

GOING FULL CIRCLE.



**The primary needs and experiences of
refugees and people seeking asylum
living in London**

JULY 2022





Forward from

KAHIYE ALIM

Welcome to the first comprehensive quantitative study report by the London Refugee Advocacy Forum that highlights the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London. The study covered key areas and issues facing them and analysed their significance on integration.

As chair of the forum's board, I am proud of the difference these grassroots organisations are making every day to the lives of the most vulnerable and under-served communities of London. This is more vital than ever coming out of the pandemic.

This report highlights their reach and the important work they are carrying out. The forum was established in 2019 with the assistance of the Refugee Council and the Cornerstone Fund. The forum has enabled us to bring together London's varied and diverse refugee communities. Until this forum, there had never been a coalition of refugee communities and no place to raise their collective voices and experiences. This is laudable amidst a climate of shrinking public services.

Refugee-led organisations are filling a vital gap of public service provision to vulnerable communities in need of support and advice in familiar and culturally sensitive environments. But the importance of their work is arguably hampered by their lack of capacity across many vital areas, such as research and data analysis, advocacy and policy engagement. The forum seeks to address these gaps and it is an illustration of the progress made so far that the collective effort of the various communities has produced this report.

I want to thank the founders of Cornerstone Fund for supporting us in this journey of shifting gears to deepen the collaboration of refugee-led community organisations and the voices we can lift up. We hope you will join us on this exciting journey.

Kahiye Alim, on behalf of the Board

Chair of the Board, London Refugee Advocacy Forum and
Director of the Council of Somali Organisations

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LONDON REFUGEE ADVOCACY FORUM

The London Refugee Advocacy Forum was established in 2019 by the Refugee Council with funding from the City of London Corporation's charitable funder, City Bridge Trust, as part of the Cornerstone funding programme. The forum was created for London-based refugee community organisations (RCOs) with the aim of improving outcomes for refugees and people seeking asylum in London, by delivering and amplifying a collective voice for these communities.

The forum represents refugees across the city from a variety of countries of origin who have made London their home for many decades. The majority of its members are refugee-led community organisations and the staff and volunteers operating them hold unique knowledge, skills and lived experiences of the issues that affect refugees and people seeking asylum.

The forum's members and many other refugee community organisations contribute to outcomes linked to social integration and objectives associated with public policies in areas such as English proficiency, health, employment, educational attainment, isolation, community and civic participation and volunteering.

Collectively, this diverse group of RCOs represents a large variety of demographic populations including twelve different nationalities, women, children and young people, LGBT groups. Their collective client base covers nearly all London boroughs. They are determined to utilise their own insight and evidence from their work with refugees and people seeking asylum by conducting advocacy work – and make the most of the clear benefits of collective action in influencing the policies and practices of decision-makers in London.

The Refugee Council and RCOs have a long history of interaction and mutual support, but the richness of their ability to collaborate in a way that enables RCOs to play a strong and visible role in the advocacy process has never been realised before. The creation of the London Refugee Advocacy Forum marked a highly important and significant step forward in positioning RCOs as true partners in strategic-level advocacy activities – including this research.

Acknowledgements

Report written by

KITTI BALAS and **TAITUM CAGGIANO**

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Finally, we're deeply grateful to all 681 refugees and people seeking asylum living in London who took the time to share their answers with us, helping bring such invaluable insights to light.

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Executive summary

This extensive quantitative study builds the big picture of the primary needs and concerns of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London. By touching on the key areas of needs, it provides us with the full panorama of barriers people face in several aspects of life, which consequently affect their successful integration in the UK community.

Particularly useful are the situations where participants point at different reasons for not being able to access certain services—such as English language lessons—as these are the most relevant to help service providers respond to those specific needs. This research therefore identifies ways in which current approaches could be strengthened, as well as which actors can play a role in doing so.

Understanding the main sources of information people use to gain information on ICT (Information and Communications Technology) training courses, housing or employment, is paramount in spotting any gaps that could be filled by NGOs, service providers, funders or the authorities.

Key findings

ENGLISH LANGUAGE:

- Generally, people seeking asylum have indicated their writing and speaking skills as being Very Poor, skewing their language confidence levels towards the negative end among all other surveyed groups
- Men rated their language proficiency much higher than women, with 31% choosing Average for their writing skills, compared to only 23% of women
- As main barriers, people seeking asylum flagged the need for advice on finding English training courses and the inability to read
- More women than men indicated the lack of childcare services preventing them from taking English lessons

ICT SKILLS:

- Refugees were more likely to be enrolled in an IT course than any other surveyed groups, however, the majority of them were not enrolled in any
- Over 56% of people seeking asylum were not taking a course at the time of the survey and they hadn't taken any in the past
- 67% of women reported not attending any IT course at the time of taking our survey
- Lack of childcare is likely to exacerbate the digital exclusion of migrant women too – they selected this option as the main hurdle for not signing up for a class, nearly three times more frequently than men did
- More refugees and British citizens chose IT courses run by local colleges over courses run by RCOs, with people seeking asylum varying their answers between RCOs and other charities

HEALTH:

- Only 9% of people seeking asylum classified their overall health as Excellent, with 40% rating it Good
- Men self-reported more positive scores than women, with 17% rating Excellent compared to only 13% of women
- 22% of people seeking asylum said they don't know whether they have an issue for which they receive treatment
- Out of the people seeking asylum who declared having experienced a mental issue, 54% reported they haven't accessed any sort of treatment – the figures looked just as problematic for refugees (47%)
- Over 10% of people seeking asylum said they don't know whether they're registered with a GP (General Practitioner)
- People seeking asylum had issues with accessing health services, ranging from problems with GP registration, language barriers to getting appointments
- The largest proportion of men who had issues accessing health services pointed at language barriers (14% compared to 22% women)

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19:

- The biggest barriers identified by people seeking asylum were related to limited access to information due to language barriers
- Refugees struggled mostly with getting services online or by phone

HOUSING:

- Approximately 17% of people seeking asylum are living rent-free, compared to only 8% and 3% of refugees and British citizens doing so
- No asylum seeker or refugee declared owning a place via a mortgage plan
- People seeking asylum struggled most with accommodation in poor conditions and not meeting basic needs of privacy
- New refugees were most at risk of homelessness
- British citizens were the largest group who maintained not having housing issues – that's 68%, nearly double the percentage of refugees and people seeking asylum combined
- People seeking asylum depend primarily on RCOs for information on housing

EMPLOYMENT:

- Over 59% of people seeking asylum surveyed were unemployed
- There were substantially more female respondents who were unemployed than male participants (47% compared to 38%)
- Out of the people seeking asylum who were unemployed, the vast majority had been in this situation between one to three years
- The largest proportion (37%) of people seeking asylum reported not having the right to work as the main barrier
- Refugees' main barriers were lack of qualifications and poor levels of English
- Out of the few employed people seeking asylum, many reported working zero hours as the main issue
- Most people seeking asylum got information on jobs from friends and RCOs
- Women tend to get their information from family (27%), slightly more than men do (24%)

LEGAL ADVICE AND INTEGRATION IN THE COMMUNITY:

- More people seeking asylum said it is Extremely Difficult to access legal advice services for immigration matters
- Slightly more women than men described integration as Very Difficult: 45% saying it's Very Difficult compared to 42% of men

COMMUNITY SAFETY:

- 15% of people seeking asylum declared experiencing domestic violence
- There were overwhelmingly more women who reported domestic violence (22%) compared to men (6%)
- Out of all surveyed groups, people seeking asylum were the largest group who said they experienced a hate crime
- People seeking asylum rated their trust in the police as Very Unconfident

ENGAGEMENT WITH RCOs:

- The majority of people seeking asylum (64%) participated in an activity run by a refugee charity before COVID-19
- 26% of surveyed male respondents never participated in community activities
- Women appeared to participate more often in these activities than men
- 44% of people seeking asylum never went to such activities during COVID-19
- Nearly half of all people seeking asylum listed immigration advice as their main service sought from RCOs
- 36% of all participants reported finding RCO services Very Useful

PRIORITISED NEEDS:

- People seeking asylum and refugees (both female and male participants) chose housing as their number one priority need
- Safety concerns and difficulties integrating within the community were listed as last priorities by all surveyed groups

Introduction

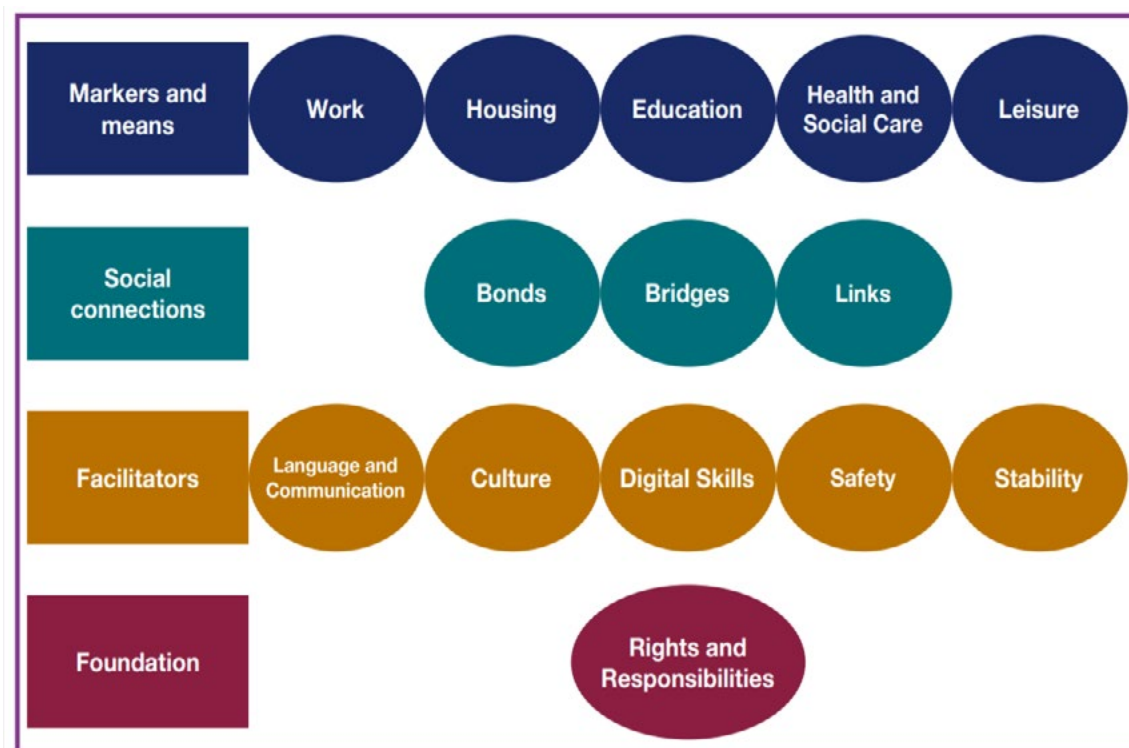
Not clearly defined in national and international law, refugee integration is a rather elusive concept, although economic factors are often used as main metrics of analysis.¹ Recent studies questioned this economically-centred approach, moving towards a recognition of integration as a multi-process taking place in differing domains.²

The ‘meaning’ of integration varies from state to state and changes over time according to “the interests, values and perspectives of the people concerned.”³ Consequently, this process is individualised and highly contextual, a spectrum including many actors and agencies.⁴

Integration from the UK’s perspective

Governments, policy-makers and academics have focused much of their work on identifying the main factors that could work as indicators of integration.

Relevant here is the Home Office’s 2019 Indicators of Integration Framework. These indexes are meant to help pin down the practicalities behind what contributes to individual and community integration – structured around 14 key domains, all central to integration.⁵



Indicators of the UK's Integration framework

1 Kaida, Lisa, Feng Hou and Max Stick, 'The Long-Term Economic Integration of Resettled Refugees in Canada: A Comparison of Privately Sponsored Refugees and Government Assisted Refugees' (2020 JEMS 46(9) 1687
2 Sarah Spencer and Katharine Charsley, "Reframing 'Integration': Acknowledging and Addressing Five Core Critiques" (2021) CMS 9(18) 1
3 Stephen Castles, Maja Korac, Ellie Vasta and Steven Vertovec, 'Integration: mapping the field' (2002)
4 Vaughan Robinson, 'Defining and measuring successful refugee integration' (1998)
5 Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019 third edition <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf>

As does the UK government, many scholars rightly argue that the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in host societies is a dynamic, multi-dimensional and gradual process. The factors that influence it—legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions and connectedness to the new space—are overlapping.⁶

In the UK, resettled refugees receive a lot of integration support whereas in-country refugees only have 28 days to transition from asylum support into the mainstream system.⁷ The country doesn't have a national integration and support strategy for them. After the last three national strategies issued in 2000, 2005 and 2009,⁸ the Government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper in 2018 followed by an 'Integrated Communities Action Plan' in 2019.⁹ The action plan makes reference to the needs of refugees and covers England.

The situation looks somewhat different in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- Scotland has its own comprehensive, rights-based strategy¹⁰
- Wales aspires to be a Nation of Sanctuary – with UNHCR's endorsement¹¹
- Northern Ireland puts the emphasis on making refugees feel safe in their communities¹²

To that extent, local authorities, non-governmental actors, service providers, the local community, refugees and people seeking asylum themselves must all work together for their successful integration as fully included members of the host society.¹³ In other words, "integration depends on everyone taking responsibility for their own contribution."¹⁴

6 A Kearns and E Whitely, 'Getting There? The Effects of Functional Factors, Time and Place on the Social Integration of Migrants', (2015) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41(13): 2105–2129

7 Citizens Advice, 'After you get refugee status' <www.citizensadvice.org.uk/immigration/after-you-get-refugee-status>

8 J Phillimore, 'Implementing Integration in the UK: Lessons for Integration Theory, Policy and Practice' <<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/sites/default/files/2018-06/ImplementingIntegrationintheUK.pdf>>

9 Integrated Communities Action Plan (2019)

10 New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022 <www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/New_Scots_2018_-_2022.pdf>

11 The Welsh Government Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (2019) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/nation-of-sanctuary-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-plan_0.pdf>

12 The Northern Ireland Executive Office, 'Draft Refugee Integration Strategy' (2021) <www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-refugee-integration-strategy>

13 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'The Integration of Refugees: A Discussion Paper' <www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/integration_discussion_paper_July_2014_EN.pdf>

14 Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019 third edition <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horri09.pdf>

Integration from Europe's perspective

The European Commission (EC) has implemented a new mechanism called 'EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion' covering 2021–2027. The plan includes a range of measures that incentivise and support member states on a national, regional and local level to promote refugee integration using concrete actions and clear guidance.¹⁵

In practice, some of these actions revolve around:

- Inclusive education and training (including recognition of qualifications)
- Employment opportunities and skills recognition
- Promoting access to and best practice on health services
- Access to affordable housing¹⁶

However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) assessments on integration barriers in EU countries reveal obstacles that encompass discrimination, societies' lack of understanding of refugees' situation, differing cultures and psychological traumas of asylum procedures, among others.¹⁷ Nando Sigona, Research Associate at Oxford Brookes University, reminds us of a pertinent quote from Nicholas Blake:¹⁸

"If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, then the highway to community harmonisation is littered with the debris of intergovernmental agreements."¹⁹

The Council of Europe distinguishes three elements in concepts of integration:

1. The link between the cultural aspects of the public and private domain (that is cultural assimilation and segregation, which differs from country to country)
2. The degree of inclusion/exclusion of immigrants in non-cultural aspects of the public domain: from residence rights, voting rights, language training, housing, education, labour market to social security
3. The individual's role in the integration process²⁰

Understanding the ways in which these dimensions affect migrants and how they're perceived can support the development of better tailored services and responses to the needs and priorities of the communities that depend on us.

Assessing the social integration of different migrant categories relies on the availability of data. But regrettably, all relevant statistics to date come from small-scale surveys, if they exist at all – which makes improvement opportunities difficult to pin down.

15 European Commission Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions' (2020) Brussels <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/eu-grid/eu-strategy_en>

16 'The EC reveals its new EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)' <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/ec-reveals-its-new-eu-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027_en>

17 UNHCR, 'Note on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union'

18 Nando Sigona, 'Refugee Integration(s): Policy and Practice in the European Union' (2005) Refugee Survey Quarterly (1020-4067) 24(4) 115

19 Nicholas Blake, 'The Dublin Convention and rights of asylum seekers in the European Union' (2001) in Elspeth Guild and Carol Harlow, Implementing Amsterdam – Immigration and Asylum rights in EC law, (Oxford, Hart)

20 Measurement and indicators of integration, 'Measurement and indicators of integration', <www.coe.int/t/dg3/migration/archives/documentation/Series_Community_Relations/Masurement_indicators_integration_en.pdf>

This report identifies the key barriers impacting the integration of refugees and people seeking asylum in London. In close collaboration with the members of the London Refugee Advocacy Forum, the Refugee Council has facilitated the implementation of one of the most substantial surveys in London that takes an all-inclusive approach towards the different needs and concerns of refugees and people seeking asylum living in the city.

The study aimed to measure the experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum in relation to a number of key areas of needs, considered to have a significant impact on their integration. Such focal points ranged from:

- English
- IT skills
- Health and mental health
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Housing
- Employment
- Immigration
- Community safety and participation

In order to spot potential differentiations between needs and concerns, we applied two filters across our analysis:

- The respondents' legal status in the UK: people seeking asylum (people awaiting a decision on their asylum application), refugees (people who have been granted refugee status), British citizens (people who hold British citizenship after being initially granted refugee status or any other asylum related permanent residence in the UK)
- Their gender identity: female and male

The results are designed to enable the members of the London Refugee Advocacy Forum (refugee-led community organisations and other small voluntary and community refugee-supporting organisations) to create a more accurate picture of the needs facing refugee communities across London. This may ultimately become a tool in their advocacy and influencing work.

The results will also help inform policy- and decision-makers, commissioners and funders, public service providers and other stakeholders, of the needs of refugee communities in London, the gaps in service provision and the challenges refugees and people seeking asylum face in accessing services. It'll help them make informed decisions based on a better understanding of refugees and people seeking asylum' experiences of living in London.

