

# IMPACT REPORT

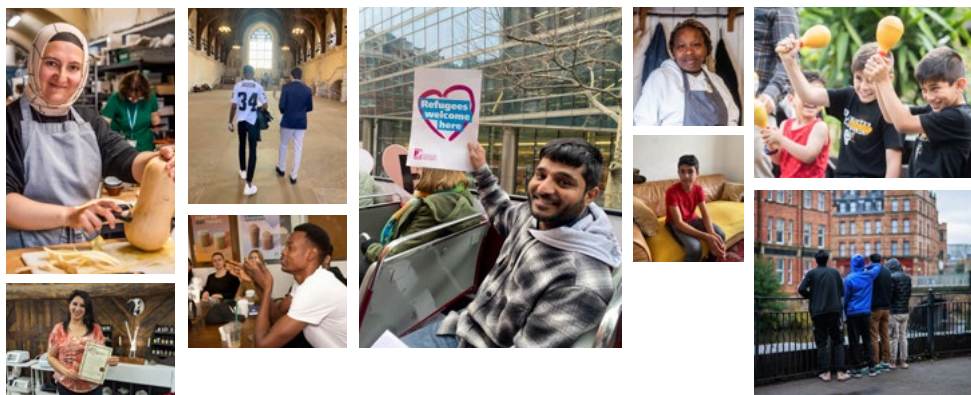
2022/23



Photo: Sean Pollock



SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES



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## A proud moment

In 2023, our CEO, **Enver Solomon** was named Charity Leader of the Year at the Charity Times Awards. Commenting on his award, Enver said: "Leadership is about building brilliant teams and this is testament to the brilliance of the whole Refugee Council team: our staff, our volunteers, and everyone who works with and supports us."



# Introduction

by **Enver Solomon**

Chief Executive, the Refugee Council

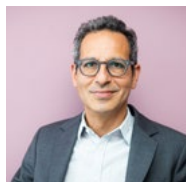


Photo: Ingrid Turner

It was a watershed year for our cause at the Refugee Council. The Government's new legislation which denies the men, women and children who reach our shores in search of safety the right to seek asylum in the UK and attempts to ship them across the globe to Rwanda, was a historic moment. It must be seen for what it was; an inhumane response that effectively ripped up our commitment to the UN Refugee Convention, of which the UK was a founding signatory in 1951 and which led to the creation of the Refugee Council in the same year.

Time after time, our asylum system counts the numbers, but fails to see the faces of very terrified and traumatised people. Over the last year we have seen rising distress, trauma and anxiety amongst those we work with stranded in

basic hotel accommodation as a direct consequence of the Government's draconian approach.

We exposed the true scale of the backlog in asylum claims and mounted a concerted influencing campaign to get the Government to act. It contributed to the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, making a personal commitment to clear the backlog in so called legacy cases within 12 months. This was a significant victory and will make a huge difference to the lives of so many vulnerable people.

The country's response to welcome nearly 200,000 Ukrainians has been in marked contrast to the Government's harsh rhetoric on asylum. We mobilised new services to meet their needs and sought to directly help those particularly facing hardship, who arrived with family visas and were eligible for less support. Our rapid response was supported by a record fundraising appeal for the Refugee Council.

We continue to make great progress in delivering our strategy to 2025. A key commitment was to take forward a new cross-organisational approach to refugee involvement; we launched a purposeful strategy and delivery plan, recruiting a new Head of Refugee Involvement to lead the work on our leadership team.

We operate in a world of both chaos and complexity with our cause, one of the most political of our time. I am very proud of our staff and volunteers who are navigating this terrain with truly humbling resilience and passion. And it is also our supporters and partners who help make us who we are, and deserve huge credit in the achievements of the last 12 months.

Thank you so much for your support.

# Who we are

The Refugee Council is a leading charity working with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. Founded in 1951 following the creation of the UN Refugee Convention, we exist to support and empower people who have fled conflict, violence and persecution in order to rebuild their lives here in the UK.

From the moment refugees arrive in the UK, we provide high-quality support, campaign and advocate for the rights of refugees. We share a vision, purpose and impact outlined below:

## OUR VISION

Refugees are welcome and live safe and fulfilling lives contributing to the UK.



## OUR PURPOSE

To transform the experiences of refugees seeking protection in the UK.



## OUR IMPACT

Refugees have control of their lives and a fair experience of seeking protection in the UK.



“After I heard about Refugee Council, they helped me very much.”

Ayse is from Turkey.  
Photo: Sean Pollock.

# Our values

## INCLUSION

We are inclusive. We work with - not for - refugees and people seeking asylum, so they have an equal voice, co-producing projects and ensuring their expertise and experiences are at the heart of what we do.



## COLLABORATION

We are collaborative. Working with others is a priority in order to have the collective impact that is vital to achieve policy and practice reform.



## COURAGE

We speak truth to power. We always stand up for what we believe is the right thing to do to transform the experiences of those seeking protection in our country.



## RESPECT

We are respectful of all those we interact with. We treat everyone – our staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, partners and people we disagree with – with the same respect, professionalism and understanding.



Shadab says hostile policies are not the answer.

“The people are from war torn countries like Afghanistan... who want a safe place.”



# Our year in numbers

Our services reached:

## 15,851

people in need of support, representing a

## 28%

increase from last year.

This included:



### 1,433

refugees benefitted from our therapeutic services



### 6,941

separated refugee children were able to receive the support they needed



### 6,260

refugees started to rebuild their lives in the UK



### 2,136

refugees were able to benefit from our integration and employment services

Most clients are from five countries:

## 63%

AFGHANISTAN

SYRIA

IRAN

UKRAINE

SUDAN



### 93,790

donations received from individuals, which totalled almost

### £4.9m



### 3,938

people donated to the Refugee Council for the first time.



