trust. We delivered an advocacy training programme for participants covering planning, policy work, influencing parliament, public campaigning and collecting evidence, and well as sessions on public speaking and collaboration. We began the process of finalising the terms of reference for the Forum in order to support its work and help with recruitment in year two of the project.

A campaigning win

In September the Refugee Council and other charities providing vital services to refugees received a letter from the Government informing us that all the refugee integration services we run via an EU grant programme would be cut immediately in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

At the Refugee Council, we have used the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) to deliver high impact services aimed at preventing homelessness, destitution, isolation, unemployment and mental distress. These are common risks faced by refugees, even when they've been given a new life in the UK.

We launched a campaign to overturn this decision and the response was overwhelming. In just three weeks almost 50,000 people signed an open letter to the Chancellor and over 1,000 people wrote to their MPs asking them to raise the matter with the Chancellor.

MPs asked questions in the House and of course during that time we were working hard behind the scenes to put pressure on the Home Office and UK Responsible Authority.

And, thanks to all that amazing support, the government changed its mind.

We want to say an enormous thank you to everyone who came forward to support our campaign. It is no exaggeration to say that your help in putting pressure on the Government may well have saved the futures of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

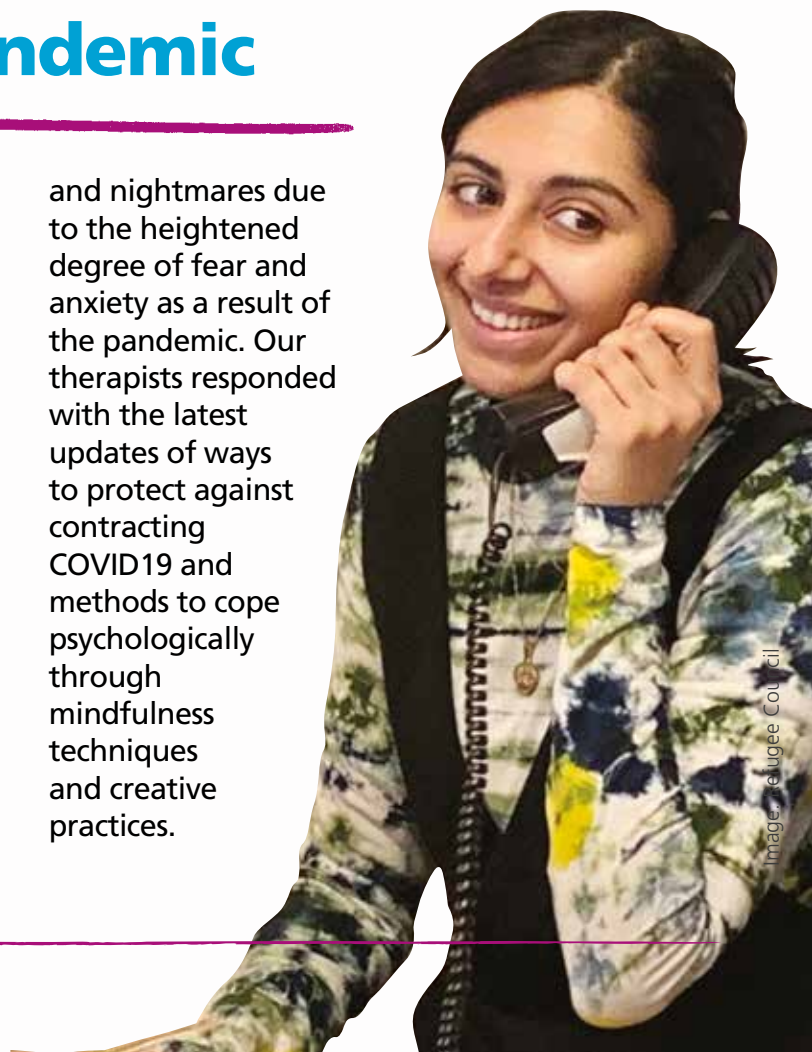
Reacting to the pandemic

Towards the end of our year Refugee Council, like the rest of the country, went into lockdown. We are proud that within a matter of days we were able to "open our doors" again for all of our core services through remote delivery of advice and support via the telephone, email or video platforms such as Zoom.

We saw a 20% increase in calls for urgent advice and support and in response we set up an information line with staff seconded from across the charity augmented by volunteers. Advisers prioritised those who were homeless and destitute, as well as people who did not have access to food or essential supplies as they were self-isolating.

We also saw a marked increase in demand for our mental health services especially amongst torture victims who were having flashbacks

and nightmares due to the heightened degree of fear and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. Our therapists responded with the latest updates of ways to protect against contracting COVID19 and methods to cope psychologically through mindfulness techniques and creative practices.



Our donors ARE AMAZING

Our impact is greater because of our supporters.
We could not do it without you. **Thank you!**

13,079 people and 134 organisations
donated the money that funded the services that helped
10,780 refugees and asylum seekers

DONORS ...

RESPONDED TO OUR APPEALS AND MADE REGULAR DONATIONS

"I live in a nice house. I have warmth, food and clothing. I can't change the world but I hope this donation gives a little respite to someone."

MADE DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF LOVED ONES

"I can't buy my Mum a birthday present any more as sadly she died. She cared deeply about creating a fair society for all and that those with refugee status were supported. Happy birthday, Mum."