Methodology

Research for this report was commissioned in 2021 by the Refugee Council in collaboration with 19 members of the London Refugee Advocacy Forum. It is one of the latest, largest quantitative studies conducted to identify the primary issues facing people seeking asylum and refugee communities living in London.

We used hard data with a large number of participants—totalling 681—to answer 48 need-specific, predetermined questions, arranged in a digital survey shared online.

The questions were written in English and distributed to the RCO members of the London Refugee Advocacy Forum. They were in charge of selecting respondents from their client base, distributing the survey and collating the responses (averaging 35 completed surveys per member organisation).

RCOs are defined as organisations led mainly by people with lived experience of the UK immigration system and of refugee integration. They run services and activities for communities whose members include significant numbers of refugees and people seeking asylum. RCOs may define their communities by nationality, language or geographical area, while others serve specific groups such as refugee women, disabled or young refugees. Others focus on a specific need or service.

The forum members who conducted these surveys are grassroots organisations whose client base include significant numbers of refugees and people seeking asylum. The selection of participating RCOs was based on the following factors:

- Capacity to deliver
- Client base diversity
- Location
- Geographical spread of client groups

The collaborative nature of the research and the involvement of leaders of refugee community organisations who can speak the languages of surveyed clients removed the English language barriers normally associated with such work. Therefore, non-English speaking refugees and people seeking asylum were able to take part too. As such, the sample of 681 refugees and people seeking asylum surveyed does represent the views and experiences of a broad range of refugees living in London.

This survey does not, however, claim to be representative of all London's refugee communities. The vast majority of survey responses were collected online and this constituted a limitation – as only those with access to a computer and the confidence to participate in online surveys were able to take part. A small proportion of survey responses were collected through hard copies, in order to minimise this limitation. Also, due to Covid-19 restrictions, RCO leaders could only provide support to respondents through digital communications.

Demographics

I. LEGAL STATUS IN THE UK

This research targeted individual members of various refugee communities living in London. This group includes people who originally came to the UK to seek asylum, their dependents and members of their families. These individuals hold different legal statuses and, in this report, the term 'refugee' is used to refer to people who have been granted refugee status.

Out of the total number of surveyed groups, respondents reported:

- Holding British citizenship (31%)
- Having Indefinite Leave to Remain (25%)
- Having been granted refugee status (26%)
- Being an asylum claimant (9%)

The remaining individuals stated they were either appealing the Home Office decision, reapplying for asylum, a European citizen²¹ or undocumented

II. AGE GROUP AND GENDER

The largest proportion of respondents declared being between 35 and 44 years old, followed closely by those aged between 25 and 34. Most people seeking asylum ranged between 25 and 34 years old, while the largest proportion of the respondents with refugee status were aged between 35 and 44 years old. Most British citizens were in this age group too, with a higher percentage being over 55.

There was a near-equal split between respondents who identified as male or female, and this proportion remained unchanged for people seeking asylum, refugees and British citizens alike. The largest proportion of male and female participants situated themselves within the 35–44 age bracket, with more women than men being over 55 years old.

III. COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Respondents reported coming from a wide range of countries, preponderantly from the African continent and the Middle East: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Eritrea, Hong Kong, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Kosovo, Macau, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa.

The most frequently reported home country by asylum claimants was Ethiopia – and Somalia, Iran, DRC and Eritrea by refugees. More male participants maintained that their home country is Somalia and Afghanistan, whereas the largest proportion of women declared coming from Iran, Somalia and DRC.

IV. BOROUGH RESIDENCE IN LONDON

Compared to other boroughs, the largest proportion of participants indicated living in Enfield (9%) followed by Hammersmith and Fulham (8%), Brent and Barnet (7%) and Haringey and Merton (6%). More people seeking asylum reported living in Enfield (17%). The boroughs selected by most refugees were Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham and Haringey (9%). More British citizens reported living in Hammersmith and Fulham (11%).

- More male respondents reported living in Barnet (9%) compared to women (6%), Enfield (11% vs 8%) and Harrow (7% vs 3%)
- More women than men indicated living in Hackney (6% vs 4%), Hammersmith and Fulham (10% as opposed to 7%), Kingston upon Thames (3% vs 1%), Merton (7% compared to 6%), Tower Hamlets (6% compared to 3%) and Westminster (6% vs 4%)

V. TIME SPENT IN THE UK

The majority of participants declared having been in the UK for over five years (63%). Nearly all British citizens (98%) have been here for more than five years, with only 31% of people seeking asylum and 28% of refugees stating the same.

More people seeking asylum (37%) have been in the UK between one and two and a half years compared to refugees (23%). More refugees have lived in the country between two to five years (43%), as opposed to only 17% of people seeking asylum.

Concerning the length of stay in the UK, the percentages were similar for men and women, with most having lived in UK either for over five years or between two and five (20% of participants).

²¹ These individuals have been legally recognised as refugees in other European countries, acquired citizenship in those countries and then moved to London.

English language: confidence and training

Introduction

Host language proficiency is known to facilitate migrant access to local communities – it's a crucial enabler, powerful enough to eliminate a variety of stressors associated with not speaking it. By providing a sense of autonomy and achievement, the ability to speak and write in English can ultimately advance integration for refugees and people seeking asylum in the country.

Taking part in a community is difficult without speaking its language. This need spans across every aspect of people's lives: finding employment, forming families, overcoming loneliness and isolation, studying, opening businesses and accessing the right health and welfare assistance.²²

Furthermore, the goal is not necessary to gain an excellent command of English as even intermediate fluency can significantly increase the likelihood of migrants getting jobs.²³ Higher language skills can facilitate community cohesions, leading to closer contact with other communities.²⁴

Despite this, the situation on the ground doesn't look promising. For example, in 2017, around 80% of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in England were facing waiting lists of up to 1,000 students – with many refugees being forced to wait more than a year to access classes.²⁵

Naturally then, understanding how confident refugees and people seeking asylum are in using English in their daily lives, as well as exploring the ways they access language training can help elucidate the gaps in English support available in London. To localise these gaps, our survey focused on:

- Exploring the respondents' command of English in both speaking and writing
- Their participation in English language training (such as ESOL)
- Potential reasons why they haven't or couldn't attend language classes
- The type of organisations that provided them with courses, if applicable
- And students' level of English attained after these lessons

22 T Salvo and A Williams, 'If I speak English, what am I? I am full man, me': Emotional Impact and barriers for refugees and asylum seekers learning English' (2017) *Transcultural Psychiatry* 54(5-6) 734

E Degler and T Liebig, 'Finding their way. Labour market integration of refugees in Germany' (2017) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development <www.oecd.org/els/mig/Finding-their-Way-Germany.pdf>

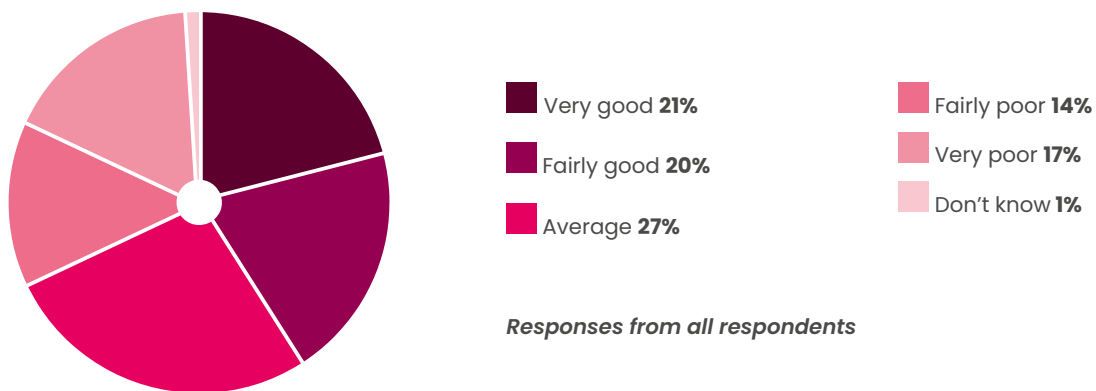
23 E Degler and T Liebig, 'Finding their way. Labour market integration of refugees in Germany' (2017) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development <www.oecd.org/els/mig/Finding-their-Way-Germany.pdf>

24 L Tip, R Brown, L Morrice, M Collyer and M Easterbrook, 'Improving refugee well-being with better language skills and more intergroup contact' (2018) *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 10(2) 144

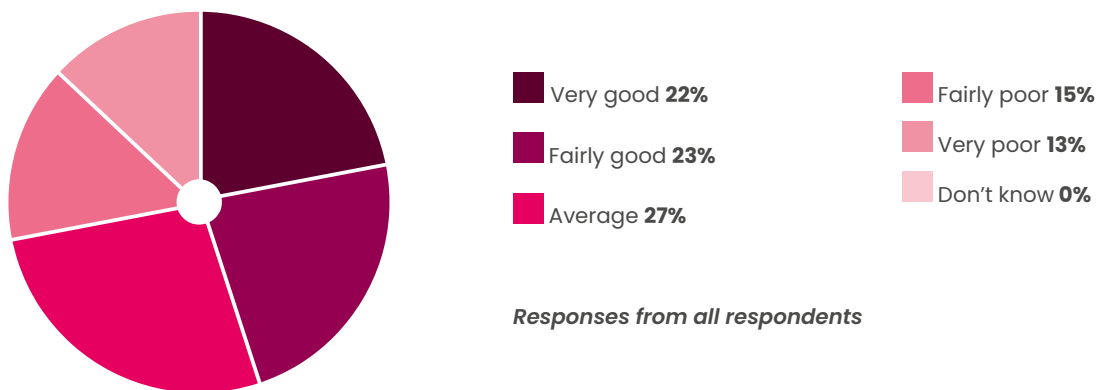
25 Refugee Action, 'Locked out of Learning: A snapshot of ESOL provision in England' (2017) <www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Locked_out_of_learning_briefing_paper_February_2017.pdf>

Confidence in the English language

Q How good are you at writing in English?
For example, writing letters or notes or filling in application forms.



Q How good are you at speaking English?
For example, having a conversation on the telephone or talking to a professional such as a teacher or a doctor?



When all respondents were considered, regardless of their legal status or gender, the biggest group rated their English language speaking and writing skills as Average – with approximately 27% of participants giving the same rating for each individual skill.

The next highest scores for confidence levels were Very Good (21%) and Fairly Good (14%) for writing. For speaking, however, Fairly Good was the next highest rating (23%), with Fairly Poor following behind (15%).

On a closer look, when separate categories were examined, differences in the data emerged. For example, people seeking asylum have mostly rated their writing and speaking skills as Very Poor (32% and 27% respectively), skewing their language confidence levels towards the negative end. Refugees rated marginally more positively on their writing and speaking skills, with 28% choosing Average.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, British citizens showed the highest confidence in English, with up to 39% rating their writing and speaking abilities Very Good.

The biggest disparity between respondents' scores was evident when we looked at the answers split between male and female participants. Men rated their language proficiency much higher than women, with 31% choosing Average compared to only 23% of women on their writing skills. This was also evident in the ratings of Very Poor: 21% of women chose this option compared to only 14% of men.

With regard to speaking abilities, male respondents were also surer of their skills: 24% rating it Very Good, as opposed to 18% of women selecting the same indicator. Overall, men classified their English skill set more positively than women on each given metric.

Access to English language training

Generally, only half of all respondents have taken an English language training course – with 53% stating they have completed, are currently taking, or have started but haven't yet finished a course. This ratio remained relatively stable across different categories of immigration statuses. The exceptions were those with refugee status, 34% of whom have completed at least one course, compared to only 10% of the people seeking asylum we surveyed.

The data revealed that slightly more women are currently taking an English language course than men (17% as opposed to 14%). However, more men have already completed at least one course.

Consequently, nearly half of respondents haven't accessed English language training in the UK at all. With long waits for host language education impacting refugees and people seeking asylum employability²⁶ and levels of isolation,²⁷ as well as playing a role in the persistence of their mental health issues,²⁸ these results are highly concerning.

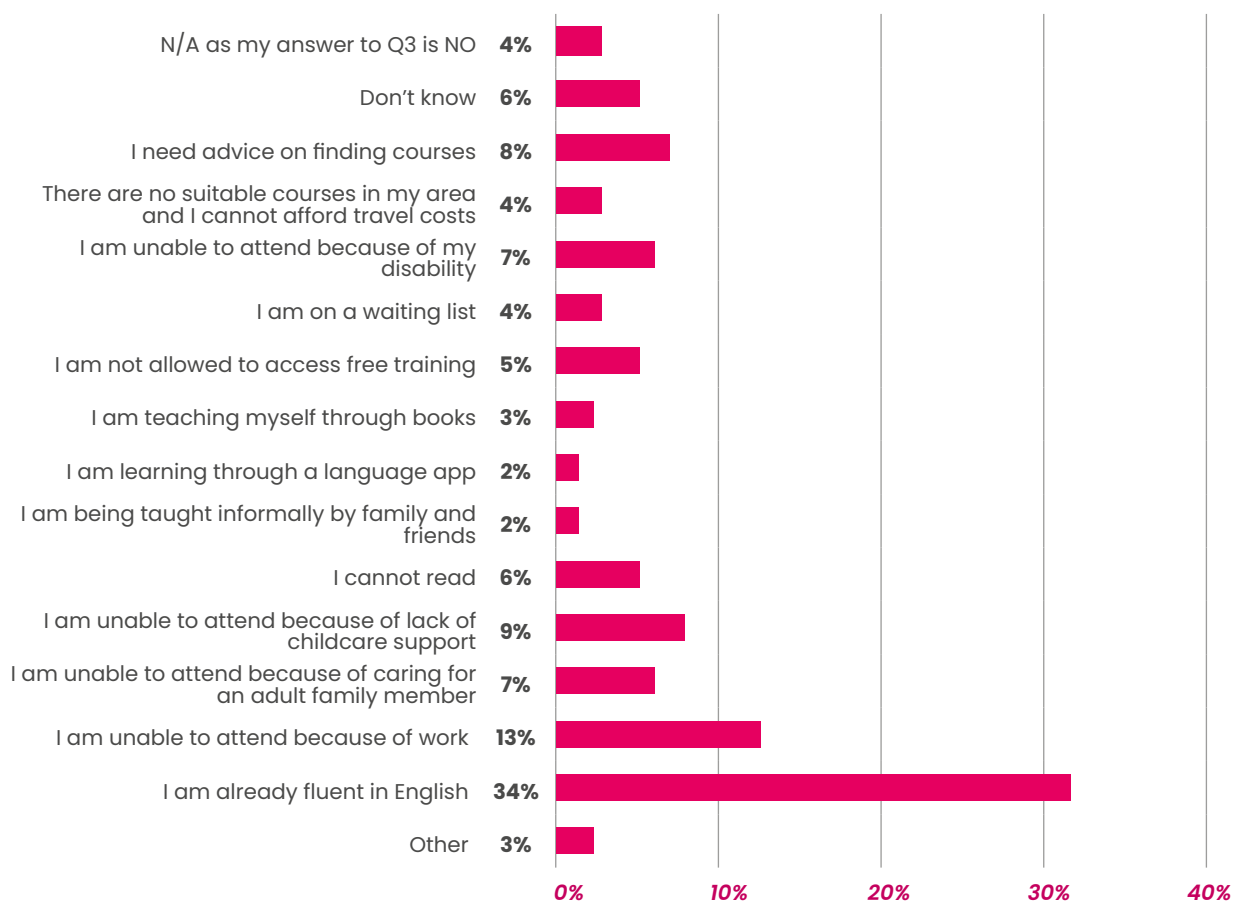
26 J Allsopp, N Sigona and J Phillimore, 'Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK; an evidence and policy review' (2014) IRIS Working Paper Series 1/2014 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2014/working-paper-series/IRIS-WP-1-2014.pdf>

27 P Aspinall and C Watters, 'Refugees and asylum seekers: A review from an equality and human rights perspective' (2010) University of Kent, Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series. <www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/refugees_and_asylum_seekers_research_report.pdf>

28 T Salvo and A Williams, 'If I speak English, what am I? I am full man, me': Emotional Impact and barriers for refugees and asylum seekers learning English' (2017) *Transcultural Psychiatry* 54(5-6) 734

Reasons for non-attendance of English courses

Q Why have you not taken any English language training course in the UK?



Responses from all respondents

For respondents who stated that they haven't taken a course yet, the most commonly chosen reason for non-attendance was that they were already fluent (34%), had work commitments which didn't allow for extracurricular activities (13%) and childcare constraints (9%).

These figures fluctuated when results were broken down by category. For instance, only 19% of people seeking asylum said they are fluent in English, with a much higher percentage of the refugees noting the same (33%).

The obstacles impeding these groups to access English training courses vary: people seeking asylum flagged the need for advice on finding such courses and the inability to read as main barrier, while a significant proportion of refugees have also identified lack of advice in this regard, caring for an adult family member or for children was also an overriding cause.