### 419,127

unique users visited our website



### 15,392

people joined our campaign for a fair and humane asylum system



The Refugee Council was mentioned in

### 6,244

media items



# Refugee involvement

**The Refugee Council made a commitment to put the voices and insights of refugees at the heart of what we do. By developing a whole organisation approach to their engagement and involvement in our work, we have taken concrete steps towards this commitment by developing a strategy and establishing a leadership function for refugee involvement.**

In addition, we have developed a plan to explore how best to support staff and volunteers with lived experience in their career development.

Our Refugee Involvement Strategy was co-produced by a Lived Experience Enabling Group (including staff with lived experience) and the Refugee Council clients. We brought in expertise about service user involvement from the health sector and the Strategy was informed by an internal review completed in 2021, that mapped out our service user participation across the organisation, and identified existing pockets of good practice, gaps and learning.

Following consultations from a wide range of staff about what they would need to be able to implement the strategy, we also co-produced a Refugee Involvement Delivery Plan.

The Lived Experience Enabling Group was also involved in communicating and championing the plans with the rest of the organisation and with the refugee community.

We allocated resources to make the strategy a reality through creating a new leadership function across the organisation to ensure we deliver our plans.

We established a Refugee Involvement Team within the CEO office, to work with all teams in different Directorates to deliver our plan. We appointed a Head of Refugee Involvement to lead the strategy implementation and a Youth Involvement Manager to work with children and young people.

Our Refugee Community Organisations project was placed under this leadership to ensure we continue to create a thriving and resilient population of refugee-led organisations with a strong voice and with the capacity to respond effectively to the needs of their communities.



Iman and Reza are volunteering at a local gardening project while waiting for a decision on their asylum claims.

“My message to politicians is don't see one side – people who are coming here, you can't imagine how difficult the things they've been through are.”

S. (speaking here) and M. visited Parliament to speak with MPs and Peers.





# Progress towards our ambitions

## Our ambitions to 2025

1. **We will** successfully press Government and other agencies to take action that significantly improves refugee protection.
2. **We will** significantly improve access to quality support for refugees in crisis and those seeking to integrate into the UK.
3. **We will** successfully influence improved public attitudes to refugees in new and imaginative ways to reform the hostile environment that impacts their lives.



“We support each other, I love that part about it.”

Ruth is from Nigeria.  
Photo: Sean Pollock



# Ambition 1

To successfully press Government and other agencies to take action to improve refugee protection

## Achievements

Despite the Government's hostile policies and its mismanagement of the asylum system, we did achieve some important and significant policy reforms and commitments that will make a positive difference to the lives of those we work with, including people in the asylum system and Ukrainian refugees.

By Autumn 2022, the backlog of people waiting for a decision on their claim for asylum had quadrupled over the last five years (to over 140,000 cases), with the cost of systemic use of hotel accommodation standing at £6m per day.

The Refugee Council advocated for practical solutions to address the growing backlog. PM Rishi Sunak committed to clearing the asylum backlog, a significant policy win, which we hope to see achieved.



“ Staying put in the hotel is very difficult for me, I find it stressful. I prefer participating in society. ”

Above: Fode is from Guinea

## Raising concerns about the asylum backlog

In February 2023, the Home Office introduced a new **Streamlined Asylum Process** to make faster decisions on applications made by people from high grant countries. We had concerns about the design of the questionnaire that was being sent to people as part of the process.

We worked with the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) and others to continue to highlight the issue and we continue to monitor the impact.

We have also been campaigning to ensure refugees are able to reunite, to allow them to come to the UK to be with their family members. We achieved some important success when the Home Office amended the Immigration Rules to allow adult dependent children to apply for family reunion (if the case meets certain exceptional circumstances), and to allow children to reunite with an adult relative other than their parents. This was an important policy win.



Above: Wasim is separated from his parents and would like them to be allowed to join him in the UK.

In April 2022, the **Nationality and Borders Act** passed into law, including significant changes to the way the UK fulfils its international obligation to people seeking asylum. This included creating a two-tier asylum system whereby people seeking asylum will receive differential treatment entirely dependent on how they arrive in the UK.

Despite integrated influencing work with the wider refugee and asylum sector, disappointingly, our efforts to amend the bill were unsuccessful and the Bill passed into law.

In the following months, the Refugee Council sought to lessen the impact of the legislation through influencing the guidance needed to implement central aspects. The published guidance reflected key recommendations we had made, particularly in relation to family reunion. It included much of our feedback in the final version.



## Campaigning against the Rwanda Plan

We also saw the shocking introduction of the Government's new **Migration and Economic Development Partnership** to outsource asylum processing to Rwanda.

We called out the human misery that would be caused by this policy, and united with the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium to highlight, in particular, the issue of children being at risk of being sent to Rwanda due to incorrect age assessment.

This work became a key area of focus later in the year when we launched our report *Identity crisis: how the age dispute process puts refugee children at risk* highlighting concerning practice and biased approaches to age assessments for unaccompanied young people seeking asylum.

Alongside others in the refugee sector, the Refugee Council has worked hard to call out the inhumane, costly and unworkable measures laid out in the Rwanda Plan.

In summer 2023, the Rwanda Plan was found to be unlawful in the Court of Appeal, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in November 2023. At the time of writing this report, there are no flights to Rwanda for the purpose of an outsourced UK asylum system.

The Government has pledged to press ahead with their Rwanda Plan and we anticipate further legislation to be brought forward on it.

**IMAGE LEFT:** Campaigning against the Rwanda Plan as part of the Together With Refugees coalition.

## Illegal Migration Bill: Our Impact Assessment

March 2023 saw the publication of the Government's latest and most hostile asylum legislation to date, the *Illegal Migration Bill*. The Bill outlined changes to the law to make asylum applications made by people who arrive irregularly into the UK permanently inadmissible, including those made by both accompanied and separated children.