Image: Mia Rolland-Bezern

ORGANISED THEIR OWN FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Mia held a clarinet recital raising money for Refugee Council in the process.

LEFT US GIFTS IN THEIR WILLS

"I'm leaving a gift to Refugee Council in my Will because I want to make sure they're still there to help people who have lost everything to rebuild their lives."

MADE REFUGEE COUNCIL THEIR BENEFITING CHARITY

Dame Emma Thompson and Greg Wise donated half the profits from their book Last Christmas

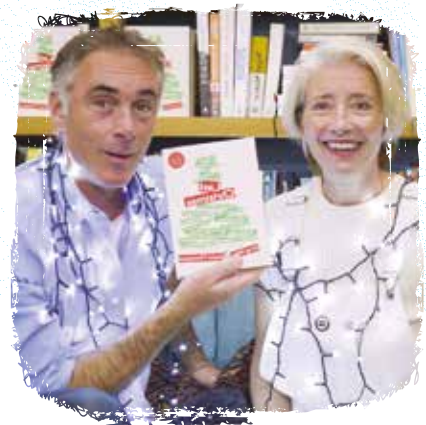
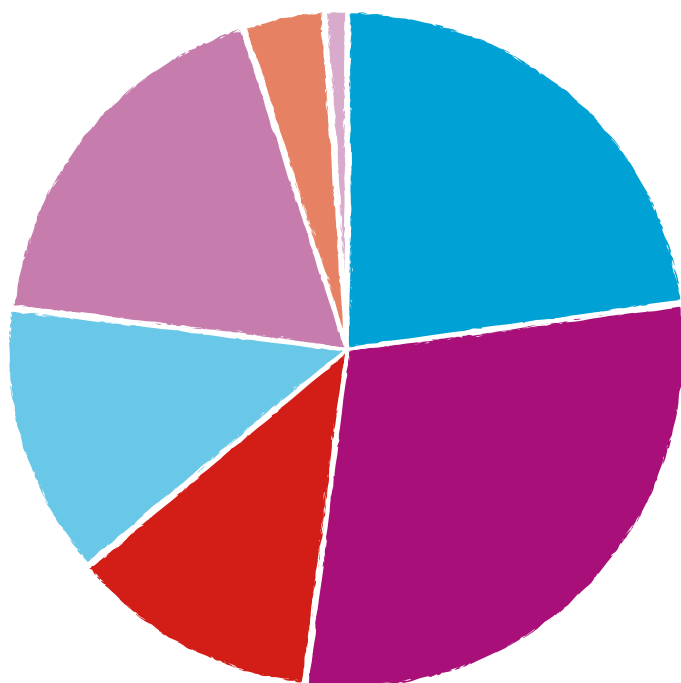


Image: Quercus Publishing

Finances

Thanks to the continuing generosity of our donors we raised £10,244,000

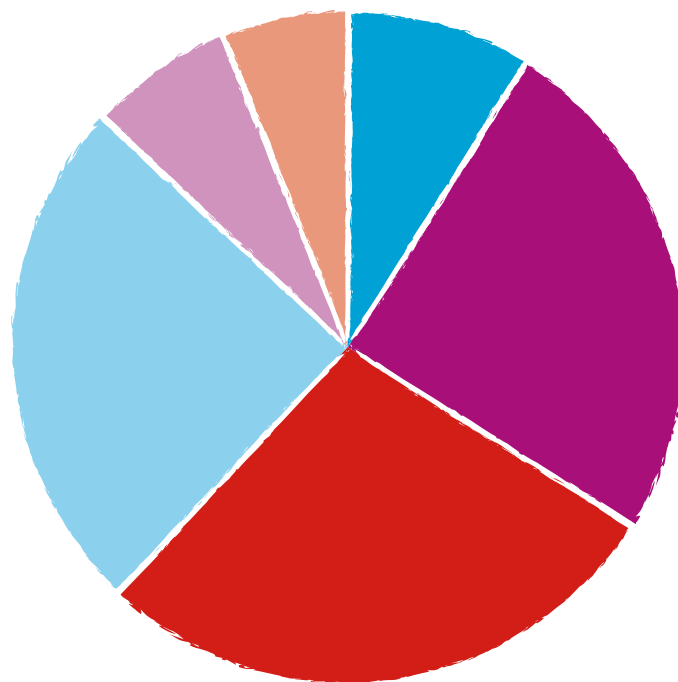


Last year, 35% of our funding was from individuals, trusts, foundations and companies

- 23%** Central government grants
- 29%** Local government grants
- 12%** European community grants
- 13%** Grants and donations from trusts, foundations and companies
- 18%** Donations and gifts from individuals
- 4%** Legacies
- 1%** Training

91% of our funding* is spent on our charitable work

- 9%** Fundraising
- 25%** Children's services
- 28%** Resettlement
- 25%** Integration (including crisis support, employment)
- 7%** Mental health and Destitution
- 6%** Advocacy & Engagement



The figures in the charts don't include rent on office space which we let to other charities. For our full accounts including further details and an explanation of these figures please visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports-and-accounts.

Contact us at

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Please keep in touch with our work on Facebook and Twitter

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk.

Cover images: Phil Taylor Photography

We take safeguarding extremely seriously so some of the names and photos in this Impact Report have been changed to protect identities.



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