Additionally, more female than male respondents indicated the lack of childcare services preventing them from taking English lessons. Existing literature has previously confirmed this gendered obstacle as hindering women's attendance of English and other available courses.²⁹ Research has shown that barriers to obtaining education resources are "particularly felt by women, older refugees and people seeking asylum".³⁰

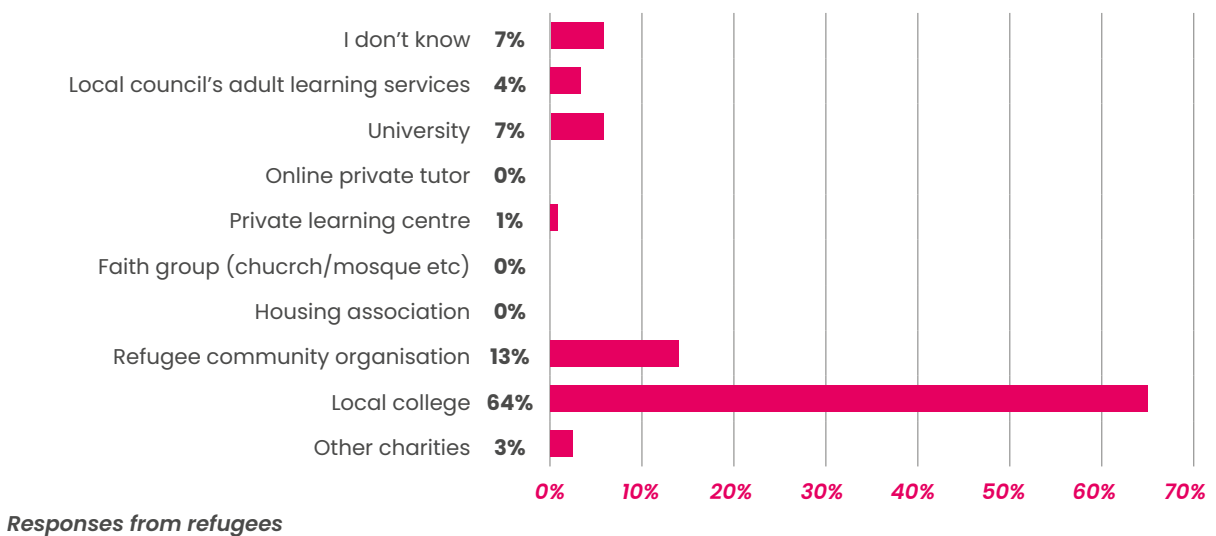
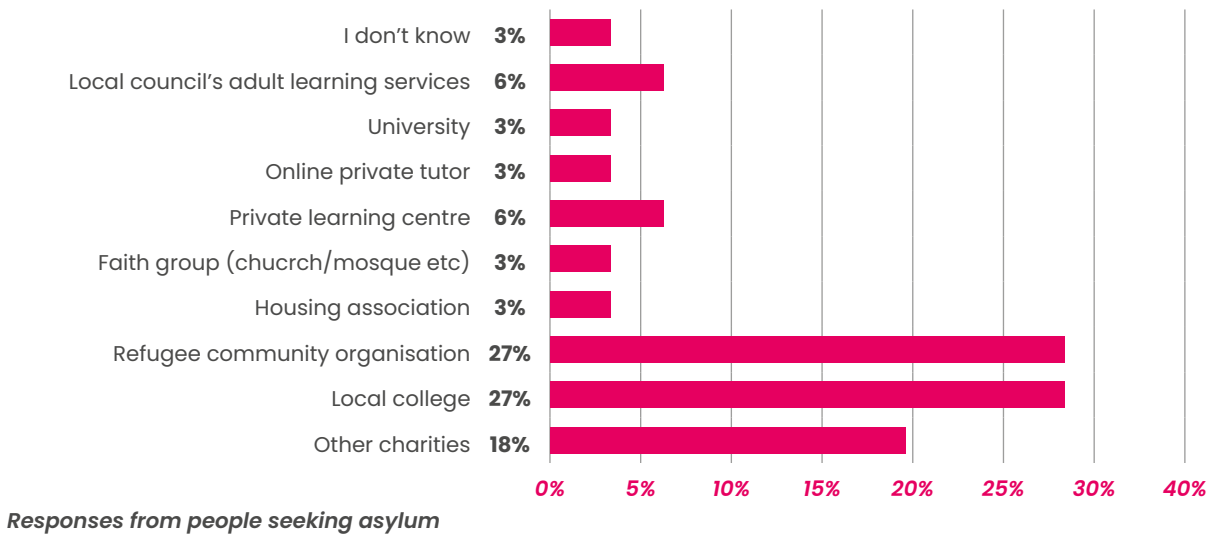
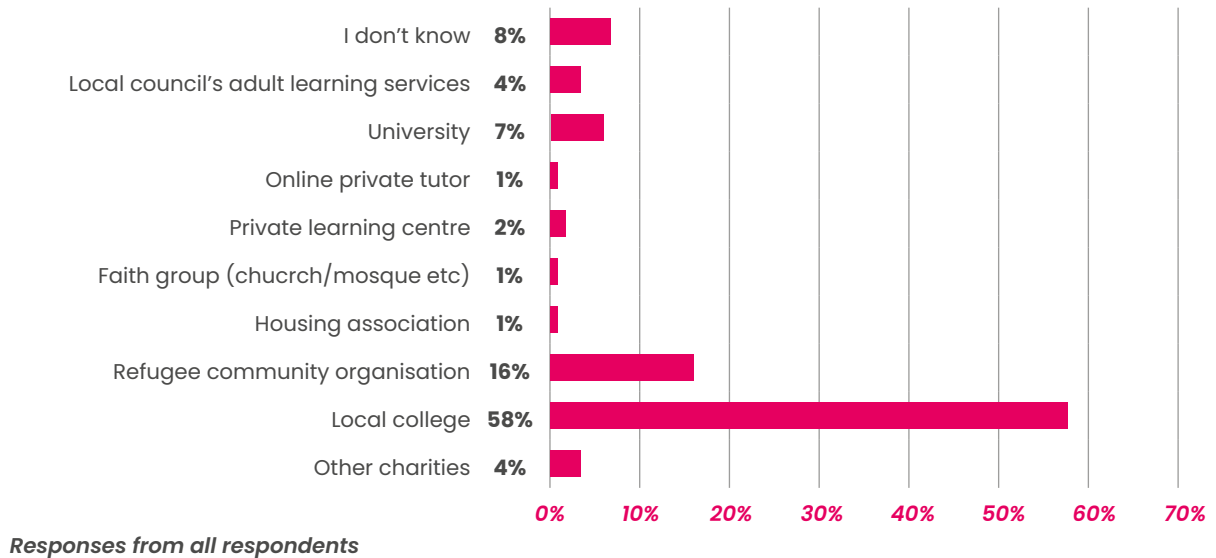
British citizens have refrained from stating any prevalent obstacles in accessing courses, potentially because they've most probably reached a level of English fluency. What's more, more than half of them said they already attained it.

29 Refugee Action, 'Locked out of Learning: A snapshot of ESOL provision in England' (2017) <www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Locked_out_of_learning_briefing_paper_February_2017.pdf>

30 ibid note 9 (Aspinall)

Main providers of English courses attended by refugees and people seeking asylum

Q If you have taken at least one English language training course in the UK, who was running the English course(s) you attended?



For individuals reporting having taken an English training class, the providers most notably mentioned were local colleges and RCOs. An overwhelming 64% of all refugees have taken a course at a local college, compared to only 27% of people seeking asylum – this could be directly attributed to the few avenues available for information on English training providers to those in the process of seeking asylum. It could also be due to the fact that people seeking asylum aren't eligible for government-funded courses.

Consequently, people seeking asylum primarily took classes offered by RCOs and other charities, more so than any other group. Compared to refugees and those with British citizenship, more people seeking asylum indicated private learning centres and services offered by local councils among the providers.

Based on the results, it appears that more female respondents tend to get their English training from local colleges than men (62% vs 55%), or from the RCOs organising them (18% vs 15%).

English proficiency scores

For those who undertook or are currently attending English classes, the data showed a variety of levels obtained. Overall, there were little fluctuations between ESOL Pre-entry, Entry 1, Entry 3 and Level 2 and GCSE English,³¹ with approximately 12% of respondents choosing one or the other. The highest level attained by people seeking asylum was ESOL Entry 1, disproportionately different from all other legal status groups. Most refugees indicated being at ESOL Level 2.

More than half of all male respondents (62%) were at an ESOL level, with the majority finding themselves at Pre-Entry – 76% of female respondents identified themselves on the same levels.

31 GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education

ICT skills

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen an increased reliance on the internet and technology to complete everyday tasks, which has highlighted the need for digital skills and IT classes.³² From ordering lateral flow diagnostic tests, working, to attending online classes, ICT skills have become a prerequisite to accessing services, education, entertainment. In response to this, organisations such as Action West London³³ and CodeYourFuture³⁴ have started offering digital skills support to refugees and people seeking asylum.³⁵

The high costs of internet data and digital devices required to access online services and learning—as well as to digitally connect with loved ones during lockdowns—have exacerbated the digital inequalities faced by refugees and people seeking asylum who are already experiencing poverty. People have different needs and situations, which means that they are facing these challenges differently. For instance, families with school-aged children might need digital devices more to access online learning, whereas those seeking asylum could depend on them to meet their social needs and keep abreast with their asylum case.³⁶

To get a better understanding of the state of digital inclusion of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London, this survey gauged respondents' ICT confidence in tasks such as:

- Writing emails, filling out online application forms or searching for information on the internet
- People's access to ICT training
- Reasons for not signing up to courses, if applicable
- The organisations running their ICT classes, for those who attended them

32 King's College London, 'Supporting Refugees with the Learning Station Project' (2020) <www.kcl.ac.uk/supporting-refugees-with-the-learning-station-project>

33 Action West London <<https://actionwestlondon.org.uk/>>

34 CodeYourFuture <www.codeyourfuture.io/>

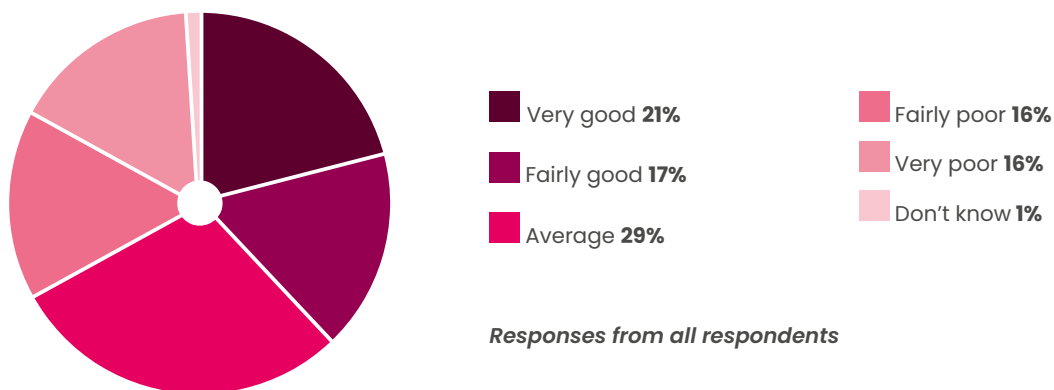
35 K Gallant, 'Action West London – digital skills for refugees' (2019) <www.onedigitaluk.com/latest-news/2019/07/15/action-west-london-digital-skills-for-refugees/>

36 E Maw, 'Digital Inclusion with Refugee Action' <www.ragp.org.uk/stories/digital-inclusion-with-refugee-action>

Confidence in using ICT

Q How good are you at using a computer when you need to?

For example, writing letters or documents, filling in online application forms (welfare benefits, school admission) or looking for information on the internet.



When all categories were examined in conjunction, the survey results didn't reflect a strong trend, neither positively nor negatively, in respondents' confidence in their ICT performance. The most perceptible self-reported ICT confidence level was Average, with 29% of all participants choosing this option – and 16% selecting Very Poor.

We noticed differentiations in individuals' assessments of their ICT confidence after applying the legal status filter. For example, people seeking asylum tend to feel less sure of their ability to use these technologies, with 22% choosing Very Poor or Fairly Poor – all the while, only 17% rated themselves as Fairly Good in utilising them.

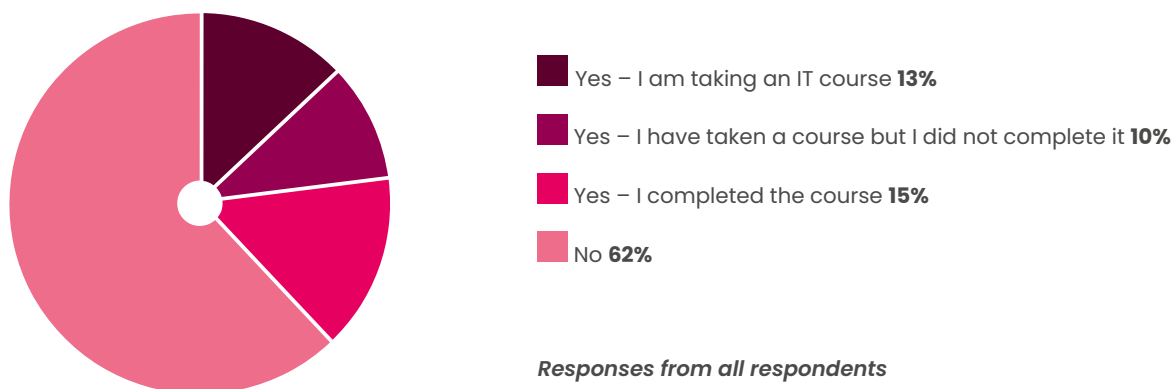
Refugees seemed more confident in their ICT skills than people seeking asylum, as 16% classified theirs as Excellent compared to 8% of the people seeking asylum.

British citizens were much more confident in rating their skills Very Good (36%) than any other group. In terms of gender analysis, men rated theirs considerably higher than women (24% compared to only 17% opting Very Good). When looking at the Fairly Poor and Very Poor metrics, women were leading the highest scores for both responses.

Access to ICT training

The vast majority of respondents (62%) haven't taken an IT training course. There were a number of reasons for this and they varied greatly: 24% of all participants attributed this to their sufficiently good ICT skills, 13% reported work barriers and 10% stated they needed advice on how or where to find these types of classes.

Q Have you taken part in any IT training course (formal or informal)?



When broken down by legal status, refugees were more likely to be enrolled in an IT course than any other category (18%). However, the majority of them still weren't enrolled in any. The same goes for people seeking asylum, with 56% not taking a course at the moment, or in the past.

A very high percentage of the female respondents (67%) said they aren't attending any IT course at the time of taking our survey. The men's percentage was lower (but still high overall), with only 58% responding the same.

The reported obstacles to attending training courses fluctuate based on gender identity and legal status. People seeking asylum reported illiteracy among the major hindrances to taking an IT training course, whereas refugees mentioned work commitments and the insufficient information on these courses within their community.

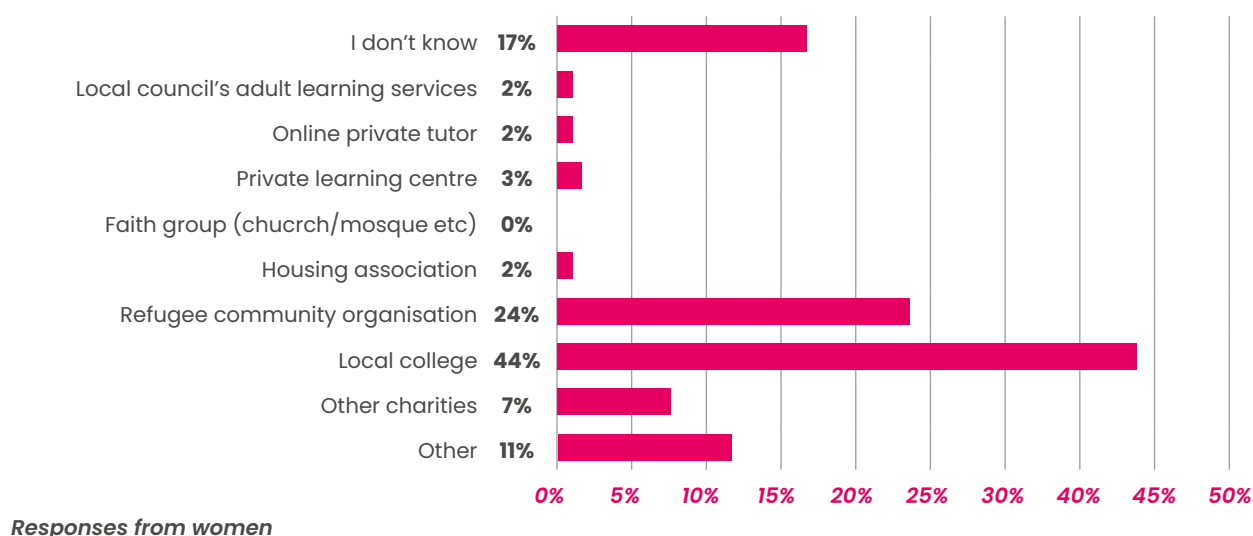
As we've seen above with regard to accessing English courses, lack of childcare is likely to be exacerbating the digital exclusion of refugee women too. Women selected this option as the main hurdle for not signing up for a course, visibly more frequently than men (13% compared to only 5%).

Main providers of ICT courses attended by refugees and people seeking asylum

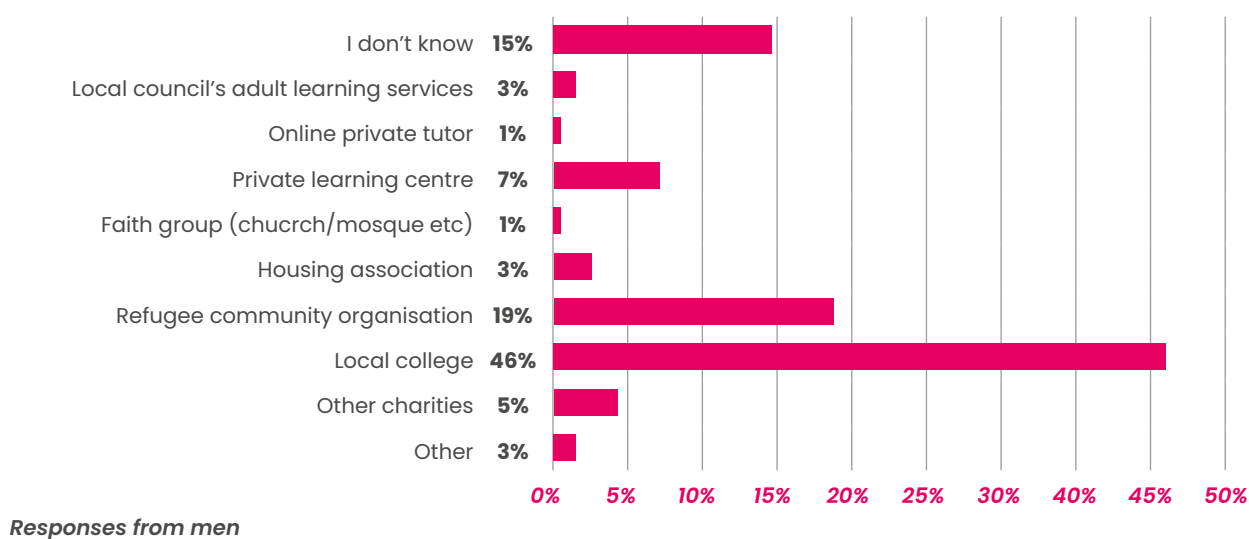
Over half of all respondents who attended IT courses reported that it was through local colleges or RCOs that they managed to access these. It was more refugees and British citizens who chose local colleges over RCOs, with people seeking asylum varying their answers between RCOs and other charities. Out of all three, it was people seeking asylum who took classes provided by a faith group (here we included churches, mosques, etc).