Using Home Office data and other sources, the Refugee Council developed and published an impact assessment of the Bill, estimating how many people it would affect and how much it would cost across the first three years of operation.

This was developed in the absence of a Government impact assessment, and as such our Impact Assessment was quoted widely in the media and in parliament.

We were invited to give oral evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights at the committee's first session as part of their inquiry on the Bill.

Disappointingly, the Illegal Migration Bill passed into law in July 2023. The Refugee Council worked hard with partner organisations across the refugee and asylum sector to achieve some very modest amendments to the legislation, such as a commitment from the Government to produce plans within six months of the Bill becoming law to set out proposed new safe routes to the UK.

We continue to oppose the Act and will now work closely with civil servants and refugee organisations to understand how the Act will be operationalised going forward.



“You learn a lot about British culture, with Refugee Council – there’s a lot of activities.”

Mohammed is from Sudan

## Campaign to waive visa restrictions for Ukrainians fleeing war

2022/23 saw over 163,500 refugees arrive in the UK fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Refugee Council worked closely with the wider refugee and asylum sector, alongside Ukrainian-led organisations, to unpick and understand the Government programmes to help people fleeing Ukraine seeking safety in the UK.

We co-ordinated a public letter backed by Oxfam, the British Red Cross, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children calling on the Government to immediately waive visa restrictions for Ukrainians. We also responded to the announcement of the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme – highlighting the slow visa application process and the increasing number of Ukrainian refugees falling into homelessness due to breakdowns in relationships with hosts.

This lobbying contributed to an extension of the family visa, that entitled family members to come to the UK, an extension on the six-month hosting placement financial support package for Homes for Ukraine hosts, and retrospective benefits entitlements for Sure Start Maternity Grants for Ukrainian refugees (alongside Afghan refugees).



## Campaigning for Afghan refugees

And, throughout this period, the Refugee Council continued to call on the Government to better meet the needs of refugees from Afghanistan. This has included escalating concerns about the experiences of men, women and families housed in hotels, alongside the restrictive nature of the Afghan resettlement scheme, to Parliamentarians and in the public domain throughout the year.

“Just give me a visa for my mum and dad. They have three children here...”



Zulikha, who arrived in the UK aged 18, is caring for her younger siblings alone.

“I try to cope... I have to be on both sides, here and there, and my heart is divided – it’s broken.”

Anna and her daughters are refugees from Ukraine



# Ambition 2

**We will significantly improve access to quality support for refugees in crisis and those seeking to integrate into the UK**

## Achievements

In 2022/23 we provided services to **15,851** people. Our services teams adapted to a fast changing external environment to welcome a sharp increase on the number of adults and separated children seeking asylum, and refugees arriving in the UK from Afghanistan and Ukraine in need of resettlement support.

Our services Directorate was named **'Frontline Team of the Year'** at the Third Sector Awards for their courageous, determined and high impact support for refugees arriving in the UK from around the world to rebuild their lives in the UK. It comes during a turbulent year when government policies sought to withdraw access to refugee protection.



**Key achievements from our four service delivery pillars were:**

### Resettlement

Delivering integration and therapeutic support to Afghans in Bridging Hotels in Yorkshire & Humberside for a second year, whilst rapidly mobilising our service response for Ukrainians in Yorkshire & Humberside and London under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

We also scaled up our services that supported Afghans to rebuild their lives in the UK through our resettlement services.

We succeeded in securing therapeutic services for Afghans in Bridging Hotels, Ukrainians, children and families in Yorkshire and Humberside, enabling people to come to terms with the emotional impact of their experiences. Our services supported Afghans and Ukrainians to access benefits, employability, education and healthcare, and plan for long term housing. We worked with Government and local housing providers to seek solutions to lack of affordable housing supply, and with statutory partners to keep people safe when domestic relationships or deteriorating mental health led to risks to their personal safety.

“ I’m a very social woman. This course is the perfect opportunity in my life. ”

Yasemin, from Turkey  
Photo: Sean Pollock

## Voice of Qudos\* a refugee supported by Resettlement Services

Qudos lives in Yorkshire with his wife and five children after being resettled from Afghanistan (via Iran) in January 2023 under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). They were taken to a bridging hotel when they first arrived where they were supported by the Refugee Council.

“ Refugees don’t know how to start here, the Refugee Council helps with everything, they apply for bank accounts, for school for kids, and also now applying for NHS doctors. Some people can’t speak English so they help. Some people have stress, some issues, and emotionally they help. There is a therapist who meets all the people in the hotel and if some people have a problem they have a contact with the therapist. They’re very useful and very good, I am very happy with them. The Refugee Council sent me one of the links for a job, in a charity and they accept me.

Now I’m also working for Afghan refugees, we are meeting with Afghan women, if they have problems, we speak with the Refugee Council. The refugees trust the Refugee Council here...

Refugees don’t like to leave their country, they left everything, for example, they have a car, they have a life, they have a house, they have money, they have shops. Nobody thinks about that, they left everything.

”

Qudos\*

Name changed to protect identity



“ It took me a long time to adjust. I wanted to go back so much.”

Kateryna from Ukraine

## Children's Services

### Our children's services supported **6,941 children, 25% more** than in 2021-22

The vast majority were supported by our Independent Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children's Support Service, that launched in May 2021, funded by the Home Office.

Building on our 28 years welcoming separated children to the UK, this service provides children arriving alone in the UK to seek asylum with the trauma-informed and child-centred advice and support they need to understand the asylum and child protection systems they rely on.

It includes our reception service for vulnerable children at the Kent Intake Unit, our free Advice Line, and regional advice teams, connecting young people with

specialist services they need to stay safe and thrive while they wait for the outcome of the asylum claim and/or to turn 18.

Alongside this England-wide service, our specialist Age Dispute team funded by our generous donors, supported 523 children who had been accommodated with adults, after being incorrectly identified by Home Office officials as adults, to be recognised as children and looked after by Local Authority children's services.

We continue to work closely with children and the Home Office to improve age identification policies and practice to address this ongoing safeguarding crisis.



“ I said ‘it’s not my age!’ They had put that I was 22. They just said you can correct it later... ”

Photos: Joel Goodman

## Voice of Amir\*, a refugee supported by Children's Services

Amir arrived in the UK from Afghanistan with a copy of his Afghan ID which showed his age as 16 years. On arrival in Dover, Home Office officials did not accept his ID, instead recording his age as 22 years. He was transferred to adult accommodation, where he found life very difficult. He felt scared and uncomfortable living with older people.

Amir met the Refugee Council Age Dispute Project Team at his hotel, they referred him to the Local Authority for an age assessment, and they agreed to take him into care. The Local Authority assessment found Amir to be a child aged 16 and he is now receiving the care and support he needs to thrive. \*name changed to protect identity.

“

They asked my age. I said 'I am 16', I gave them my Afghanistan date of birth...They gave me no reason, they just said 'no you are 22.' Two or three times I said 'no', I said 'if you don't believe me, I am 16, I can give you my national ID'. They said 'this is not your ID.'

It wasn't fair. I struggled a lot. The Refugee Council visited me, helped me get out of the hotel and get my age corrected. Now I get help from a social worker and can get help with issues I don't understand, like getting to the GP.

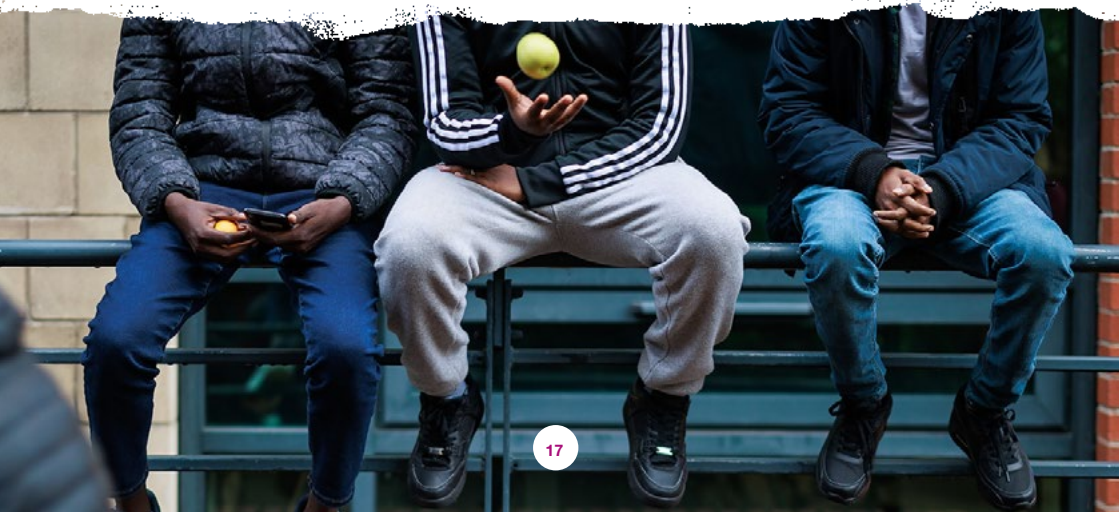
I heard this country was kind. I didn't expect them to be so unfair. I'm still shocked. It's not just me, it's also happening to lots of other people, even younger than me.

Mentally it was difficult to cope with, I suffered. At my young age I have seen and experienced a lot of suffering. If not for Josh [at the Refugee Council], I could still be in that hotel. Day and night I'm thankful, and I pray for Josh, because he helped me to get out.

Young people come here because there is no safety in their countries. If they are treated well, they can work and become useful members of society. I don't want them to suffer as I did.

Despite the bad experience, I'm thankful to the British people for giving me safety.

”





## Integration Services

Our Integration and Employment Services played a critical role again this year enabling **2,136** refugees to overcome the key challenges to rebuilding their lives in the UK – understanding of housing, healthcare, welfare, and employability systems, and addressing the barriers to inclusion through specialist advocacy, training and support.

Our specialist services supporting newly recognised refugees to access housing, benefits and social care systems, secured **40 tenancies** with private landlords in London for refugees experiencing homelessness.

Our specialist employment services in London, Hertfordshire and Yorkshire:

- enabled **141 people** to secure employment at entry and professional levels.
- enabling a further **482 people** to develop their employability through mentoring programmes, job placements, training and support to have their qualifications recognised.

BELOW: Hamid from East Africa attending a training session run by the Refugee Council and Starbucks.

Photo: Sophia Evans





## Voice of Mariam, a refugee supported by Integration Services

“ It's so difficult when you come, you can't speak English, it's a hard life in the beginning. After we studied ESOL English language classes, step by step, we learned a lot. We learned about life here, it's interesting and it's so cool.

I'm 32 now, and I have three kids. My oldest one, my son is 14, my second one, she is 12, and my youngest is 4. When we arrived here, the Refugee Council helped with everything. I came with my husband and children.

I heard about the beauty training, and I felt excited and happy. They give you confidence, it's good teaching. Really, they helped me a lot. I was learning about acrylic nails, health and safety, and different therapies. I enjoyed it, it was so helpful. Everything takes practice!

I felt confident and relaxed after the course. The teacher told me for every section what I needed to do. She was so kind, really.

In future I hope to open my own hairdressing salon, and my sister will open it with me, together, we will do nails and acrylic nails, we will have our own business.