Women were more likely to go to RCOs than men (24% compared to 19%), and men were more likely to go to a private learning centre than women (7% compared to 3%).

Q If you have taken at least one IT training course in the UK, who was running the IT training course(s) you attended?



Responses from women



Responses from men

Health

Introduction

The majority of refugees and people seeking asylum arriving in the UK come with pre-existing health problems, often strongly connected to their reasons for fleeing: “war, imprisonment, genocide, physical and sexual violence, witnessing violence to others, traumatic bereavement, starvation, homelessness, higher risk of diseases that have increased prevalence in the country of origin.”³⁷

This wide range of experience affects their health and nutritional state in a variety of ways, demonstrating that people seeking asylum and those receiving it are not a homogeneous population. They come from different countries and cultures,³⁸ often with untreated communicable diseases, poorly controlled chronic conditions, maternity care, mental health and specialist support needs.³⁹

These are heightened by the poverty individuals experience upon arrival. Insufficient diets, the inability to afford basic health and hygiene products (such as over-the-counter medication, cleaning products, toiletries, sanitary towels, nappies)⁴⁰ and the distance from health clinics are among the barriers that can severely affect the physical and mental health of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK.

Several studies have confirmed that disabled refugees and people seeking asylum also face barriers to healthcare such as linguistic challenges, mobility issues, cultural differences and lack of knowledge.⁴¹ A 2019 qualitative study confirms this. It shows that refugees and people seeking asylum find primary care services difficult to navigate and negotiate due to language barriers, inadequate interpretation services, lack of awareness of the structure and function of the NHS (National Health Service), prescription fees and the high cost of transport to appointments.⁴²

To make matters worse, some refugees and people seeking asylum have also reported being ignored and overlooked by UK healthcare staff⁴³ – professionals that aren’t always aware of the healthcare entitlements of refugees and people seeking asylum.⁴⁴ Additionally, scholars have highlighted the tendency of the healthcare staff to overestimate the language proficiency of immigrant patients and opt not to use interpreters as a result.⁴⁵

With health being a somewhat neglected indicator of integration, it’s important to assess and highlight its importance. Studies have shown that pre- and post- migration experiences will significantly affect people’s health. As a result, poor health can increase the risk of social exclusion, enacting high walls to people seeking asylum’ and refugees’ participation in society.⁴⁶

Considering all this, our survey sought to better understand respondents’:

- Physical and mental health needs
- Ability to access healthcare when they need it

37 J Allsopp, N Sigona and J Phillimore, ‘Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK; an evidence and policy review’ (2014) IRIS Working Paper Series 1/2014 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2014/working-paper-series/IRIS-WP-1-2014.pdf>

38 Angela Burnett and Michael Peel, ‘Health needs of asylum seekers and refugees’ (2001) <www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1119741/>

39 The British Medical Association, ‘BMA refugee and asylum seeker health resource’ (2018) <www.bma.org.uk/media/1838/bma-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-health-resource-june-19.pdf>

40 J Allsopp, N Sigona and J Phillimore, ‘Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK; an evidence and policy review’ (2014) IRIS Working Paper Series 1/2014 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2014/working-paper-series/IRIS-WP-1-2014.pdf>

41 *ibid* note 19 (Allsopp).

42 Cara Kang, Louise Tomkow and Rebecca Farrington, ‘Access to primary health care for asylum seekers and refugees: a qualitative study of service user experiences in the UK’ (2019) <<https://bjgp.org/content/69/685/e537>>

43 P Dwyer, ‘Integration? The perceptions and experiences in Yorkshire and the Humber’ (2008) Yorkshire & Humber Regional Migration Partnership <www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/file/PolicyandResearch/YHRMP_Reports/YH_RefugeeFocusGroups_Nov08.pdf>

44 *ibid* note 19 (Allsopp).

45 T Salvo and A Williams, ‘If I speak English, what am I? I am full man, me’’: Emotional Impact and barriers for refugees and asylum seekers learning English’ (2017) *Transcultural Psychiatry* 54(5-6) 734

46 W Wilson, ‘When work disappears: new implications for race and urban poverty in the Global Economy’ (1998) CASE paper 17 London

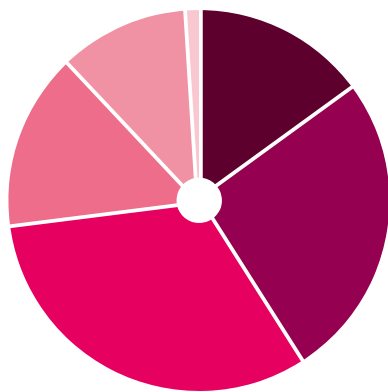
General health status

Just over 15% of all our respondents indicated Excellent when describing their overall health, with 26% of those surveyed saying it's Very Good and 32% rating it merely as Good.

When we zoomed in more, we noticed that the tables turned to people seeking asylum' detriment. Only 10% of them classified their overall health as Excellent, with the vast majority saying it's Good (39%) and only 27% of them reporting it as Fair.

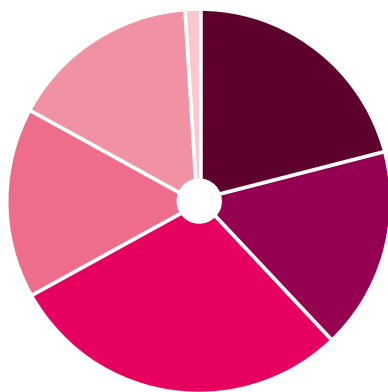
As for refugees, the numbers were slightly more positive: 31% rated their health as Very Good and 14% marked it as Fair. The situation looked brighter in the case of British citizens who felt their health was Excellent (22%) or Very Good and Good (31%)

Q In general, how would you rate your overall health?



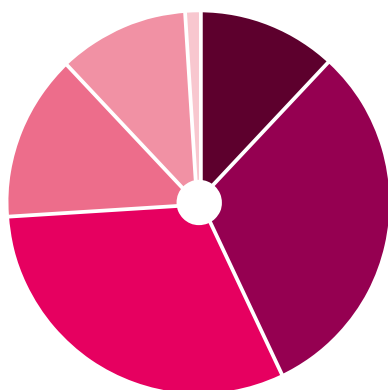
- Excellent **15%**
- Very good **26%**
- Good **32%**
- Fair **15%**
- Poor **11%**
- Don't know **1%**

Responses from all respondents



- Excellent **10%**
- Very good **12%**
- Good **39%**
- Fair **27%**
- Poor **9%**
- Don't know **3%**

Responses from people seeking asylum



- Excellent **12%**
- Very good **31%**
- Good **31%**
- Fair **14%**
- Poor **11%**
- Don't know **1%**

Responses from refugees

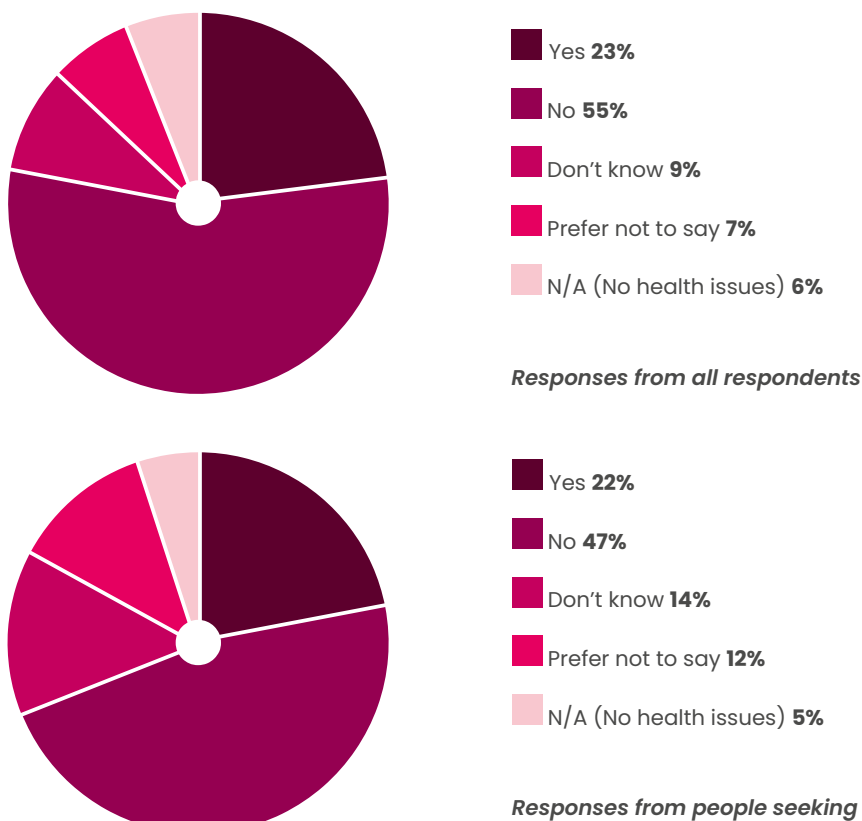
Men self-reported more positive scores than women, with 17% rating Excellent compared to only 13% of women. Interestingly, there was a close-to equal proportion of male and female participants who rated theirs as Good (33%) and Poor (11%).

While 25% of all individuals answered that they currently receive some sort of advice, information or treatment for at least one health issue, 60% reported they don't. It's worth noting that nearly 10% of respondents didn't know the answer to this question – from our data, it's unclear whether participants weren't aware of the existence of a health-related issue or whether it was that they don't receive any information or treatment for it (for example, if there's someone else in their network who takes care of this for them, such as a carer).

We saw similar results when studying different legal statuses and genders. The one peculiarity that stood out was in the case of people seeking asylum, 22% of whom said they don't know if they have an issue for which they receive treatment. This percentage was 9% higher than for all other groups. More women had an issue for which they received treatment than men (30% compared to 21%).

Mental health

Q Have you ever personally experienced a mental health problem?
(for example anxiety or depression)



A multitude of factors can affect the mental health and well-being of people seeking asylum and refugees. Refugees may show symptoms of depression and anxiety, panic attacks, agoraphobia, problems with memory and concentration.⁴⁷

47 Angela Burnett and Michael Peel, 'Health needs of asylum seekers and refugees' (2001) <www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1119741>

The signs aren't always immediately clear – nor is the need for counselling, which is a Western-orientated concept that might be unfamiliar to those “not accustomed to discussing their intimate feelings with a stranger outside the close family circle.”⁴⁸

Out of all participants, 23% responded affirmatively when asked whether they've experienced mental health problems such as anxiety or depression, with 55% saying they didn't. It's worth mentioning here that 9% of the respondents didn't know whether they've experienced this at all.

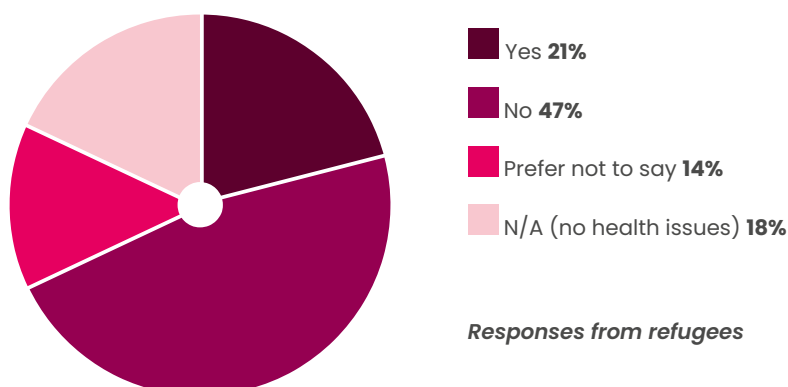
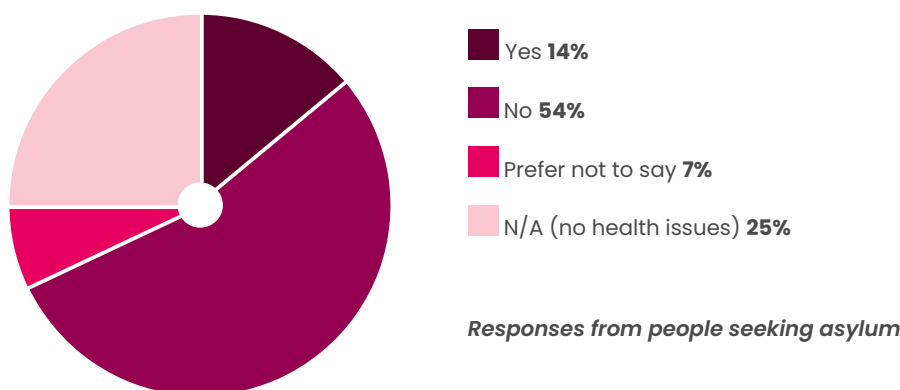
People seeking asylum are more likely to report mental health problems compared to other migrants,⁴⁹ which places them “among the highest risk categories for suicide in the UK.”⁵⁰ As part of our survey, just under a half of people seeking asylum declared they haven't experienced any mental health problems, with 12% preferring not to say.

The percentage of those who haven't experienced this was higher among refugees (60%), with only 5% preferring not to say. Out of all individuals who said they're struggling with mental health issues, 7% more were women than men (27% compared to 20%).

Just under half of all those who declared having experienced a mental health problem reported not having accessed therapy or specialist treatment to care for it, with only 28% responding they did. Out of all respondents who are people seeking asylum, 54% reported that they haven't accessed any sort of treatment. The figures looked just as problematic for refugees: 47%.

More men (47%) declared they haven't accessed treatment compared to women (42%).

Q If you have personally experienced a mental health problem, have you had access to therapy or treatment from a specialist?



48 D Summerfield, 'Addressing human response to war and atrocity' in: R Kleber, C Figley, B Gersons, Beyond trauma (New York: Plenum, 1995)

49 Z Kone, I Ruiz and C Vargas-Silva, 'Refugees and the UK Labour Market.' (2019) Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at University of Oxford <www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ECONREF-Refugees-and-the-UK-Labour-Market-report.pdf>

50 J Allsopp, N Sigona and J Phillimore, 'Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK; an evidence and policy review' (2014) IRIS Working Paper Series 1/2014 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/>

Access to healthcare

Refugees and people seeking asylum with an active immigration case or appeal are entitled to free NHS healthcare in the UK, with access to primary and secondary care services.⁵¹

Nearly all (86%) respondents said they're currently registered with a family doctor. The numbers shifted somewhat when we looked at different legal statuses. For example, out of all people seeking asylum, 72% reported that they are registered, compared to 88% of the refugees and 96% of British citizens. Curiously, over 10% of people seeking asylum said they don't know whether they are registered. Slightly more women were registered with the GP compared to men: 7% vs 10%.

About 17% of all participants pointed at language barriers and difficulties to get an appointment as main issues preventing them from accessing health services, although overall 65% were satisfied with this service.

When more filters were applied, we saw that people seeking asylum had issues with accessing health services including: problems with GP registration (10%), language barriers (19%), getting appointments (20%) and fears of having their details shared (14%). Approximately 9% also said they can't access health services because of religious beliefs. The highest percentage of those who reported fearing that their contact details will be passed on to the Home Office was among people seeking asylum (14% compared to 4% out of all other legal statuses).

The majority of refugees responded that they were having difficulties getting an appointment with the GP. But the language barrier obstacle was still high for this group too, -approximately 17%. Out of all British citizens, an overwhelming 83% reported as not having any issues accessing these services. The same barriers reported by the other categories appeared here too, though in much smaller percentages.

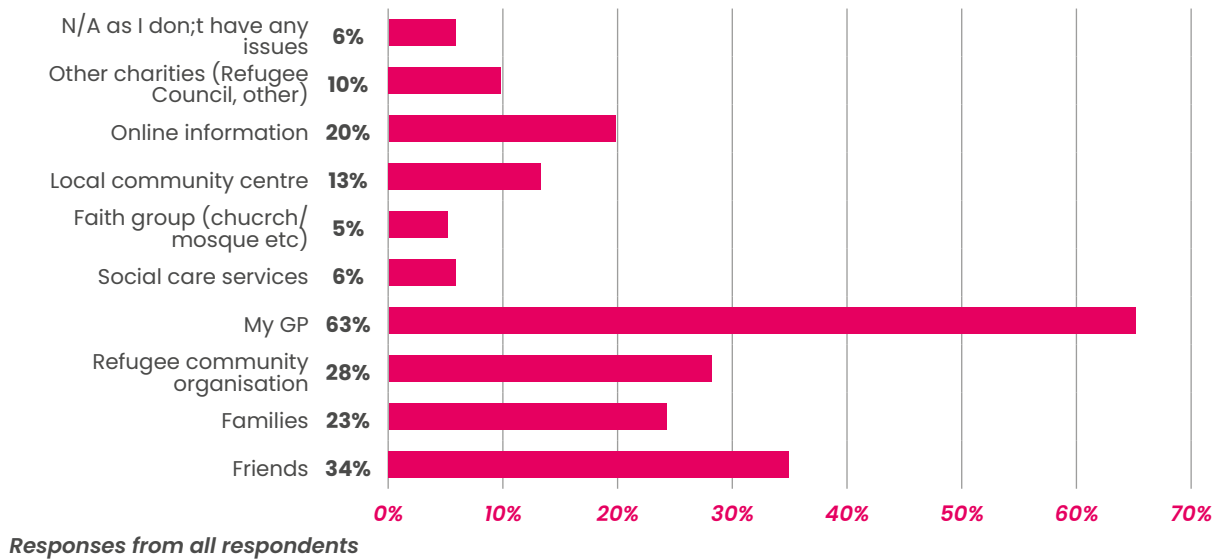
The majority of men who had issues accessing health services pointed at language barriers (14% compared to 22% women) and getting appointments (17% of both female and male respondents declared the same).

iris/2014/working-paper-series/IRIS-WP-1-2014.pdf

51 The British Medical Association, 'BMA refugee and asylum seeker health resource' (2018) <www.bma.org.uk/media/1838/bma-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-health-resource-june-19.pdf>

Main sources of information

Q What are your sources of information for health issues?



The main sources of information for health issues were directed at GPs (with 63%) – RCOs (28%), followed closely by friends (34%), families (23%) and online sources (20%). The remaining options were other charities (10%), local community centres (12%), social care services (5%) and faith groups (4%).

People seeking asylum reported that they get their information mostly from their GP (44% compared to 62% of refugees and 71% of British citizens), friends (37% compared to a lower 28% of refugees and 29% of the citizens) – and 26% do so from online sources (compared to just 14% of all surveyed refugees).

Refugees rated similarly to the British citizens when responding about where they get their information from. Men tend to rely on GP sources (64%), friends (33%) and RCOs (30%); whereas women rely on the GP (63%) too, but slightly more on friends than men (35%).

Impact of COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated hostility in an already-hostile environment. We have seen a selection of exclusionary restrictions designed to make it more difficult for people seeking asylum to be successfully granted refugee status.

Lockdowns, travel restrictions and the closure of borders and maritime ports have severely interrupted migrant journeys, leaving them stranded in camps or detention facilities.⁵²

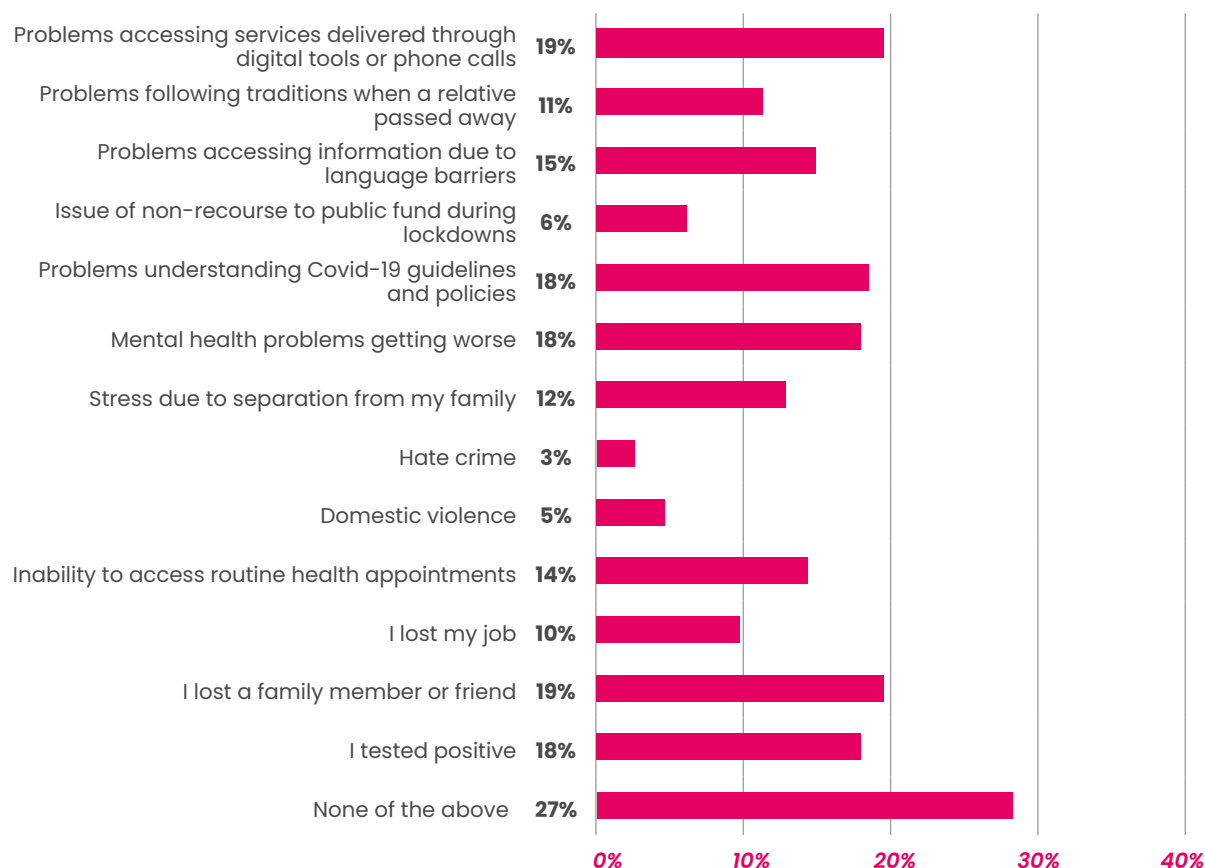
The onset of the pandemic highlighted and exacerbated pre-existing issues and inequalities facing refugees and people seeking asylum, from social isolation and loneliness, digital exclusion, to financial pressure and mental health issues due to pre-existing conditions, the loss of a loved one, to the general insecurity brought by the national lockdowns.

With many NGOs supporting refugees and people seeking asylum having to cancel their in-person provision of services, more clients were pushed into loneliness and isolation. A 2021 study shows that 39% of 20 surveyed organisations felt less confident that their charity had the right resources to support people during the pandemic, due to the chronic lack of funding facing the sector.

⁵² Maria Santillana, 'The impact of Covid-19 on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees' (2021) <www.idea.int/news-media/news/impact-covid-19-migrants-asylum-seekers-and-refugees>

Main struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic

Q Did you experience any of the following issues as a result of COVID-19 pandemic or related measures such as lockdown?



Responses from all respondents

The main issues identified by all respondents as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or its related measures included problems accessing services delivered through digital tools or by phone as well as the loss of a family member or a friend (19%), challenges understanding guidelines and policies related to the pandemic (18%) and testing positive for the virus (18%). Only 27% of all respondents said they haven't experienced any of the issues that the survey exemplified.

The biggest barriers identified by people seeking asylum were related to limited access to information due to language barriers (24%), testing positive for Covid-19 and not understanding COVID-19 guidelines and policies (23%). The inability to make routine health appointments (17%) and use services delivered digitally/over the phone were also mentioned by 18% of participants. Approximately 12% of all people seeking asylum reported two more stressors: being separated from their families and not having recourse to public funds during lockdowns.

Refugees struggled mostly with getting services online or by phone (19%), not being able to book routine health appointments and losing a loved one. The numbers shifted for British citizens, who mostly reported losing a family member and testing positive as the main difficulties.

Women faced more pressure from not understanding the guidelines and new policies (24%), language barriers in accessing information (20%) and domestic violence (8%) more disproportionately than men (respectively 15%, 11% and 2%).

Housing

Introduction

Housing conditions in the UK, primordialially for people seeking asylum, have been shown to be unsatisfactory through reports of “overcrowding, damp and delays in repairs, lack of locks on bedroom doors, pest infestation, lack of heating or hot water due to system breakdown, absence of smoke or fire alarms, and poor hygiene in common areas.”⁵³

In the UK, people seeking asylum are dispersed in accommodation located across the country, embedding them within communities where they frequently experience harassment, xenophobic treatment, isolation – on a subsistence-only basis.⁵⁴ There, surrounded by strangers and separated from established social networks or ethnic communities, they have to vacate the premises within 28 days upon being granted or denied refugee status, often unaware of their rights and entitlements.⁵⁵

Therefore, homelessness is often reported to be one of the major issue facing refugees and people seeking asylum, especially among new refugees in transition stages⁵⁶ who have received a positive decision, aged out of benefits or were refused asylum.⁵⁷

Insufficient information can be just as detrimental as insufficient funds. Studies have found that when people receive refugee status, “they are not always aware of their entitlements, the process for finding housing and support, and who can help them.”⁵⁸

From accessing private-rented sector housing, having no funds for a deposit or advance payments (and no right to work while waiting for their claim to be processed), language barriers and a lack of knowledge of the local housing market – all these constitute difficulties for newly-recognised refugees. Refugee Council’s 2021 Keys to the city report on this topic calls on the London’s Mayor to help end refugee homelessness by setting up a City Hall fund to cover the up-front cost of a tenancy deposit for new refugees.⁵⁹

Housing situation

From our pool of respondents, 34% reported renting from a private landlord, followed by 29% renting from a local authority or council. Approximately 12% rent from a housing association. A few participants are living rent-free, either with a relative or in a friend’s house (6%) – and only a very small percentage own their property through a mortgage plan (4%).

Approximately 17% of people seeking asylum are living rent-free, compared to only 8% or 3% of refugees and British citizens doing so. The differences are similar when we look at which group is more likely to be living in a homeless hotel, with people seeking asylum leading the charts: 8% compared to 1% of British citizens.

Up to 2% of all surveyed refugees reported living in an abandoned or unoccupied property – no refugees or individuals with British citizenship said the same. Equally, no people seeking asylum or refugees we surveyed declared having owned a place via a mortgage plan, with just 0.55% refugees saying they have a place of their own.

53 J Allsopp, N Sigona and J Phillimore, ‘Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK; an evidence and policy review’ (2014) IRiS Working Paper Series 1/2014 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2014/working-paper-series/IRiS-WP-1-2014.pdf>

54 E Stewart, ‘Dispersal policy and onward migration: mapping the current state of knowledge’, (2012) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25(1) 25

55 Linda Bakker, ‘The Asylum-Integration Paradox: Comparing Asylum Support Systems and Refugee Integration in The Netherlands and the UK’ (2016) *International migration* 54 (4) 118

56 P Dwyer, ‘Integration? The perceptions and experiences in Yorkshire and the Humber’ (2008) Yorkshire & Humber Regional Migration Partnership <www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/file/PolicyandResearch/YHRMP_Reports/YH_RefugeeFocusGroups_Nov08.pdf>

57 *ibid* note 32 (Allsopp).

58 Effective Action, ‘Working with refugees Guidance for homelessness services’ (2012) <www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Practical%20guidance%20on%20working%20with%20refugees.pdf>

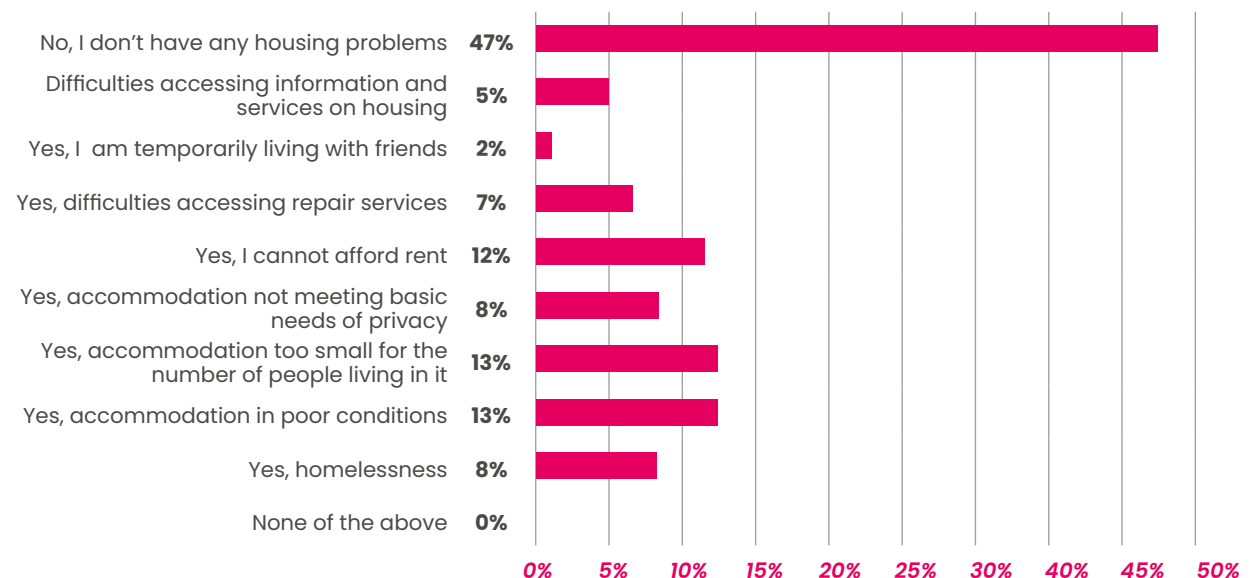
59 Refugee Council, ‘How can refugees pay a housing deposit when they arrive with nothing and are banned from working?’ Refugee Council calls on London Mayor candidates to pledge support for

More British citizens were renting from local authorities, with nearly half renting from private landlords. A very small proportion has a mortgage, lives rent-free or in a homeless hotel.

More women were renting from a local authority than men (34% compared to 25%), and strikingly more women were living rent-free compared to men (8% vs 4%). 50% more men than women declared owning a place outright. The proportions of men and women living in a homeless hotel was the same.

Main barriers to housing

Q Do you currently have any of the following housing problems?



Responses from all respondents

Out of all participants, fewer than half declared not having any housing problems. This makes the other half divided between struggling with life in very small accommodation for the number of people inside (13%), accommodation in poor conditions (12%) and the inability to afford rent (12%).

Out of all groups surveyed, people seeking asylum struggled most with accommodation in poor conditions (22%), not meeting basic needs of privacy (20%), homelessness (17%) and having difficulties accessing information and services on housing-related issues (12%).

British citizens were the biggest group who maintained not having housing issues: 68%, which is nearly double the percentage of refugees and people seeking asylum combined. Poor living conditions and rent costs were top priority issues for refugees (19% and 13% respectively).

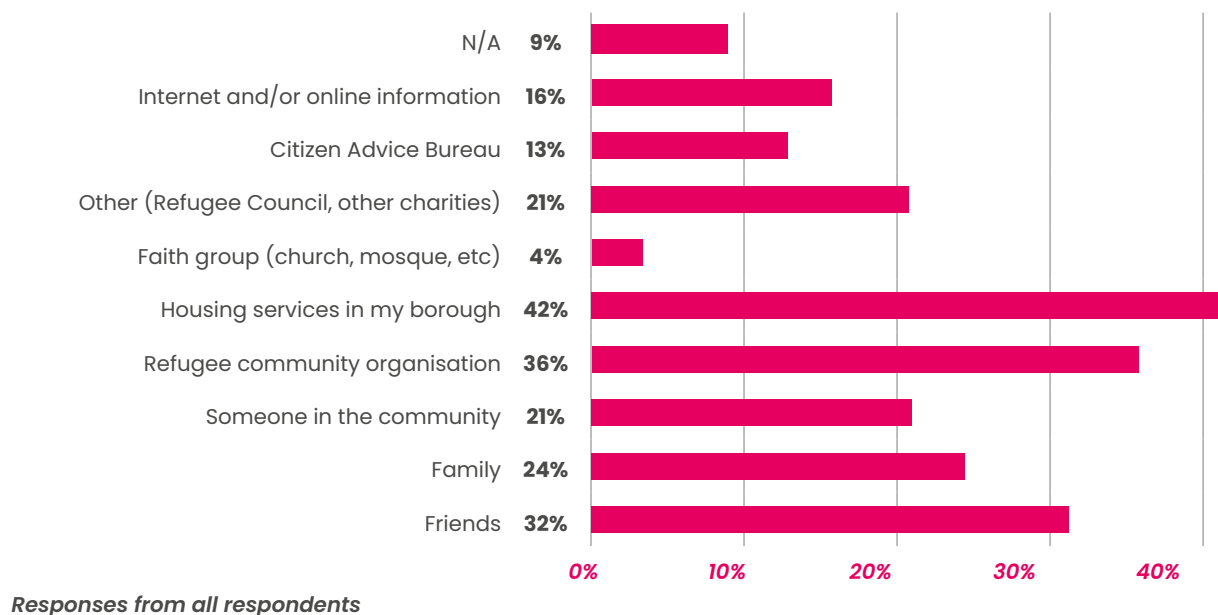
There was little discrepancy between the responses from male and female respondents, although we saw a slight increase in the number of men calling out rent affordability (13% compared to 9% women) and difficulties accessing repair services (9% compared to 6% women).

For those who responded having housing problems, this was an ongoing issue for a period of one to three years (31%) – with 22% either experiencing them for up to one year (22%) or more than five years (22%).

Out of those facing these problems from six months to a year, there were more refugees than British citizens (24% compared to only 8%). Curiously, nearly half of all British citizens who are facing housing issues have been having these problems for over five years, compared to 13% of refugees and people seeking asylum. There wasn't a huge disparity when considering the timeframe of issues faced by men and women, with the exception that more men than women were having issues that lasted for at least five years (23% compared to 18%).

Main sources of information and support

Q What are your main sources of information/support for housing issues?



The most frequently reported sources of information when it comes to receiving support with housing issues were housing services in the borough (this includes either local authority or housing associations) – an option chosen by 42% of all respondents. This was closely followed by RCOs (36%) and friends (32%). A quarter of all participants reported resorting to the internet for information.

People seeking asylum depend primarily on RCOs for information (39%), but they also rely on someone in the community (30%), friends (28%) and family (20%). Only 15% of them reported sources from the internet, a slightly higher percentage than refugees stating this. British citizens rely more on the internet to source information than any other legal status group.

Nearly half of refugees said they rely on housing services and a slightly lower percentage on RCOs (45%). Friends and family came next, followed by other charities (20%).

More women said they tend to go to friends for information on housing (35%), RCOs (39%) and housing services in their borough (46%) compared to men (30%, 35% and 39% respectively). Women are preponderantly more reliant on other charities than men – whereas men are more likely to ask for information from someone in the community than women, or use the internet.

Employment

Introduction

Research validates the fact that, out of all migrant and UK-born groups, people seeking asylum are the least likely to be in employment, situating them at a 51% employment rate compared to 73% for UK-born.⁶⁰

Several academics provide evidence that almost 80% of people seeking asylum will want to work once they're legally entitled to.⁶¹ Many are forced to enter informal employment due to lack of state support and debts to smugglers. Informal employment puts them at risk of exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, denial of their human rights and other dangers.⁶²

Furthermore, people seeking asylum work fewer hours than any other migrant or UK native category, while also earning less: 55% less per week, 38% less per hour and are 19% less likely to hold leadership positions.⁶³ What's worse, people seeking asylum can only apply for permission to work under specific conditions, such as if it's been more than 12 months since they've been waiting for an asylum decision, where this delay isn't their fault. On top of this, they're limited to jobs on the country's shortage occupation list.⁶⁴

The way they arrive in the UK can often predict the level of difficulty people seeking asylum will face in securing employment. Many arrive without evidence of their qualifications, employer references or even evidence of work – having had to flee their home countries, often with little to no time to gather or access documents.⁶⁵ Additionally, many will have few viable networks that can put them in contact with potential employers. Loss of skills and mental health issues are also a significant barrier to employability.⁶⁶

With regards to those with refugee backgrounds, the employment rate is four times the national average.⁶⁷ While they have the right to work, they're often denied jobs due to employers wanting them to have prior UK work experience because of misconceptions about their status, or lack of recognised qualifications⁶⁸ – which is something that emerged from our data too.

The inability to find work is strongly related to refugees' successful integration into society. Securing work commensurate with their skills will be a further obstacle to integration, which is often associated with downward professional mobility.⁶⁹ As a result, our survey analysed:

- Individuals' employment status
- Major barriers in getting work (for those unemployed)
- Major barriers at work (for those employed)

60 Z Kone, I Ruiz and C Vargas-Silva, 'Refugees and the UK Labour Market.' (2019) Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at University of Oxford <www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ECONREF-Refugees-and-the-UK-Labour-Market-report.pdf>

61 F Aldridge and S Waddington, 'Asylum seekers' skills and qualifications audit pilot project' (2001) National Organisation for Adult Learning Leicester

62 Targarona Rifa and G Donà (2021, 5 January). Forced unemployment or undocumented work: The burden of prohibition to work for asylum seekers in the UK. *Journal of Refugee Studies*.

63 *ibid* note 39 (Kone).

64 M Gower, 'Asylum seekers: the permission to work policy' (2021) House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 1908 <<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01908/SN01908.pdf>>

65 Jenny Phillimore, 'Problem or Opportunity? Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Employment and Social Exclusion in Deprived Urban Areas' (2006) *Urban studies* 43 (10) 1715

66 J Phillimore and L Goodson, 'Exploring the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Wolverhampton into UK labour market' (2001) Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at University of Birmingham

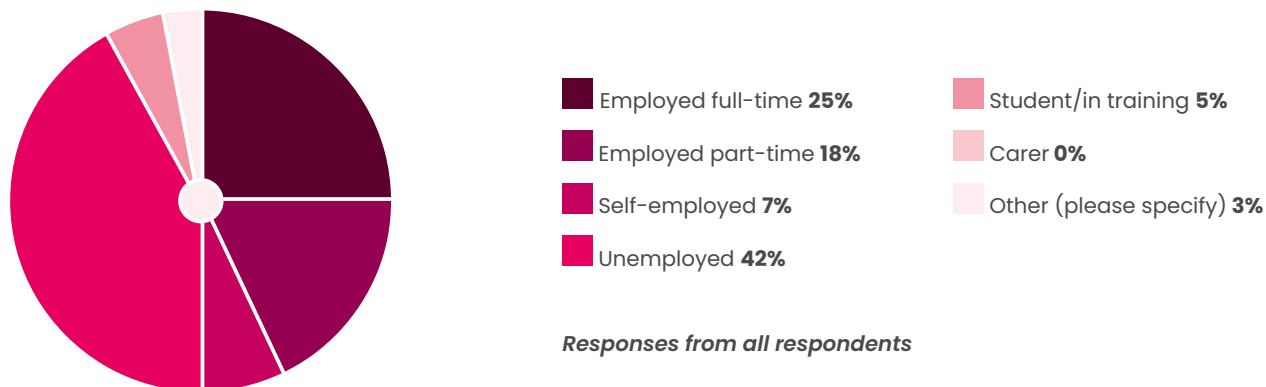
67 Breaking Barriers 'The Refugee Employment Crisis. Barriers to Employment' <<https://breaking-barriers.co.uk/the-cause/refugee-employment-crisis/>>

68 C Brothers, 'New plans to smooth the long road to employment for refugees in the UK' (2019) UNHCR <www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2019/5/5cc9a4054/new-plans-to-smooth-long-road-to-employment-for-refugees-in-uk.html>

69 G Sargeant and A Fornà, 'A poor reception: refugees and asylum seekers: welfare' (2001)

Employment status

Q Which of the following best describes your employment status?
Please click Student/in training if that is the only thing you are doing now.



In describing their employment status, nearly half (42%) of all respondents stated they are unemployed, with the rest being either employed (full-time 24% or part-time 18%).

Approximately 5% of all individuals said they are either students or enrolled in specific training courses. Among the surveyed respondents, we also found retired people, housewives, volunteers or casual workers.

The majority of people seeking asylum surveyed were unemployed (59%). A very high percentage of refugees were out of work too (47%), while the rest were working part-time or full-time (approximately 18%).

There were substantially more unemployed female respondents than male participants (47% compared to 38%). More men were working full time (27%) compared to 21% of women. Studies confirm that women refugees fare worse than men in accessing employment.⁷⁰ When looking at part-time working, it was more women (22%) than men (13%).

Out of all the respondents who reported being out of work, 16% were in this situation for more than five years, 8% were not working for three to five years – and the majority (29%) were unemployed for a period of one to three years.

Of the people seeking asylum who were unemployed, the vast majority were in this situation between one to three years (29%), followed by those who haven't had work in over five years (17%) and individuals who didn't have a job for six months to a year (16%).

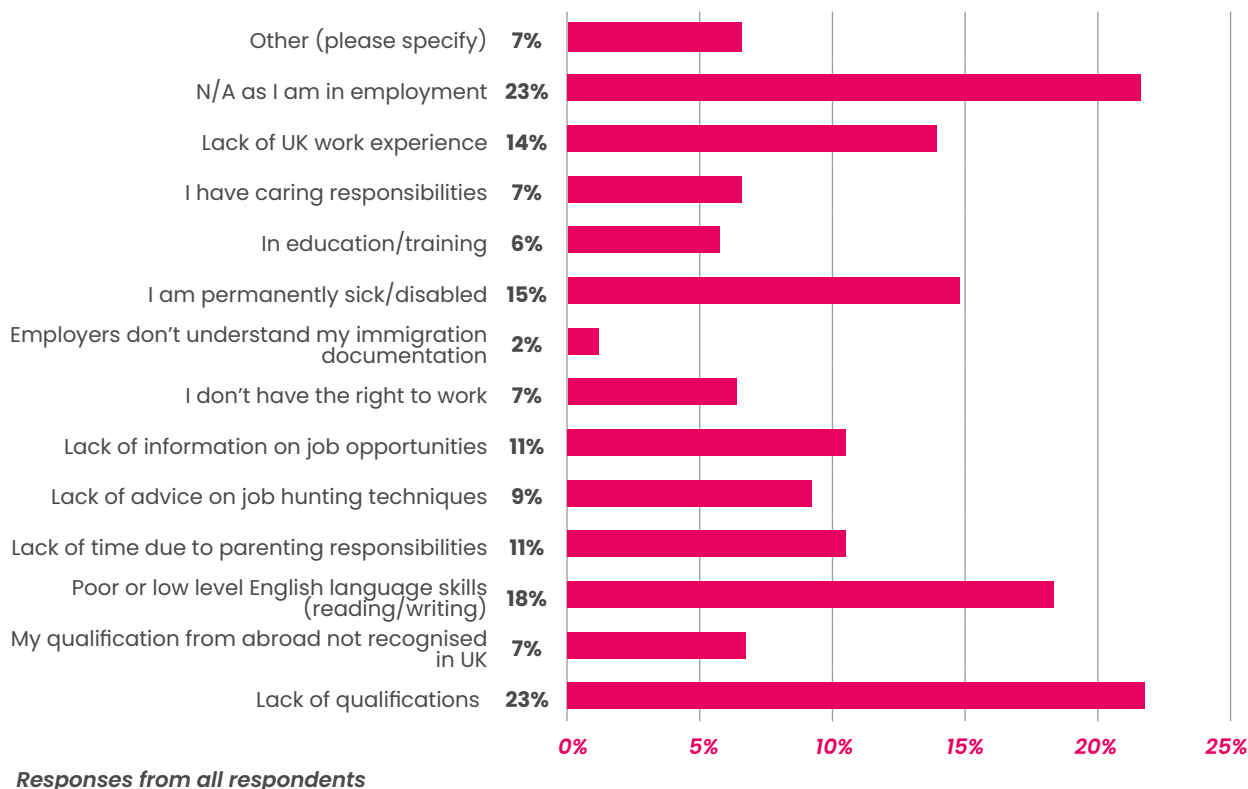
The majority of people seeking asylum were out of work for one to three years (30%) – the number of refugees who identified the same timeframe were much higher (39%). There were more British citizens out of jobs for over five years than any other legal status (34% compared to 15% of people seeking asylum and 7% of refugees).

Looking at the gender differentiations, there isn't a big variety in how long men and women were out of jobs, although there were slightly more men out of jobs for longer periods, such as five years, than women (19% compared to 16%).

70 J Allsopp, N Sigona and J Phillimore, 'Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK; an evidence and policy review' (2014) IRIS Working Paper Series 1/2014 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2014/working-paper-series/IRIS-WP-1-2014.pdf>

Barriers to employment

Q If you are unemployed, what is preventing you from getting a job?



When asked what prevented the unemployed from getting a job, the biggest barrier represented was lack of qualifications (23%), followed by poor or low level of English language skills in reading and/or writing (18%).

It's important to note that many participants reported being permanently sick and/or disabled as additional hurdles in accessing employment (15%). The list of identified barriers also included lack of UK work experience (14%), insufficient time due to parenting responsibilities (11%), lack of information on job opportunities (11%) and lack of advice on job hunting techniques (9%).

A total of 6% of respondents mentioned other barriers to not having a job such as insufficient relevant vacancies, health conditions, retirement or having been made redundant recently due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The largest proportion of people seeking asylum reported not having the right to work as the main barrier (37%), followed by not being professionally qualified (30%). Having poor or low level of English language skills (21%), being sick and/or disabled (16%) and not having their professional qualifications recognised in the UK (14%) were also among the hurdles mentioned by people seeking asylum.

We noticed a huge drop when we asked refugees the same question: unsurprisingly, only 0.72% mentioned the right to work as a barrier to work – this is a small number of refugees who might not be aware that they have the right to work. Refugees' main barriers were lack of qualifications (24%), poor levels of English (22%), lack of UK work experience (16%), advice on job hunting techniques (14%) and information on job opportunities (14%). For British citizens, the figures changed dramatically, with answers being equally distributed. The main barrier that stood out here was disability or health issues (18%).

Male and female participants pointed at different barriers to employment. Lack of qualifications is marginally more problematic for women than men (24% compared to 22%) and poor command of English is more apparent for women too (21% compared to 16% of men). Having caring responsibilities was more relevant for women than men (11% vs 1%) as well as not having time for work due to parenting responsibilities (17% compared to 4% of men), or needing advice on job hunting (11% compared to 7% of men).

Barriers for those in employment

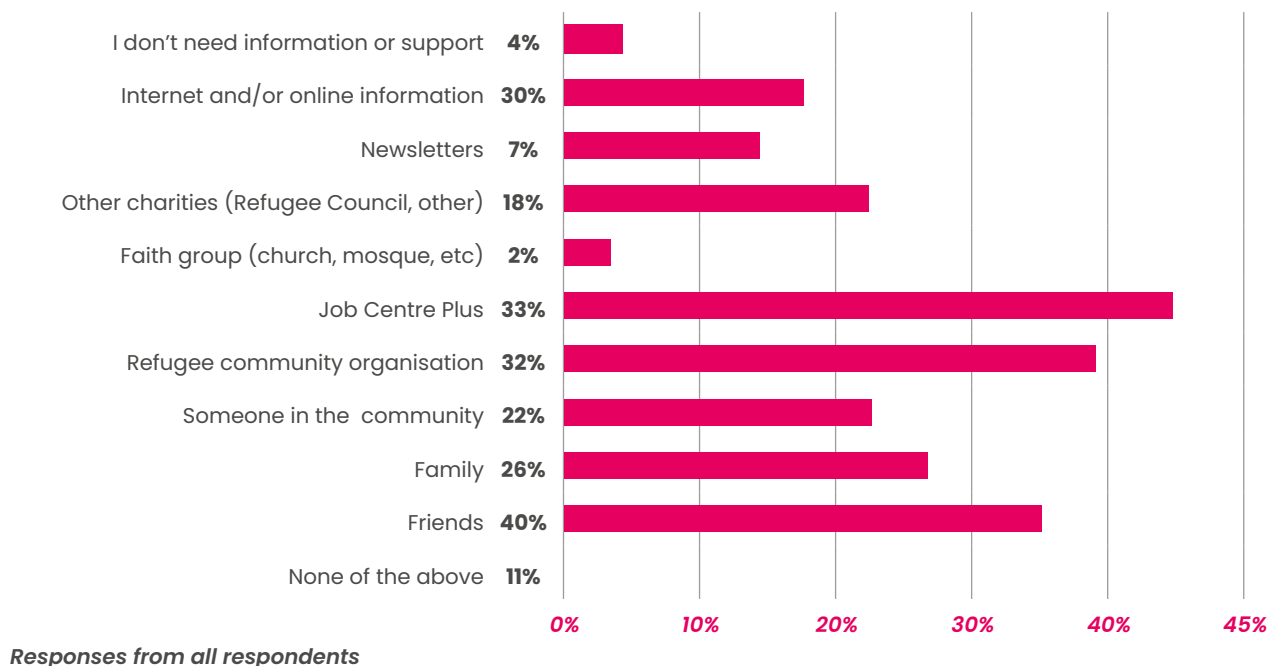
For all respondents who said they are in employment, 26% stated having a low-income job as an employment related issue, with 18% declaring that their job doesn't match their qualifications. Approximately 15% reported working on a zero-hour contract. For 6% of the respondents, the job time commitment is conflicting with their family responsibilities, and 4% have a health condition which affects their performance at work.

Out of the few people seeking asylum who responded and were employed, they reported working zero hours as the main issue (18%). Refugees reported low income jobs (29%), working zero hours (14%), and not having jobs that match their qualifications (13%).

For British citizens, the main issue at work was the low wage (28%). Both women and men called this out as main problems, however this, and health issues, was more apparent for women (27%) than for men (24%).

Main sources of information

Q What are your main sources of information/support for employment related needs?



The main sources of information for employment opportunities and support listed by all respondents were friends (40%), JobCentre Plus (33%), RCOs (32%) and the internet (29%). Other sources included families (26%), someone in their community (22%), newsletters (7%) and faith groups (2%).

Most people seeking asylum got information on work from friends (40%) and RCOs (31%). About 21% of this group pointed to the internet. Compared to all other surveyed groups, refugees reported relying more on someone in the community and RCOs on getting information on jobs. By a very large margin, they also rely on other charities (19%) to get information compared to people seeking asylum (10%) and citizens (9%). Citizens rely more on the internet (35%) than refugees and people seeking asylum do (27% and 21% respectively).

Women tend to get their information from family (27%), slightly more than men do (24%). The same goes with RCOs (34% vs 32%) and other charities (20% of women vs 16% of men). However more men rely on Jobcentre plus (35%) compared to women (32%) and newsletters (8% compared to 7%).

Legal advice

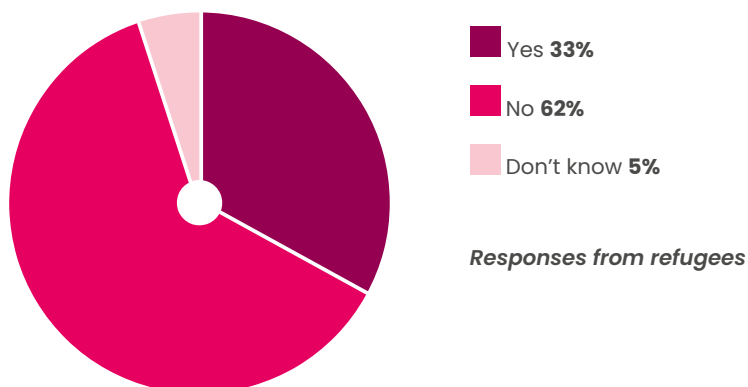
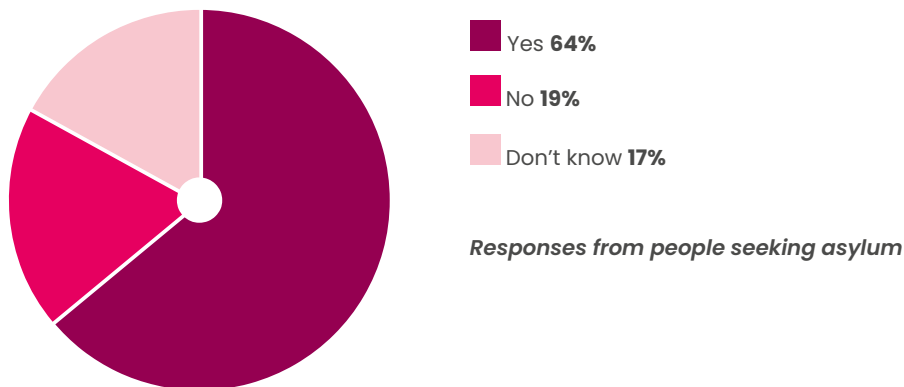
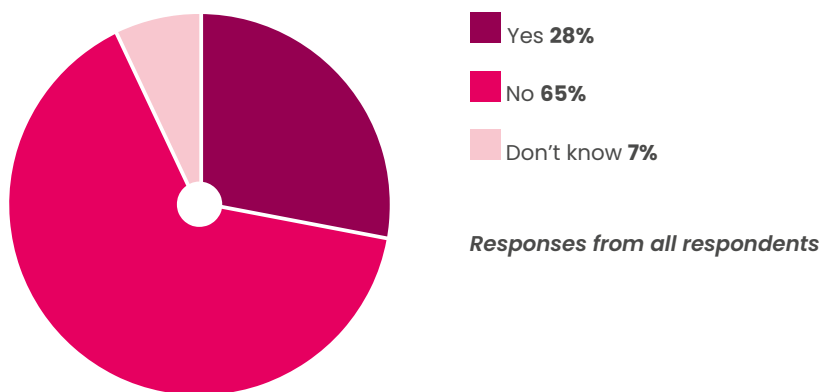
Introduction

In spite of London's high proportion of legal aid providers, the demand for legal aid work isn't met with sufficient supply. The current offerings can only address 10,000 immigration and asylum matters per year when there are demand estimates in the hundreds of thousands.⁷¹

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that some organisations received more funding while others faced financial difficulties as a result of the slow process of asylum decision-making. A lack of access to advice can return some individuals to exploitative or dangerous situations.

Access to legal advice

Q Are you in need of legal advice for immigration matters?



71 J Wilding, M Mguni and T Van Isacker, 'A Huge Gulf: Demand and Supply for Immigration Legal Advice in London' (2021 Justice Together <<https://justice-together.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/A-Huge-Gulf-FINAL-report.pdf>>

Out of all surveyed participants, 65% stated they don't need legal advice for immigration matters. The numbers turned when we looked at separate immigration status: 64% of people seeking asylum reported needing advice, with only 33% of refugees and 7% of British citizens saying so. Roughly the same percentage of women said they need advice as men (around 29%).

Nearly half of all respondents stated that it's Very Difficult to access legal advice – this percentage hasn't changed much when we looked at different categories: people seeking asylum (47%), refugees (42%) and citizens (44%).

More people seeking asylum said it is Extremely Difficult to access legal advice services for immigration matters (32%) than any other legal status: 21% of refugees and only 5% of British citizens stating the same.

The percentage of male and female participants declaring that getting legal advice is Very Difficult was relatively similar (44% vs 42%), with slightly more men rating this service as Extremely Difficult (18%) than women (17%). It was also more women who found it Very Easy (7%) compared to men (4%).

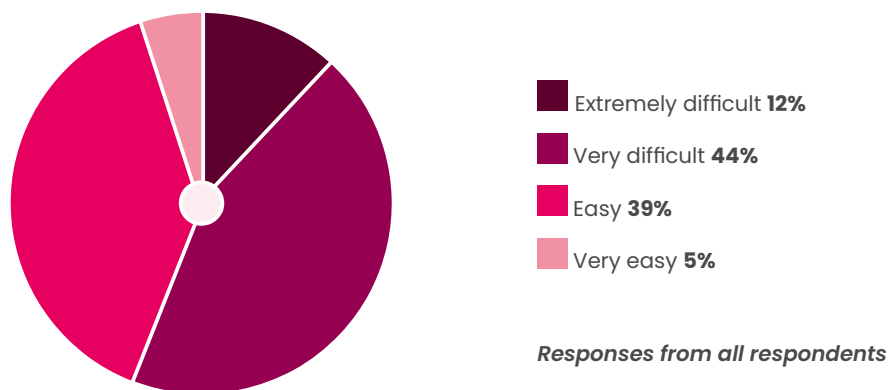
Integration in the community

Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that the quality of social networks can have a positive overall impact on people seeking asylum and refugees,⁷² open up access to health and welfare services⁷³ and work as additional financial and other forms of support in times of need.

Integration scores

Q How difficult is/was it for you to integrate in the community where you live?



Looking at all participants, 44% reported that it is Very Difficult for them to integrate in the community they live in. People seeking asylum scored the highest here (58%) out of other groups (45% refugees and 36% citizens). It was mostly British citizens who found it Easy (43%), compared to 38% of all refugees and 22% of all surveyed people seeking asylum.

Women found integration harder than men: 45% saying it's Very Difficult compared to 42% of men. This was also evident in how many male respondents rated their integration as Very Easy: 7% compared to just 4% of women.

72 M Collyer, L Morrice, L Tip, R Brown and E Odermatt, 'A Long Term Commitment: Integration of Resettled Refugees in the UK' (2018) <www.sussex.ac.uk/migration/research/integrationcitizenship/refugeeresettlement/reports>

73 S Cheung and J Phillimore, 'Social networks, social capital and refugee integration' (2013) Nuffield Foundation London <www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Phillimore%20Refugree%20Integration%20Report.pdf>

Community safety

Introduction

There is evidence of harassment and racism towards people seeking asylum within criminal justice records. However, “little specific evidence has been collected on hate crimes towards these groups.”⁷⁴

Many studies have reported that asylum-seeking women face domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. Research published by Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) in 2018 found that asylum-seeking women “can be at risk of abuse and violence at any stage of the asylum support system.”⁷⁵ It reported that while domestic abuse is one of the most prevalent types of abuse faced by women in society, women seeking asylum are vulnerable to other forms of abuse and harm including the heightened risk of being sexually exploited whilst they are destitute particularly after being granted leave to remain, or while living in insecure or unsuitable accommodation.

Domestic violence

Approximately 74% of all participants reported not having experienced domestic violence (as described as violent or aggressive behaviour within their home, typically involving the violent abuse of a partner). About 14% responded affirmatively and 7% preferred not to answer this question.

Of the respondents who identified as asylum seekers, 15% declared having experienced domestic violence, with 12% not knowing and 7% preferring not to say. Out of the surveyed refugees, fewer people said yes (9%) – with a similar number not knowing (5%) or preferring not to say (4%).

There were significantly more women who reported domestic violence (22%) compared to men (6%). More male participants preferred not to answer this question (6%) than women (4%). A similar percentage of women and men said they don’t know whether they have experienced intimate partner violence.

Hate crime

When asked whether they’ve ever experienced hate crime (as described as crime that is motivated by prejudice on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds), 59% of all respondents said they haven’t. However, 22% of the total participants answered affirmatively, with 8% preferring not to answer.

Out of all surveyed groups, it was more people seeking asylum who said they experienced a hate crime (27% compared to 18% refugees and 24% citizens). 9% of people seeking asylum didn’t know whether they had experienced it, with the majority (20%) preferring not to say.

More women reported having experienced hate crime (26%) than men (20%). However more men (7%) preferred not to talk about it as opposed to women (3%). More women than men (11% vs 10%) said they don’t know if they’ve experienced hate crime.

Approximately 32% of all participants maintained fear of being the victim of a knife crime themselves or a family member, with the majority saying they don’t worry about this (59%).

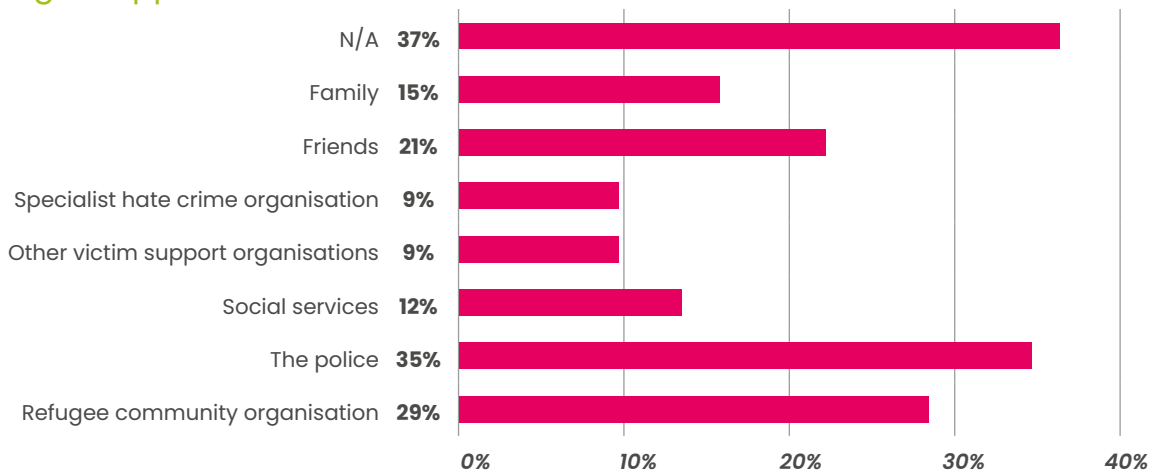
Looking at the different legal status, we saw that 28% of people seeking asylum said they’re afraid of being a victim of a hate crime, with 32% of refugees and 30% of British citizens declaring the same. Here, it was more people seeking asylum who preferred not to answer this question (21%) compared to refugees (10%) and citizens (5%). More women (37%) were afraid of hate crime than men (28%).

74 P Aspinall and C Watters, ‘Refugees and asylum seekers: A review from an equality and human rights perspective’ (2010) Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series at University of Kent <www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/refugees_and_asylum_seekers_research_report.pdf>

75 Helen Baillot and Elaine Connelly, ‘Women seeking asylum: Safe from violence in the UK?’ (2018) https://www.asaproject.org/uploads/Safe_from_violence_in_the_UK._ASAP-RC_report_.pdf

Main sources of support

Q If you experienced domestic violence, hate crime or any other crime, where did you get support from?



Responses from all respondents

For those who declared having experienced domestic violence, hate crime, or any other crime, the support they received came from the police (35%), followed by RCOs (29%), friends (21%) and family (15%). Social services and specialist hate crime organisations were also mentioned, but to a lesser degree.

The largest proportion of people seeking asylum (34%) pointed at RCOs compared to all other groups (26% of refugees and 29% of British citizens), with specialist hate crime organisations and the police being at the bottom (7%).

The answers given by refugees were more varied, with the largest proportion saying they received support from the police (33% compared to only 17% people seeking asylum). Specialist hate crime organisations were rated much higher by refugees than by people seeking asylum (14%). Out of all legal status categories, refugees relied less on family (10% compared to 15% of people seeking asylum and 22% of British citizens).

Both male and female participants chose the police as the source where they got support from, with women more than men (38% compared to 36%). RCOs were following up closely in the matter of options (more for women than for men; 32% vs 27%). Women relied more on family (19%) and on social services (14%) than men did (13% and 11% respectively).

Confidence in getting support from the police

When asked how they rate their confidence in reporting a crime to the police, most respondents (34%) said Fairly Confident, with only 16% choosing Very Confident. Approximately 11% of all respondents stated Very Unconfident.

People seeking asylum rated their trust in the police as Very Unconfident – 20% compared to 7% refugees and citizens. Fewer women (32%) said they're Fairly Confident in reporting to the police compared to men (38%) – and more were on the brink, reporting this neither Confident or Unconfident (19% women compared to 17% men).

Engagement with RCOs

Introduction

Research shows that the common themes experienced by refugees from their neighbours are hostility, harassment and resentment,⁷⁶ which constitutes a huge impediment to community participation. Studies have reported that refugees find areas with a history of immigration easier to integrate into.⁷⁷

Even volunteering or basic training workshops can help build those connections.⁷⁸

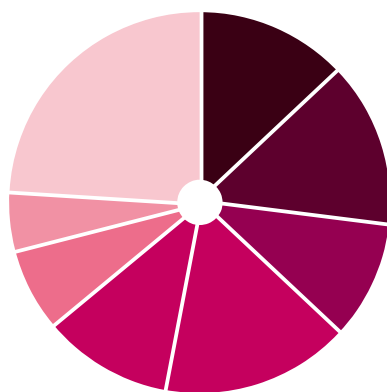
Community participation before COVID-19

When asked how often, if at all, before the COVID-19 pandemic, did people attend activities run by an RCO, the majority of the respondents said they attended refugee community activities but the frequency of attendance varied. Around 16% of respondents attended once a month, 14% once a week, 13% more than once a week, 14% attended weekly and 11% attended once every three months. The less frequent participation was once every six months (7%) or once a year (5%). Only 24% said they have never attended any activity run by an RCO.

Out of the respondents who were people seeking asylum, the majority (64%) participated in an activity run by a refugee community organisation. Also, more people seeking asylum than any other category participated once a week (24%) compared to 15% of all refugees or 13% of British citizens. There were more refugees (22%) that went once a month compared to people seeking asylum (15%) or British citizens (14%), or once every three months.

Out of all surveyed male respondents, 64% participated in RCOs' activities, with 18% going once a month, and 9% attending only every three months. Women appeared to participate more often in these activities than men, with only 20% never attending. Around 17% of the female respondents stated going once a week.

Q Before COVID-19, on average how often, if at all, did you attend activities run by a refugee community organisation?



BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

More than once a week 13%	Once every 3 months 11%
Once a week 14%	Once every 6 months 7%
Once in 2 weeks 10%	Once a year 5%
Once a month 16%	Never 24%

Responses from all respondents

76 P Dwyer, 'Integration? The perceptions and experiences in Yorkshire and the Humber' (2008) Yorkshire & Humber Regional Migration Partnership <www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/file/PolicyandResearch/YHRMP_Reports/YH_RefugeeFocusGroups_Nov08.pdf>

77 P Aspinall and C Watters, 'Refugees and asylum seekers: A review from an equality and human rights perspective' (2010) Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series at University of Kent <www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/refugees_and_asylum_seekers_research_report.pdf>

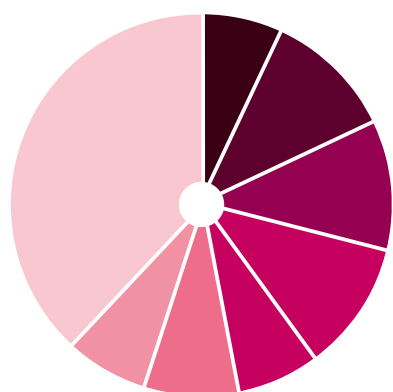
78 J Phillimore, 'Implementing integration in the UK; lessons for theory, policy and practice' (2012) Policy and Politics 40(4) 525

Community participation during COVID-19

The next question concerned whether participants have, during the COVID-19 restrictions, participated in any activities run by an RCO – this could have included activities organised via digital tools such as Zoom. Approximately 38% of all participants reported never attending such activities, with only 11% going once a week. A very small proportion participated once every six months (8%), once every three months (8%) or once a year (7%).

Out of these respondents, (44%) of people seeking asylum never went to these activities compared to a small number of refugees and British citizens, 35% and 36% respectively. However, people seeking asylum attending once every two weeks (14%) were higher in number than refugees (8%) or British citizens (10%).

Q During COVID-19, on average how often, if at all, did you attend activities run by a refugee community organisation?



DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- More than once a week **7%**
- Once a week **11%**
- Once in 2 weeks **11%**
- Once a month **11%**
- Once every 3 months **7%**
- Once every 6 months **8%**
- Once a year **7%**
- Never **38%**

Responses from all respondents

Approximately 13% of all female respondents reported going once a month compared to just 11% of men, followed by 12% participating once a week or every two weeks, compared to slightly lower percentages of men stating the same (10% respectively 9%).

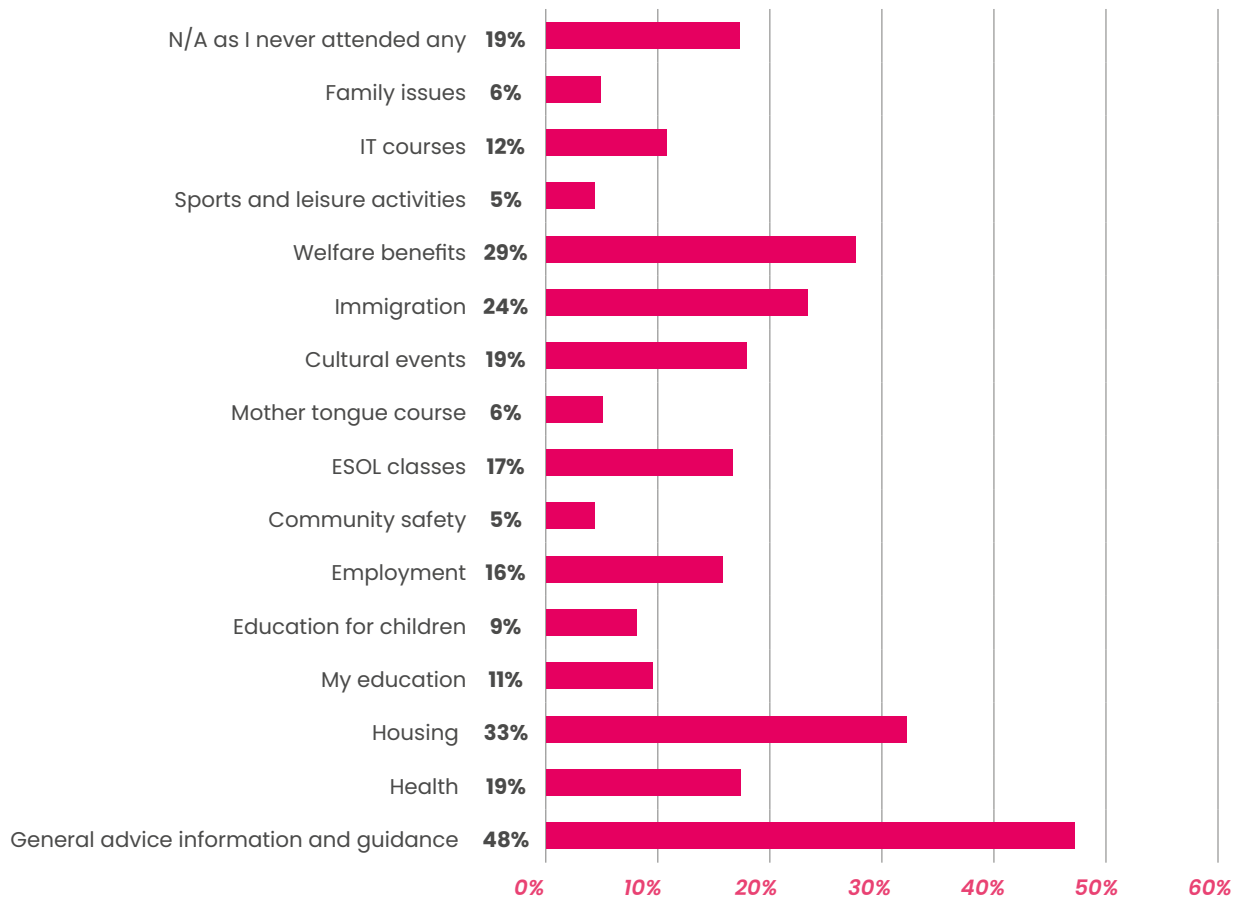
For those who attended these activities and services run by an RCO, the capacity in which they did so was predominantly as clients (60%). A significant percentage worked as volunteers (22%) or as employees or trustees (2%).

RCO activities and services

More respondents who are British citizens attended these activities as volunteers (29%) compared to only 20% of people seeking asylum and 23% of those with refugee status. They were also the least likely to attend as clients (41%) as opposed to 59% of people seeking asylum and 65% of refugees doing so.

More women attended RCO-run activities as clients (64%) than men (57%), however men were more likely to be volunteers (25% vs 21% of women).

Q If you attended activities/services run by a refugee community organisation, which services from the list below did you receive from the organisation?



Responses from all respondents

When asked about the type of services participants received from the organisation, the most popular responses included having received general advice, information and guidance (48%), advice on housing (33%), welfare benefits (29%), immigration assistance (24%) and attendance of cultural events (19%).

People seeking asylum listed immigration (44%) as their top service sought from RCOs compared to 29% of all refugees and 7% of British citizens. Refugees reported having received general advice, info and guidance (51%) more than people seeking asylum (42%) and British citizens (43%) – the same applies with housing and health and employment.

ESOL classes rated higher with people seeking asylum (31%) than refugees (19%) and British citizens (15%). The latter were more preoccupied with community safety (9%) than people seeking asylum (3%) or refugees (4%).

More women attended RCO organisations for general advice compared to men (52% vs 46%), health (21% vs 17%), education for children (12% vs 10%), employment (18% vs 14%), mother tongue classes (9% vs 4%) and family issues (9% vs 5%).

Asked how useful people find these services, 36% of all participants reported Very Useful, with 32% saying Extremely Useful and 11% choosing Somewhat Useful. More refugees (45%) rated these as Very Useful compared to 37% of people seeking asylum and 29% of British citizens. More British citizens chose Extremely Useful (38%) than people seeking asylum (20%) and refugees (26%).

More female participants rated these activities as Extremely Useful (36%) compared to men (31%), and more men found them Somewhat Useful (12%) compared to only 8% of women.

Priority needs

Introduction

Individuals face challenges and have needs related to their situation and very often, their legal status. To understand how these needs and concerns shift from one legal group to another, we asked respondents to list a predefined list of issues by order of priority, from one to seven: housing, English language, employment, health (including mental health), access to legal advice for immigration matters, community integration and safety.

When considering all participants, regardless of legal status or gender, most chose housing issues (37%) and employment (18%) as main worries, with English language problems following up closely (14%).

As the second priority, most respondents selected employment issues (22%), very closely situated to problems with the English language (21%), and Health and mental health (15%).

As third priority came employment (23%), access to legal advice for immigration matters (20%), and English language (18%).

The issues the majority of our respondents did not consider being among the main three priorities were:

- Access to legal advice for immigration matters
- Difficulties to integrate in the community
- Safety issues

Priority needs of people seeking asylum

Priority one for people seeking asylum was reported to be housing (45%), with the second one occupied by employment issues (24%).

The third priority was employment (31%), with the fourth being an equal split between health issues and access to legal advice for immigration matters (24%). The fifth priority for this group was taken by difficulties to integrate in the community (23%), with the last two occupied by safety concerns (28%).

Refugees' priority needs

The number one priority for refugees was also housing issues (38%), and the second employment (20%), followed very closely by housing and English language problems (19%).

Priority three represented employment (25%), with the fourth taken up by health concerns (36%). The last three priorities were, in order of importance, access to legal advice for immigration matters (26%), difficulties to integrate in the community (33%) and safety (28%).

British citizens' priority needs

Citizens have also identified housing as their number one priority (25%), with the second being health (20%). As the third priority, they ranked access to legal advice for immigration matters (23%), with priority four being, by far, health issues (29%).

Safety was a much bigger priority for this group than for the others, with it being number five (21%). The last two priorities were difficulties to integrate in the community (19%) and housing (25%).

Men's and women's priority needs

The number one priority for male respondents was housing (37%), same as for women although in a lower percentage (33%). The second priority for both men and women was English language problems (23% vs 20%).

Men maintained that priority three for them is access to legal advice for immigration matters (24%), whereas women reported employment issues (25%).

Priority four for both men and women was health (31% compared to 29% of women). The following priorities were the same for both genders: access to legal advice for immigration matters (21%), difficulties to integrate in the community (27% of men vs 26% of women) and safety issues (24% of men compared to 20% of women).

Conclusions and recommendations

This research has illustrated some of the primary needs of people seeking asylum and refugees, becoming a crucial tool in helping understand the integration process from the point of view of refugees and people seeking asylum. By breaking it down in key areas of need, this work helps identify gaps and potential lessons that authorities, service providers, funders and RCOs can draw upon.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates that the priority needs of individuals are directly connected to their legal status, with people seeking asylum struggling in most areas and, on the other side of the spectrum, British citizens feeling more confident in accessing their rights and entitlements.

English

English is undeniably one of the most important factors which can boost and facilitate refugee integration. A relatively good command of English can facilitate communication, help in building relationships and social networks through which refugees have access to all information they need. There is a correlation between a good command of English and success in accessing housing services, health services, education and employment.

It is therefore worrying that language barriers were mentioned mostly by people seeking asylum and newly-recognised refugees as one of the main factors impeding their ability to access services in housing, health, education and training as well as employment. For employed refugees, the lack of time due to work commitments is one reason for not attending English courses. But the lack of advice and guidance is the main hindrance for those in work as well as for the unemployed including people seeking asylum. For women, these factors are compounded with the lack of childcare.

Employment

In describing their employment status, nearly half (42%) of all respondents stated that they are unemployed. This employment rate is far lower than the UK employment rate which was estimated at 75.5% at the time of the survey (2021). The biggest barrier to employment identified by this research is the lack of qualifications, followed by poor or low level of English language skills in reading and/or writing. However, the majority of people seeking asylum mentioned not having the right to work as the main barrier followed by not being professionally qualified.

Although naturalised refugees were found to be faring better in English, IT skills, and other areas which could affect their employability, this research found that there were more British citizens out of jobs for over five years than any other legal status. The majority of these are disabled or permanently sick.

Housing

Housing has been identified by this survey as the first priority for refugees and people seeking asylum living in London. The reason is that refugees and people seeking asylum face compounded issues related to housing and most of the time finding somewhere to stay or live does not mean that the problem is over. Many refugees face housing issues for up to five years and the issues range from homelessness, poor conditions of properties, overcrowdedness, rent affordability, to the inability to access housing services and housing information. Besides, due to their unique circumstances, newly-recognised refugees find themselves in difficulties even after successfully applying for asylum - including lack of savings from having been barred from working while claiming asylum; lack of guarantors and references resulting from the lack of community links, language barriers; lack of understanding of the UK housing system; and in some cases, mental or physical health issues - this group is more vulnerable to homelessness and destitution.

Health

Mental health continues to be a big problem within refugee communities across London. Expectedly, this survey found that just under half of people seeking asylum declared they haven't experienced any mental health problems (with 12% preferring not to say) and 54% of those who reported having experienced it have not accessed any sort of treatment. The situation with refugees is not better particularly when it comes to accessing treatment.

The role of RCOs

The role of RCOs in helping refugees and people seeking asylum has been documented in various research reports. Once again, their role has been highlighted by this survey and particularly their role as a trusted source of information and support to address a variety of issues pertaining to refugee integration. RCOs provide a wide range of services but the most sought out services include general advice, information and guidance, housing advice, advice on welfare benefits, immigration and social and cultural events.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on service delivery across the voluntary sector, 40% of respondents to this survey managed to attend services delivered by RCOs at least once a month. This demonstrated the level of adaptability and resilience of RCOs.

Finally, the collaborative nature of this work and the approach adopted by the London Refugee Advocacy Forum, whereby research is conducted by grassroots organisations which are often led by members of the group most affected by the issues being researched, show that RCOs and their Forum are more than capable of collecting data and developing an in-depth knowledge of London refugee communities, both in terms of what their needs are and what the best solutions to address them are as well.

General recommendations

Recommendations for the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Mayor of London

1. Expand the ESOL provision available to refugees and people seeking asylum in London – including funding that ensures people seeking asylum have access to free services as well as making funding available for those who encounter travel costs or childcare as a barrier to English learning.
2. Recognise (through GLA's housing strategy impact assessment) the unique circumstances of newly-recognised refugees, which make them more vulnerable to homelessness and destitution. These include language barriers, a lack of savings from having been barred from working while claiming asylum, a lack of guarantors and references due to limited community links and a lack of understanding of the UK housing system.
3. Commit to establish a City Hall fund that can provide support for the up-front cost of a tenancy deposit. Local authorities and the voluntary sector would be able to refer refugees to this fund – with clear qualifying criteria – ensuring that it provided a consistent approach across the city, regardless of the local authority in which a new refugee lives.
4. Engage with the relevant stakeholders including local authorities, voluntary and community organisations and social landlords to ensure that better tenancy support is provided to newly-recognised refugees. This can be achieved through pre-tenancy training, access to information and understanding of rights. Support must be available to ensure deposits are protected, with information about how deposit protection schemes function.
5. Engage with relevant stakeholders including local councils, voluntary and community organisations and private landlords, to ensure a provision of housing support that's tailored to the needs and circumstances of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London.
6. Engage with public and private employers in London and encourage them to employ or to provide volunteering opportunities to refugees.
7. Ensure local authorities are commissioning appropriate mental health services for refugees and people seeking asylum, particularly in boroughs with a high concentration of refugee communities. This could be done by making sure that local NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups connect with local RCOs or with the London Refugee Advocacy Forum to develop an in-depth knowledge of the specific and specialist mental healthcare needs of refugees and people seeking asylum – hence ensuring the commissioning of appropriate services.

Recommendations for central government

1. Recognise the detrimental impact of government immigration policies, including the policy on the right to work, which undermines people seeking asylum' ability to integrate right from day one; the policy on the 28-day 'move on' period, which renders newly-recognised refugees more vulnerable to homelessness and destitution.
2. Engage with the London Refugee Advocacy Forum and invest in RCO contributions to social policy objectives.

Recommendations for service providers

1. Involve grassroots RCOs in public service delivery in order to ensure that the needs of vulnerable and hard to reach refugees and people seeking asylum are met appropriately. This can be achieved through partnership or subcontracting arrangements.
2. Engage and consult with RCOs and their forum to involve them in the design and planning of service delivery and ensure optimum accessibility of services by refugees and people seeking asylum.
3. Ensure availability of accurate translations of information related to services, policy and procedures, on service providers' websites in languages most spoken by people seeking asylum and refugees to make sure they are not left out.

Recommendations for funders and commissioners

1. Commissioners to make commissioning processes as accessible and jargon-free as possible for RCOs (which are small organisations with little or no working capital) to enable them to tender to deliver services to refugees and people seeking asylum. This means that tender specifications should take account of the distinctive offer, approach and position of RCOs for meeting the needs of refugee populations in local areas.
2. Funders to recognise the unique insight, reach and capacity of RCOs (particularly members of the forum) to address the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum – and adopt accessible grant programmes for RCOs, which include core funding and a capacity building element.
3. Funders to support the London Refugee Advocacy Forum to gather more evidence and develop an in-depth knowledge of London refugee communities, and engage with local planning and decision-making processes at local and regional level.

Appendix

Survey questions

There were three types of questions used in this survey:

1. Multiple-choice
2. Likert scales (that gauged respondents' opinions and feelings, with a range of options such as Very Useful or Fairly Confident)
3. Ranking (that helped us understand how participants prioritise their needs)

The questions were split across nine sections, and the estimated time of completing the survey was calculated at approximately 20 minutes. To preserve the anonymity of all participants, we never asked for any identifying information. The participation was entirely voluntary.

SECTION: ENGLISH & IT

Q1 How good are you at writing in English? For example, writing letters or notes or filling in application forms.

Answered: 681; skipped: 0

Q2 How good are you at speaking English? For example, having a conversation on the telephone or talking to a professional such as a teacher or a doctor.

Answered: 681; skipped: 0

Q3 Have you taken part in any English language training course (e.g. ESOL) in the UK?

Answered: 681; skipped: 0

Q4 If your answer to Q3 is No, why have you not taken any English language training course in the UK?

Answered: 387; skipped: 294

Q5 If your answer to Q3 is Yes and you have taken at least one English language training course in the UK, who was running the English course(s) you attended?

Answered: 396; skipped: 285

Q6 If your answer to Q3 is Yes and you have taken/currently taking at least one English language training course in the UK, what was the level of your most recent English language course?

Answered: 397; skipped: 284

Q7 How good are you at using a computer when you need to? For example, writing letters or documents, filling in online application forms (welfare benefits, school admission) or looking for information on the internet.

Answered: 681; skipped: 0

Q8 Have you taken part in any IT training course (formal or informal)?

Answered: 681; skipped: 0

Q9 If your answer to Q8 is No, why have you not taken any IT course in the UK?

Answered: 448; skipped: 233

Q10 If your answer to Q8 is Yes and you have taken at least one IT training course in the UK, who was running the IT training course(s) you attended?

Answered: 313; skipped: 368

SECTION: HEALTH

Q11 In general, how would you rate your overall health?

Answered: 670; skipped: 11

Q12 Do you have any health related issues for which you need advice, information, or treatment?

Answered: 670; skipped: 11

Q13 Have you ever personally experienced mental health problems (for example anxiety or depression)?

Answered: 670; skipped: 11

Q14 If your answer to Q13 is Yes, and you have personally experienced a mental health problem, have you had access to therapy or treatment from a specialist?

Answered: 295; skipped: 386

Q15 Are you currently registered with a GP or family doctor in the UK?

Answered: 670; skipped: 11

Q16 Are there any issues that prevent you from accessing health services?

Answered: 670; skipped: 11

Q17 What is your source(s) of information for health issues?

Answered: 635; skipped: 46

SECTION: IMPACT OF COVID-19

Q18 Did you experience any of the following issues as a result of COVID-19 pandemic or related measures such as lockdown?

Answered: 667; skipped: 14

SECTION: HOUSING

Q19 Which of these statements best describes the way you occupy your current accommodation or where you live?

Answered: 661; skipped: 20

Q20 Do you currently have any of the following housing problems?

Answered: 661; skipped: 20

Q21 If any of your answers to Q20 is Yes and you have housing problems, how long have you had these problems for?

Answered: 353; skipped: 328

Q22 What are your main sources of information/support for housing issues?

Answered: 597; skipped: 84

SECTION: EMPLOYMENT

Q23 Which of the following best describes your employment status?

Answered: 605; skipped: 76

Q24 If you are unemployed, how long have you been unemployed for?

Answered: 402; skipped: 279

Q25 If you are unemployed, what is preventing you from getting a job?

Answered: 441; skipped: 270

Q26 If you are in employment, do you have any of the following employment related issues?

Answered: 418; skipped: 263

Q27 What are your main sources of information/support for employment related needs?

Answered: 581; skipped: 100

SECTION: IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Q28 Are you in need of legal advice for immigration matters?

Answered: 657; skipped: 24

Q29 How easy or difficult is it for you to access legal advice services for immigration matters?

Answered: 554; skipped: 127

Q30 How easy or difficult is/was for you to integrate in the community where you live?

Answered: 593; skipped: 88

SECTION: SAFETY IN THE COMMUNITY

Q31 Have you ever experienced domestic violence? By domestic violence we mean violent or aggressive behaviour within your home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner.

Answered: 655; skipped: 26

Q32 Have you ever experienced a hate crime? By hate crime we mean a crime which is motivated by prejudice on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds.

Answered: 655; skipped: 26

Q33 Are you in fear of you or a young member of your family being a victim of a knife crime?

Answered: 598; skipped: 83

Q34 If you experienced domestic violence, hate crime or any other crime, where did you get support from?

Answered: 655; skipped: 26

Q35 How do you rate your confidence in reporting a crime to the police?

Answered: 655; skipped: 26

Q36 Considering the issues you are facing now, please list the following issues by order of priority with P1 being the highest.

Answered: 655; skipped: 26

SECTION: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Q37 Before COVID-19, on average how often, if at all, did you attend activities run by a refugee community organisation?

Answered: 653; skipped: 28

Q38 During COVID-19, on average how often, if at all, did you attend activities run by a refugee community organisation (this can include activities run through digital tools such as Zoom)?

Answered: 653; skipped: 28

Q39 If you attended activities/services run by a refugee community organisation, in which capacity did you attend the activities of the RCOs?

Answered: 653; skipped: 28

Q40 If you attended activities/services run by a refugee community organisation, which services from the list below did you receive from the organisation?

Answered: 653; skipped: 28

Q41 If you attended activities/services run by a refugee community organisation, generally how useful did you find their services?

Answered: 653; skipped: 28

SECTION: GENERAL INFORMATION

Q42 Which of the following best describes your current immigration status?

Answered: 651; skipped: 30

Q43 How old were you on your last birthday?

Answered: 651; skipped: 30

Q44 What is your gender?

Answered: 651; skipped: 30

Q45 What is your country of origin?

Answered: 519; skipped: 162

Q46 How long have you been in the UK?

Answered: 651; skipped: 30

Q47 Where are you currently living in London?

Answered: 651; skipped: 30

Q48 What is the name of the organisation that invited you to complete this survey?

Answered: 651; skipped: 30



IMAGE BY: James Glossop