I'd say everyone should have opportunities. I love this work, and if you love it, you keep going, and step by step, you'll find what you like. My kids told me - we hope you open your own business Mum, and do anything you want! ”

BELOW: Mariam from Syria was supported by our team in Hull to learn English and train as a beauty therapist.



## Therapeutic and Destitution Services

Our therapeutic services supported people seeking asylum and refugees to come to terms with the emotional impact of their experiences since fleeing to the UK to seek protection. Our services work with separated children and those who have come to the UK with their family, as well as adults and families.

Our destitution service engages people who have been failed by the refugee protection system for many years, often with poor physical and mental health due to years of living in inadequate or exploitative housing situations. Our specialist person-centred casework service supports them to access housing, health care and legal services needed to resume their asylum claim and secure long term safety.

This work takes immense care and skill to regain people's trust and secure the professional support needed to restore their health and access to safe housing.

- Our destitution service supported **87 people** and enabled **35** to re-enter the asylum support system.
- We supported **219 adults** seeking asylum in hotels and initial accommodation to manage the loss of hope and trauma of living in accommodation inappropriate to their needs.
- We supported **29 families, 99 people**, through our therapeutic service for children and families resettling in South Yorkshire – in this service 100% reported improved mental and physical wellbeing, ability to make informed choices, and social inclusion.



Image: The Refugee Council supports young people to come to terms with traumatic experiences and move forward with their lives.

## Ali Martin was supported by Destitution Services

Ali Martin is from Sierra Leone where he campaigned for the rights of other disabled people. After a new Government came to power, his life was in danger, and he claimed asylum in the UK.

It was a very difficult process for him, as a blind person, and he struggled to find accommodation, to buy food, and to get the support he needed. He was supported by the Refugee Council who also connected him with a solicitor.

“

There was a time when I was almost homeless. It was very difficult for me. The Home Office would not give me accommodation. It was difficult because according to Social Services I had no recourse to public funds. It was a struggle. I had no money to eat, nothing. I had to contact the Refugee Council. The Refugee Council were so instrumental in finding a solicitor for me, and giving me money.

Organisations like the Refugee Council and others are doing a very good job... I went to the court, I won my appeal, I got my decision on 9th November.

In my depths of struggle for food, there were times I did not have Home Office support. I did not receive my Aspen Card. Kellie at the Refugee Council has always provided me vouchers to get food.

It was not easy to get food. Those were starving days for me. I starved. Apart from the counselling services, which I received from the Refugee Council.... They also provided other resources, of institutions to contact.

It has been very tough and challenging. You have to think of what's happening at home. Then when you think you are safe now, you can only think of your family, you still have to think of shelter, food, you know, it was really tough.

Ali Martin

”



# Ambition 3

To successfully influence public attitudes to refugees and people seeking asylum in new and imaginative ways to reform the hostile environment

**2022/23 was a key year for delivering a step change in our work to influence public perceptions of refugees.**

Our media and influencing work has accelerated. Over the last two years, we have increased our overall media coverage by **616%**, and our national media by **459%**.

During this period, the Refugee Council was mentioned in **6,244** media items, of which **554** were in national outlets.

We have also delivered reports and policy analysis that have shaped the refugee debate and undermined the foundations of the anti-protection argument, cited not just by the refugee sector but by the media, think tanks and politicians.

We have stepped further into our work with unexpected messengers to reach new audiences, never better illustrated than when A list celebrities such as Sylvester Stallone and Daniel Radcliffe joined our

patron Emma Thompson to shine a light on the true impact of the Nationality and Borders Act through the **#YoureACriminal** viral film.

We also understand how crucial it is to take a relational approach in our influencing work. We have proactively built strong relationships with Editors, Home Affairs Correspondents and respected think tanks that traditionally sit on the centre right in their politics.

## Influencing public attitudes

A large part of our work under this ambition is to balance the narrative and influence positive public discourse around refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK.

This includes sharing evidence and information that refute incorrect or misleading information in the public domain. For example, during the year we challenged misinformation around the men, women and children arriving in small boats across the English Channel through our report, *The Truth about Channel Crossings*. It was aimed to directly counter the Home Office's narrative that those crossing the channel are predominantly economic migrants.

Using the Home Office's own data, our report showed that two-thirds of people currently crossing the channel and awaiting a decision on their claim for asylum would be recognised as refugees.

Journalist Zahra Shaheer speaking to the BBC about her experiences of leaving Afghanistan.





We work to influence public attitudes in imaginative ways. Photo: Ingrid Turner

The report, and the evidence within it, has been cited across the media, by parliamentarians and by the refugee and asylum sector to help balance the hostile narrative that dehumanises and demonises refugees.

We also spoke out about the inappropriate use of hotels to house unaccompanied children over the summer of 2022. We were one of 60 signatories to an open letter led by Children England, warning that children seeking asylum are actually going missing from hotels and at risk of exploitation.

Alongside this, we leaned into the divisive topic of children and young people's ages within the asylum system, by highlighting the damaging processes used to assess a child's age in our report, *Identity Crisis: how the age dispute process puts refugee children at risk*.

The report highlighted the hundreds of refugee children at risk as a result of inaccurate decision making that sees the Home Office routinely mistaking them for adults, with no access to support or education and at clear risk of abuse and neglect. In over half of these cases, the Home Office claimed these children were at least 25, if not older.

The report was covered by a large number of media outlets and also cited by Stuart McDonald MP in the November 2022 Home Affairs Select Committee, who asked the Home Secretary for more data on the number of children affected and how that is recorded.

Looking to the future, we are sadly expecting the number of young people wrongly age assessed to significantly increase and will be publicly calling for Government to publish adequate and accurate data to give a true picture of the numbers of children affected.

### Working to dispel myths

We continued to shine a light on polarising and misunderstood areas of the refugee protection system, to help balance the narrative.

For example, this year saw the continued and increasing use of hotels, alongside the mounting backlog in decision making, for people in the asylum system. We countered the hostile rhetoric around supposedly 'luxurious' hotel stays by evidencing the impact of prolonged hotel stays on the health and wellbeing of people, in our report *Lives on Hold: The Experiences of People in Hotel Asylum Accommodation*.



The report uncovered that the use of hotel accommodation for people seeking asylum had almost trebled in 2021, leaving thousands of families with limited access to vital health, legal and other support services and at risk of depression and suicide ideation.

The report made a number of recommendations to ensure people are not left in limbo in hotels for long periods, but moved into dispersal accommodation within 35 days, and whilst people are in hotels, they have access to quality legal advice early and basic essentials like clothing, nutritious food and medicine.

### **The Manston Immigration Processing Centre in Kent**

The Autumn of 2022 also saw the terrible and wholly avoidable situation unfold in the Immigration Processing Centre at Manston in Kent, in which 4,000 men, women and children were detained, illegally, for up to a month in a facility designed to house 1,600 people for a 24-hour period.

In these overcrowded unsanitary conditions, highly contagious health conditions such as scabies and diphtheria, spread among people living there causing immense distress, particularly as they lacked any power to address their unacceptable situation.

The Refugee Council spoke out, challenging the inhumane conditions, and proposing a six-point plan to address the situation to the Government.

Following the death of a person held at Manston, from suspected complications from diphtheria, we led a joint call backed by over 60 charities in late November calling for an independent inquiry into the treatment of people being accommodated in Manston.

Shortly after this, Manston was cleared and a plan for contingency processing facilities was put in place to avoid a repeat of this scenario going forward.



“ My name is Marwa, I’m from Afghanistan, I am 19 years old. I’m studying ESOL class. I want to be a dentist! I will try. But I need to improve my English. ”

Photo: Sophia Evans

# Spotlight on...

## Our campaign for a fair and humane asylum system

**Our Communications, Campaigns and Fundraising teams came together to launch our campaign, *A Fair and Humane Asylum System*, in response to the crisis that was unfolding at the Manston processing centre, where refugees faced overcrowded and unsafe conditions. It was relaunched in response to the announcement of the Illegal Migration Act.**

The Refugee Council issued a six-point action plan for the Government, offering immediate, practical solutions to ensure a fair and humane asylum system, that promised compassionate treatment for those seeking asylum in the UK.

We invited our supporters across social and digital channels to join us on a journey to advocate for change. Our goals were clear: reach new audiences through digital channels, raise funds to support our vital work, and utilise our supporter base to target MPs asking them to support our six-point action plan.

**The impact we've achieved together is incredible. At the end of March 2023:**

- a total of **15,392** people had signed up
- **4,540** new supporters engaged in just one week when the Illegal Migration Act was announced
- we raised **£18,700** to support our vital work

By joining the campaign, supporters are the first to know how they can take action to make our collective voices heard as well as other ways they can support our ongoing work; this includes policy updates, campaigning actions and fundraising activities.

We're thrilled to see the sustained engagement with our work.

While the road ahead remains challenging, together we can continue to stand up for the rights of the women, men and children impacted by an unfair and inhumane asylum system.

We know that with you by our side, we're making a real difference, one step at a time.

BELOW: Our online content is driving awareness.



# Fundraising, communication, and our people

**In 2022/23 we received income of £6.2m. Three key factors helped:**

1. generous support from donors responding to our Refugee Crisis Appeal, launched in response to the Ukraine war, which received matched funding of £500,000 from the Lund Trust,
2. extraordinary legacy year, which included a very large legacy donation from one legator (Mr Romera Maura) – total value expected to be in the region of £3m over the next two years, and
3. launch of a new corporate partnerships approach to our employment services, resulting in new commitments and relationships with brands including Ikea, Starbucks and ServiceNow.

We work with supporters in a variety of ways. Our Individual Giving programme enables our supporters to make either one-off donations or regular gifts, inspiring support through direct mail, email, website and social channels.

We also have a collection of fantastic community fundraising supporters who raise funds through events and activities in their local communities.



The Refugee Council has partnered with Farewill to help making a Will simple and free. Find out more at:

<https://farewill.com/refugeecouncil-21-eg>

We were grateful to receive several legacy gifts during the year, as well as grateful to each person who has pledged us a gift for the future in their Will.



Ms Sylvia Schwarz, pledged a gift in her Will to the Refugee Council.

“ I have always been moved and saddened by the plight of refugees and those suffering political persecution. Even as a six-year old in 1956, I remember being concerned about the Hungarians when I heard of the revolution there, and I met some of the refugees at

my school. Later, in the 1970s, I met people who had had to flee from the brutal Pinochet regime in Chile. There are now so many more people urgently in need of our help, so I'm doing what little I can. ”

Most of the fundraising undertaken by the Refugee Council is done directly by our own staff, which means we are able to fully control the standards to which the work is carried out. We also work with specialist partners to support our activities, in areas such as telephone fundraising to promote regular giving, digital to support our social media fundraising campaigns, and also an expert fundraising consultant to help manage the refugee crisis emergency appeal following the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

We do not sell or exchange lists of data with any other charities or companies. For further details please see

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

The Refugee Council has been registered with the Fundraising Regulator since its inception in July 2016 and with its predecessor, the Fundraising Standards Board, before then. We take supporter complaints seriously and have established a process to handle, quantify and respond to complaints.

This year we received seven complaints, all of which were resolved to the complainant's satisfaction by our Supporter Care team.

In July 2017 the Fundraising Regulator launched the Fundraising Preference Service (FPS) aimed at providing people with the means to stop direct marketing from specific charities without having to contact them directly. In this financial year, the Refugee Council has received three such requests.

**BELOW:** Mai, from Syria, speaks about visiting a local nature reserve with our Women's Group in South London.



“ It gives us positive energy. ”

# Learning Matters

## Striving to always do better

**Reporting on our impact is also being open and transparent about what we have learned, where we need to do better and what we need to do differently. Whilst we have achieved a great deal, we didn't manage to realise everything in all the areas we identified last year for improvement. And through learning and reflection, we have identified additional areas where we need to improve.**

### **Taking an authentic approach to equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB)**

We have been taking forward our EDIB plan with an initial focus on anti-racism. We have reviewed our recruitment and selection policy and practice and improved our data collection. However, our staff groups have not been working as well as we would like. With external support we have taken stock and done a review with staff to understand how to achieve deeper cultural change. We are challenging ourselves to consider what leadership and organisational development is needed to embed EDIB in a whole organisation approach that is authentic and not just a tick box exercise and will be rethinking our approach and plan.

### **Developing a theory of change and demonstrating our impact**

We are on an impact journey developing a whole organisation theory of change that clearly sets out the change we want to create with refugees. As a first step we have developed outcomes data framework to show the difference we make through our direct work with refugees. We piloted the collection of impact data with our resettlement, therapeutic and integration services.

We plan to expand this work across all our services and also develop an approach to outcomes data collection and reporting for our external facing campaigning and communications work. We are committed to embedding our theory of change across the organisation and demonstrating our impact through quality data collection and reporting. Although this is a challenging change process, we recognise that it is critical to understand and communicate the difference we are making with refugees and to refine our work and deepen our impact.





### Services quality improvement

Our services are at the heart of what we do. We have identified that we can do more to improve the quality of our services with refugees. We are developing a quality improvement plan that we will implement from 2024, and this will enable us to continuously drive up our service quality for the next two years. Immigration services quality is the first priority area, followed by our Advice Services as a whole, our aim being to secure the Advice Quality Standard by the end of the year.

### Supporting and developing our leaders

Our leaders and managers play a critical role across the organisation shaping our culture and supporting staff and volunteers. Yet we know that we do not have a consistent approach to management across the organisation and because we have not done enough to develop and support our managers, we have worked with them to develop a new leadership capability framework. However, we know there is more to do. Over the coming year we will be putting in place a leadership and management development programme.

# A thank you to our supporters

38 Degrees  
B&Q Foundation  
BBC Children In Need  
Clive, Alison & Olivia Beecham  
Comic Relief  
DLA Piper, London office  
Frances and Matthew Lindsey-Clark  
Haskel Family Foundation  
Ian and Liz McVeigh  
IKEA  
Jonny Holliday and Som Holliday  
Masonic Charitable Foundation  
Mike and Mary Lisle  
Nationwide Building Society  
Parker Johnson Prentice Charitable Trust  
Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
Paul Smee  
PWC  
ServiceNow  
Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation

Starbucks Foundation and Starbucks EMEA Ltd  
The Alice Ellen Cooper-Dean Charitable Foundation  
The Boltini Trust  
The French Huguenot Church of London Charitable Trust  
The Jane Goodman Charitable Trust, in memory of Dr Jane Goodman  
The John MacLeod Charitable Trust  
The Linbury Trust  
The London Community Foundation  
The Lund Trust  
The National Lottery Community Fund  
The Robin MacLeod Charitable Trust  
The Valentine Charitable Trust  
The Vivienne Foundation  
This Day  
Unbound Philanthropy  
Usborne Publishing  
West Hackney Parochial Charity

Photo: Sean Pollock



# Spotlight on... IKEA

## **IKEA and the Refugee Council supporting refugees into employment**

The Refugee Council has partnered with IKEA since April 2021 to deliver the Uppnå (meaning “to achieve” in Swedish) employability programme, developing and delivering a pathway of quality, holistic employment support for refugee talent to take up paid job experience placements at IKEA.

The programme focusses on support for refugees who are work-ready. This includes people who have the English language skills to work in a customer facing role and who may have had previous work experience, in a professional, or skilled or unskilled capacity, either in the UK or gained in their country of origin.

They join this programme to gain valuable training and advice about working in the UK and gain vital experience through partaking in an 8 week work placement.

Many programme graduates will then be offered an opportunity for permanent employment with IKEA.

### **What the partnership has achieved over the last three years:**

- 204 refugee clients successfully completed job readiness training
- 125 clients completed paid placements within IKEA
- 60 clients have gone on to secure permanent roles with IKEA

**“ Here at IKEA, we are thrilled to be continuing our great partnership with the Refugee Council as we give more opportunities for refugees from within our local communities to rebuild their lives, have access to decent employment and a fair wage and gain valuable experience to develop their skills and contribute towards our business. ”**

Tanya Hamilton, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Project Manager, UK&IE



**“ After my eight week placement I joined the sales department as a permanent worker. I would like to say thank you very much to IKEA for giving me this chance. ”**

Abdisa, from Ethiopia

# Our people

Refugee Council made a commitment in our strategy to develop our staff, invest in our systems and processes, prioritise a learning approach and attract the resources needed to deliver our mission and ambitions.

This year we continued to invest in our support functions and infrastructure, particularly focusing on our people and our technology.

Last year, our **423** volunteers contributed **23,087** hours. That's the financial equivalent of **£230,875**.

Volunteers are a vital part of the Refugee Council and play a crucial role in helping the organisation to increase the support available to refugees. They use their time and skills to support our work in a variety of ways, to the benefit of our clients, the Refugee Council and the individual volunteer. Wherever possible and appropriate, we are committed to involving volunteers at every level of our organisation.

In recognition of their excellent work the **Marsh Charitable Trust** sponsored an awards programme, that recognised sixteen volunteer-led projects across our services and regions, each being awarded **£400** to fund their activities.

We were incredibly proud that **Fatuma Ibrahim**, a refugee from Somalia who volunteers in our Resettlement team, received the Third Sector Volunteer of the Year Award. During the year, she supported more than 100 refugees with appointments and paperwork, and as an interpreter between teachers and parents.

To read more about the Third Sector Awards, scan the QR code or visit [www.thirdsectorawards.com/shortlist-2023](http://www.thirdsectorawards.com/shortlist-2023)



# Financial position

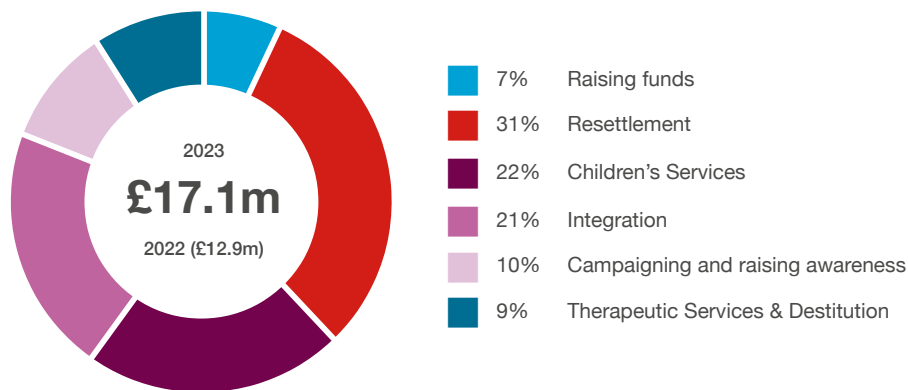
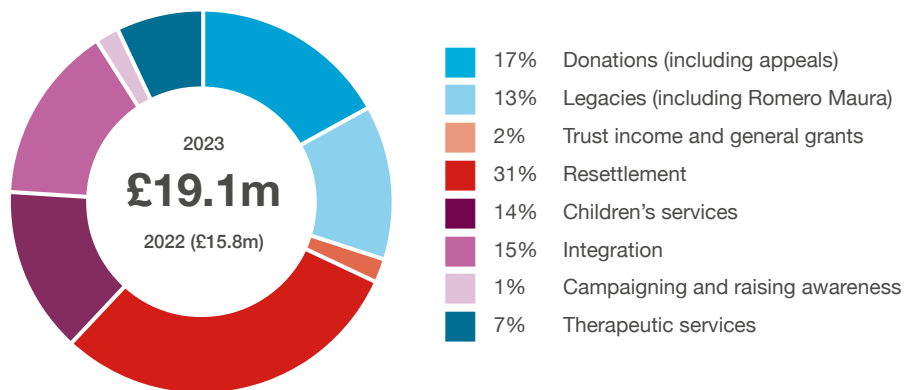
## Income

We can only achieve our vision to welcome refugees to live safe and fulfilling lives contributing to the UK thanks to the incredible generosity of our supporters, funders, volunteers, and partners.

In 2022/23, we raised a total of £19.1m. This includes:

- **£12.8m** from charitable activities
- **£6.2m** from fundraising, including £2.5m in legacies
- **£0.1m** from investments and other trading activities

Total income for 2022/23 was £3.3m higher than the prior year (2021/22: £15.8m) driven primarily by an exceptional year for legacy income and an expanding of our locations and activities for resettlement.





## Expenditure

Total expenditure increased by £4.2m to £17.1m (2021/22: £12.9m) driven by spend on charitable activities of £15.9m, up from £11.2m in the prior year and as expected in line with the increase in income.

Expenditure on our resettlement programmes was £2.2m higher than the prior year, as we increased our activity due to high numbers of people arriving to resettle in the UK via government programmes providing safe routes for people fleeing persecution from Afghanistan and Ukraine, as well as a new London-based programme.

Other charitable activities, such as children's services, integration and therapeutic services, have seen small increases in spend, with this increase being covered by income from Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), the European Asylum Migration & Integration Fund (AMIF) and other generous funders.

Expenditure on our advocacy & awareness raising activities was £1.7m, an increase of £1.0m from prior year and of which only £0.2m is covered by restricted income.

These teams and their activities are critical to our success to achieving our two strategic ambitions:

- **Ambition 1:** We will successfully press Government and other agencies to take action that significantly improves refugee protection.
- **Ambition 3:** We will successfully influence improved public attitudes to refugees in new and imaginative ways to reform the hostile environment that impacts their lives.

Continued investment in this area is crucial to achieve our strategy and we will continue to both look for external funding for this activity, as well as invest our unrestricted funds to deliver success in this key area.

Photo: Sean Pollock



# Reserve policy & designated funds

Total funds at 31 March 2023 stand at £10.8m; of which £3.0m is restricted by donors to fund specific projects, and £0.1 million is a long term endowment fund. Neither of these balances are available for general use. Of the balance of £7.7m unrestricted funds, £1.9 million has been designated and set aside by Trustees at the year-end as funding for specific future purposes.

Our free unrestricted general reserves at 31 March 2023 stand at £5.8m, an increase of £1.2 million from the £4.6m held at the start of the year. This balance is greater than our reserves policy indicates we need, a policy which was reviewed and updated during the year, but we recognise that we are entering a very turbulent period financially reflected in our latest three-year plans and will need these reserves to weather the coming period.

We have significant financial challenges ahead of us relating to a combination of the ongoing cost of living crisis, some key contract funding arrangements ending next year and our continued need to invest in transforming our organisation to better transform the experiences of refugees seeking protection in the UK.

Photo: Ingrid Turner






## Contact us

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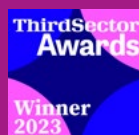
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**SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES**