



Integration guidelines

for multi-agency fora supporting asylum seekers and
refugees in the East of England

Produced by the

East of England Strategic Migration Partnership

in collaboration with the

Refugee Council and

Partnership Development Project (MENTER)

Foreword

The UK has a rich heritage of welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. Refugees can make a huge economic, social and cultural contribution to our region and they bring a wide range of skills and experience. If the process of integration works effectively, it can enable them to use and develop their skills to achieve their full potential and to benefit the host community. However, asylum seekers and refugees often have specific needs as a result of their experiences and circumstances and we must all work together to try and meet those needs for the benefit of all of us.

We are therefore pleased to present this 'Integration Guide' for the agencies working with asylum seekers and refugees in our region. We hope that this document will provide the region's multi-agency fora with a starting point from which they can develop their own integration strategies and good practice guides that will meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in their own specific area.

We know the process is challenging but we hope that this guide provides a useful tool in order to make our communities more welcoming for some of its most vulnerable members.



Keith Bennett
Chair of the EERA Social Inclusion Panel

About us

East of England Strategic Migration Partnership

The East of England Strategic Migration Partnership is the regional enabling body for the co-ordination of services to asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers in the East of England. Its role is to provide support, advice and representation to organisations working with asylum seekers, unsuccessful asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. It also seeks to ensure that the needs of the above groups are reflected in mainstream policy development and service delivery.

The Strategic Migration Partnership is a tiered regional network which encompasses grass roots organisations and a regional network of multi-agency fora and specialist and task groups which feed into the EEDA led Migrant Worker Steering Group, the EERA Asylum and Refugee Reference Group and the EERA Social Inclusion Panel, each with a mechanism to feed into the national bodies.

Further information on the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership can be found at: www.eera.gov.uk/smp

The Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is the largest organisation in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. The Refugee Council not only gives direct help and support, but also works with asylum seekers and refugees to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed.

The Refugee Council believes asylum seekers and refugees should be treated with understanding and respect. Their services aim to reflect this and include:

- giving advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees to help them rebuild their lives
- working with refugee community organisations, helping them grow and serve their communities
- caring for separated children to help them feel safe and supported in the UK

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- offering training and employment courses to enable asylum seekers and refugees to use their skills and qualifications
- campaigning and lobbying for refugees' voices to be heard in the UK and abroad
- keeping them high on the political agenda and discussed in the media
- producing authoritative information on refugee issues worldwide, including reports, statistics and analysis

Further information about the Refugee Council can be found at: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Partnership Development Project (MENTER)

The Partnership Development Project's main aim is to assist the integration of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers in the East of England and to improve local community cohesion through partnership working.

The project is managed by MENTER, a regional network of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations and communities for the East of England. The project's steering group consists of the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership, MENTER, the Refugee Council and the Voluntary Sector Refugee Network East of England.

Further information on the partnership development project can be found at: www.partnershipdevelopmentproject.org.uk

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Introduction

This is the first edition of the **Integration guidelines for multi-agency fora supporting asylum seekers and refugees for the East of England**. It aims to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees, and to support their host communities in the East of England.

Informed by some of the region's key practitioners, it is intended to provide guidance and a framework from which multi-agency fora working with asylum seekers and refugees can develop their own sub-regional integration strategies, and provides specific guidance and examples of good practice in relation to these groups around key integration themes.

The development of these guidelines takes place within the context of a number of related strategies and plans¹ which impact on the integration of asylum seekers and refugees, and have contributed to the development of the recommendations in this document.

It is intended that this be a living document; one which is of practical benefit to asylum seekers and refugees and those working to support them. It can be modified and added to in order to reflect changing priorities and a greater understanding of what is required, and as a result, it will be reviewed regularly.

Definitions

Asylum seeker: A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been decided.

Refugee: Someone whose asylum application has been successful and is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution in their country of origin.

1. See references page 47

‘Unsuccessful’ asylum seeker: A person whose asylum application has failed and has no other protection claim awaiting a decision. Some refused asylum seekers voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned and for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change.

‘Illegal’ immigrant: Someone whose entry into or presence in a country contravenes immigration laws.

Economic migrant: Someone who has moved to another country to work.

What is integration?

For the purposes of this document, 'integration' is defined by using the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) Europe-wide definition of refugee integration as a change process that is²:

Dynamic and two-way: placing emphasis on both the refugee and the host community. The refugee adapting to the host community and lifestyle without having to compromise his or her cultural identity and the host community recognising refugees as part of the community and facilitating access to resources and decision making.

Long term: begins at the time of arrival and is concluded when a refugee becomes an active member of a community from a legal, social, economic, educational and cultural perspective.

Multi-dimensional: relates to the conditions for the participations and the actual participation in the economic, social, civil and political life of a country.

2. Refugee integration: Can research synthesis inform policy? Feasibility study report (2002), Home Office.

Why do we need an integration strategy for asylum seekers and refugees?

There are many reasons why we should be concerned with supporting the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The experiences and interactions that asylum seekers have from 'day one' are critical to the ultimate success of their integration if subsequently granted status. Consequently, these guidelines seek to address integration as it applies to both asylum seekers and refugees.

The UK helped draft, and was a founding signatory of, the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, under which refugees have a right to seek sanctuary from persecution. We therefore have a humanitarian obligation to ensure that asylum seekers are able to live with dignity and access the services they require, and in the longer term to assist them to build a life in the UK if they are granted refugee status.

Some asylum seeker and refugee needs are different than the surrounding host community. For example, some asylum seekers and refugees require specific help with adjustment to laws, customs and language. Also, experiences such as family separation, loss of homeland, and physical and emotional trauma make asylum seekers and refugees a particularly vulnerable group.

Integration also brings numerous benefits to the host community. As well as bringing diversity to the arts and culture of the region, refugees make an immense economic contribution. Many refugees have been educated to graduate level and refugee communities include experience in a wide range of professions including doctors, nurses, teachers and engineers as well as semi- or unskilled workers.

How to use this document

These guidelines are structured to examine eight key areas of integration: information and advice, communications and the media, housing, health and well being, employment and training, community safety, community development and culture, leisure and sports.

Each focus area provides:

- Identified aims and the recommended actions required to achieve those aims.
- The actions are sub-divided into two sub-sets:
 1. actions required by the Multi-Agency Forums (MAFs)
 2. actions required by the individual MAF member organisations.

Relevant examples of successful integration work which illustrate practice already in place around the region and the country can be found in the 'Case studies and useful resources' section at the end of the document.

This document offers general recommendations but does not provide an exhaustive list of actions. It is intended to serve as a guide and a starting point in which each local multi-agency and its member organisations can establish their own local strategy and actions to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees enjoy the same opportunities as other residents. It is recommended that each local multi-agency fora focus on each topic as part of a themed meeting at which appropriate agencies can be invited and local good practice highlighted.

Acronyms

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
AS&R	Asylum Seekers and Refugees
ASU	Asylum Screening Unit
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CVS	Community and Voluntary Sector
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EERA	East of England Regional Assembly
EEDA	East of England Development Agency
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IAS	Immigration Advisory Service
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
JCP	Job Centre Plus
LA	Local Authority
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LSC	Legal Services Commission
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MACF	Multi-Agency Chairs Forum
MAF	Multi-Agency Forum
MENTER	Black and Minority Ethnic Network for the Eastern Region
NARIC	National Recognition Information Centre
NAM	New Asylum Model
NHS	National Health Service
OSS	One Stop Service
PCT	Primary Care Trust
RAGU	Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit
RETAS	Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
RSC	Regional Strategic Co-ordination Group
SMP	Strategic Migration Partnership
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
UKBA	UK Border Agency

Information and Advice

Without appropriate information and advice, asylum seekers and refugees will become at best, passive recipients of welfare and support and at worst, remain completely excluded from mainstream services and society in general. Their needs range from 'hard' information about housing, welfare benefits, employment and legal advice, to 'soft' information about the political, cultural and social systems in the UK. The need for appropriate information, advice and support is particularly acute at the point where asylum seekers are given positive decisions on their asylum claims i.e. the 'move-on' stage, as they then have a 28 day period in which they have to access benefits or find employment, and find new accommodation.

Ensuring that asylum seekers and refugees get the information they need can be challenging given that many do not have functional levels of English. The New Asylum Model also aims to provide decisions on asylum claims much more quickly which means asylum seekers may not have had time to learn adequate English by the time their decision is served. The provision of adequate interpreting and translation therefore should be at the forefront of any information and advice service.

The Refugee Council provides asylum seekers and refugees with specialist advice and support in the East of England via their One Stop Service based in Ipswich. They also provide outreach sessions in Norwich, Peterborough and Luton and have a regional telephone advice line. In addition, the Red Cross provide asylum seekers and refugees with specialist advice, and support in Norwich and Peterborough, as do the New Link Centre in Peterborough. Local refugee support groups also exist in various localities throughout the region which provide specialist advice.

It is, however, the responsibility of all service led organisations to ensure they provide relevant and accessible information to all sections of the community.

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) are currently in the process of developing regional Refugee Integration and Employment Services which will make available a standard set of services to all new refugees wherever they live in the United Kingdom. It will consist of three distinct but complimentary service components: an employment advice service; a mentoring service and a general advice and support service. The services will be in place by October 2008.

Current issues

- Some statutory service providers experience a high turnover of staff which can affect the continuity of service and also results in some staff being unaware of the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Core information is not always translated into appropriate languages.
- Interpreters or language line services are not always used when asylum seekers and refugees with poor English skills attend 'face to face' advice sessions or attempt to access information over the phone.
- Staff need to be aware of the specific backgrounds, needs, rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees. The issues are complex and staff need specific training in relation to this client group.
- Not all relevant organisations, including those that attend MAFs, are aware of the services that other MAF stakeholders provide.
- Individuals often trust their own communities more than organisations and this can sometime lead to incorrect information circulating through communities.

Aim 1) To ensure all information, advice and guidance (IAG) providers are aware of the specific needs, rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. To review the information provided to staff to ensure they have clear guidance and up-to-date policy information regarding the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees.
2. To ensure that their staff are adequately trained in relation to the 'cultural awareness' issues, rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees.
3. To consider creating an asylum seeker/refugee 'champion' to ensure that information, policies and staff training is up-to-date in relation to asylum and refugee issues.

Aim 2) To ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are made aware of their rights and entitlements and provided with clear, accurate information and advice in a language that they can understand when they access information and advice services.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. To produce a 'MAF Information Pack' outlining:
 - i) MAF membership
 - ii) Member organisation contact details & opening times
 - iii) Services provided by each member.

The aim of the 'MAF Information Pack' is to ensure that all MAF members are aware of the services that their partner organisations offer and how they can be accessed. This will assist them to make the appropriate onward referrals when signposting clients (i.e. asylum seekers and refugees).

2. To carry out periodical reviews of the legal advice available to asylum seekers in their area and report back any 'gaps' to the SMP and the regional Legal Services Commission team via the Multi Agency Chairs' Forum.

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Aim 2) To ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are made aware of their rights and entitlements and provided with clear, accurate information and advice in a language that they can understand when they access information and advice services.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. To produce clear policies and protocols regarding the provision of interpreters. (NB. Statutory organisations have a legal obligation to provide interpretation under the Race Relations Act)
2. To audit their web based and hard-copy information to ensure it is translated, where appropriate, into suitable languages (this information can be obtained from the SMP). Organisations should also consider developing an agreement to share translated material to reduce costs.
3. Key MAF agencies develop reciprocal referral protocols where appropriate.

Communications and the media

Asylum and refugee issues feature heavily in the UK media, reflecting the issue's political and popular importance. The attitude of the media is therefore a crucial element in opinion-forming on asylum seeker and refugee issues. Informative communications and positive images of asylum seekers and refugees are essential in countering prejudice and misinformation.

Local media coverage needs to be proactively managed and monitored, and relationships with journalists need to be developed to enable constructive, accurate and objective media coverage and ensure healthy media relations. Organisations which support asylum seekers and refugees need to be willing to engage directly with the media to ensure fair and balanced coverage of asylum and refugee issues, and be able to effectively respond to negative and inaccurate media reporting as it arises.

When working with the media, organisations need to be aware of the concerns of the community and should develop appropriate links to achieve this. People from even the most vulnerable communities should be empowered to speak for themselves. Positive human interest stories of people overcoming challenges are most likely to gain media interest and can have the greatest impact on opinion-forming.

Communities and Local Government have produced some useful material on combating misinformation about migrants and minority ethnic groups³.

Current issues

- Incorrect use of terminology, blurring distinctions between illegal immigrants, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, and the use of inaccurate information are issues of particular concern and once in the public fora, myths and rumours can be hard to rebut.

3. Combating misinformation about migrants and minority ethnic groups (2007), CLG

- Negative media coverage of asylum and refugee issues which can significantly damage community relations, integration and self-esteem to the greater social exclusion of asylum seekers and refugees, especially where there are no other measures to counteract these hostile images.
- Ineffective working relations between the media and organisations which support asylum seekers and refugees. A general distrust of journalists to report stories fairly and a reluctance to engage with the media among organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees means that little is done to counteract misinformation leaving communities open to myths and misconceptions.
- When media intervention does take place it is often reactionary, and whilst reactive work can often achieve a positive impact there needs to be more emphasis on continuous media work to counteract inaccurate information, promote the benefits of migration, encourage the celebration of diversity, address local communities concerns and foster better understanding between communities.
- Limited profile of refugee and asylum seeker voices in media coverage. Some asylum seekers and refugees are happy to talk to the media. However, others are very reluctant and need support from people who understand their situation and are experienced in how the media works.

Aim 1) To proactively monitor media coverage and build relationships with local journalists to enable positive media work to take place as well as prompt and effective responses to negative and inaccurate media coverage.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Gather intelligence of what the key issues and potential tensions are in your local area by speaking to local communities and monitoring stories in local newspapers.
2. Provide journalists with accurate information and statistics, such as an asylum and refugee press pack, which clarifies terminology, dispels myths and provides information on the local asylum and refugee picture.
3. Monitor breaking news stories so that you are able to counter negative coverage and manage 'crisis' situations.
4. Work with voluntary sector organisations to encourage the provision of case studies of asylum seekers and refugees who are able to talk about their own experiences.
5. Work with journalists to generate positive stories about asylum seekers and refugees and ensure that the local media understand the importance of their role in building integration and cohesion.
6. Use existing communication channels such as council magazines etc. to circulate accurate and impartial messages about asylum seekers and refugees.
7. Have spokespeople who are ready and willing to speak to the media on asylum and refugee issues at all times.
8. Publicise regional training opportunities on talking to the media on asylum and refugee issues.

Aim 2) To organise awareness raising events that encourage a better understanding and interaction between communities

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. To provide coordination and encourage development of Refugee Week activities in June which is a good focus for such events/activities

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Refugee Community Organisations and other organisations should be encouraged to involve each other in a programme of regular social events themed around 'cultural exchange', e.g. sharing of traditional food, music and arts.

2. Schools should work with Refugee Community Organisations and other organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees to deliver a programme of awareness-raising events in schools as part of the citizenship programme.

Housing

Living environment and conditions, in terms of housing, is key to the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Only by making housing equally accessible to refugees and host Communities will integration succeed.

A person lodging an asylum claim has two accommodation options: they can ask the UKBA for subsistence support only, undertaking to find their own place. Alternatively, if they receive both housing and subsistence from the UKBA they will usually be dispersed to a UK region while their claim is being processed. In the East of England asylum seekers are dispersed to Ipswich, Norwich and Peterborough.

Asylum seekers who are granted leave to remain are given 28 days after which time they must locate 'move-on' accommodation and move out of dispersal accommodation. This transition to independent accommodation can be difficult, and is a period when refugees are at an increased risk of becoming homeless. To avoid homelessness refugees must seek alternative housing by renting in the private sector, as a tenant of a local authority, or accessing accommodation through housing associations or charitable organisations. The new UKBA Refugee Integration Services, to be in place by October 2008, will allocate 20 hour case worker support to guide refugees through the move-on process.

Refugees are automatically assumed to have a "local connection" to the area in which they were dispersed under homelessness legislation. At this point refugees may seek social housing. Homeless refugees will be assisted if they are considered to be in priority need, unintentionally homeless and if, in the case of those leaving UKBA accommodation, the local authority to which they apply as homeless is the last area to which they were dispersed. Others must seek accommodation from alternative means.

The “Housing Needs of Refugees in the East of England” report to the East of England Regional Assembly was published in 2005⁴.

Current issues

- Transition from dispersal accommodation to independent housing during the ‘move-on’ period can be difficult. Often not enough information and support is given to refugees at the move-on stage. There is evidence that a real shock occurs when individuals move from the relative comfort and security of UKBA provided accommodation to more unpredictable areas of the housing system.
- Given language barriers and cultural differences some refugees may have particular difficulty in understanding the complex UK housing system, and may need to be supported in knowing what housing services are available to them and on what criteria of eligibility.
- During the move-on period there is a high risk of refugees leaving UKBA accommodation after the stipulated twenty-eight days with no alternative accommodation arranged.
- Difficulties in accessing the private housing market. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work which means they cannot save money for rent, or the rent deposit necessary for the private housing market should they be granted refugee status.

4. Housing Needs of Refugees in the East of England (2005), East of England Regional Assembly, <http://www.eera.gov.uk/Text.asp?id=SX9B98-A77F8096&cat=463>

- Many refugees end up living in deprived areas where housing conditions are poor. Asylum seekers and refugees are likely to face manifold barriers, especially financial and social disadvantages to acquire decent housing. For many, housing is scarce, rents are high, living conditions are poor, and often the only neighbourhoods available are deprived areas. Single refugees in particular are more likely to live in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which sometimes contain the worst properties in the sector. Others resort to 'floor hopping' between relatives and friends. The reality is that for many asylum seekers and refugees the lack of adequate housing is a key obstacle to integration.

Aim 1) To prepare, guide and assist asylum seekers and refugees during and after their 'move on' phase from UKBA accommodation to independent housing

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Provide a focus at MAF meetings on asylum seeker and refugee rights, entitlements and access to housing and ensure that relevant community and information and advice agencies cascade the information to the appropriate communities.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Organisations providing information and advice to asylum seekers and refugees should utilise move-on packs for refugees which have information and signposting on social housing systems, options for avoiding homelessness, how to rent, how to apply for a loan and social benefits, how to pay for gas, electricity and other amenities. This move-on information could be provided through citizenship training, for example.

Aim 2) To reduce the instances of refugees becoming homeless at the move-on stage.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Multi-agency fora in dispersal areas should promote the benefits of the homelessness protocols between the UKBA accommodation provider and the local authority and assist these organisations to develop a local protocol to prevent homelessness. This protocol could include an agreement regarding the possible temporary use of Target contract housing stock for refugees (who are eligible for local authority housing) where local authority housing is not immediately available.

2. Co-ordinate an informal network of voluntary/community/faith sector support agencies to ensure that all agencies are aware of the additional assistance and support which can be provided.

Cont'd.

Aim 2) To reduce the instances of refugees becoming homeless at the move-on stage.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Local authority to consider creating an asylum seeker and refugee 'champion' from the housing department to ensure that information, policies and staff training is up-to-date in relation to asylum and refugee issues. The housing 'champion' should also act as the direct link between the local authority housing department and the MAF to ensure effective two-way communication on asylum seeker and refugee issues.

2. Local Housing and Homelessness Strategies should include refugees in their analysis of local housing needs, review the extent to which these are being met (including identifying barriers to access) and contain actions to address any shortfall. This should include interpreting for support workers, and translation of advice materials.

3. All public sector support services (e.g. social services, housing, community care etc) should be provided with No Recourse to Public Funding (NRPF) training to ensure that they are aware of the legal framework and entitlements of NRPF clients. The national NRPF Network can provide guidance, information and training on NRPF issues. Further information can be found at: http://www.islington.gov.uk/Health/ServicesForAdults/nrpf_network/default.asp

Aim 3) To ensure that refugees have equal access to suitable and sustainable accommodation in the private housing market

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Local authorities to investigate the development of rent deposit schemes to assist people on low incomes to access the private rented sector, as the main factor preventing people accessing the private sector is finding a deposit and the rent in advance that private landlords request. The scheme works by the local authority guaranteeing the deposit to the landlords.

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Aim 3) To ensure that refugees have equal access to suitable and sustainable accommodation in the private housing market

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

2. Voluntary and Community organisations to ensure that new refugees are made aware of the Refugee Integration Loan but are also informed of the potential issues around applying for it.
3. Local authorities to monitor standards in private rented accommodation, and intervene in this sector as necessary through inspection and rating regimes. To support this, organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees should ensure that clients are aware of their rights and entitlements and that any issues be fed back to the local authority.

Health and well being

Being well, physically and mentally, will clearly make a huge difference to asylum seekers' and refugees' prospects of integrating into society, including finding a home, getting qualifications, getting a decent job and building their social life.

However, many asylum seekers and refugees have complex health needs. Some of the health problems are the result of circumstances in the country of origin, where children may not have had vaccinations or immunisations, and diseases such as TB and diabetes might not have been diagnosed. There may be physical and psychological effects of torture and war, including malnutrition, injuries, depression and anxiety. Further problems may result from stresses during flight or while awaiting determination of status.

Ensuring that asylum seekers and refugees get the services they need can be challenging given the need to overcome potential language, cultural and information barriers.

At a regional level the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership is seeking to address such health inequalities through the development of a regional health group focussing on the needs asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. For further information contact Alex Collis, Health Support Worker, EERA-SMP, email: Alex.collis@eera.gov.uk

Current issues

- Having little knowledge of English is a pervasive problem in getting access to health advice and services. Access to interpretation services and translated information materials within the health services is also a problem.
- Unfamiliarity with UK health system procedures, including rights and entitlements.
- War, torture and the experience of flight from their home country may for some refugees have a long-term impact on health, both physical and mental.

- Conditions on arrival in the UK, including isolation, racism, anxiety and lack of social networks, may have equally damaging effects.
- Health can be undermined both by living conditions for people awaiting an asylum decision, and by the strain of the decision-making process.
- Levels of support below standard benefit levels with no right to take paid employment, accommodation of low standard often in an environment that feels unpleasant and insecure and high mobility between addresses can also impact on health needs.
- The perceived stigma and a lack of information and access to services specifically relating to sexual and mental health can impact on health needs and on access to health services.
- Confusion about entitlements among many health practitioners may lead to refugees and asylum seekers being wrongly denied services.

Aim 1) To ensure all appropriate organisations are aware of the specific health needs, rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Provide a focus at MAF meetings on asylum seeker and refugee rights, entitlements and access to health services and ensure that relevant community and information and advice agencies cascade the information to the appropriate communities.
2. Promote and encourage refugee participation in processes of consultation on health and social care policies at local level (e.g. through Local Involvement Networks (LINks) which provide a mechanism for local people to have a say how services from local social care and health services are provided.)
3. Identify specific areas of concern and feed into the regional health group to help build a regional picture of key issues to inform planning (contact Alex Collis, Health Support Worker, EERA-SMP, email: Alex.collis@eera.gov.uk).

Aim 2) To promote health and wellbeing within asylum seeker and refugee communities and tackle health stigmas

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Promote joint working between health service providers and voluntary sector organisations working with asylum seekers, refugees and refugee community groups to:
 - i) support people with mental health problems to help them deal with stigma while also tackling prejudice in communities.
 - ii) raise awareness of sexual health issues and tackle prejudice in communities

Cont'd.

Aim 2) To promote health and wellbeing within asylum seeker and refugee communities and tackle health stigmas

Recommended actions for MAFs:

2. Identify and disseminate examples of good practice in the development of health services which meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. These examples of good practice can be cascaded through officers at the Strategic Migration Partnership or Partnership Development Project.

Employment and training

Refugees have one of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates for any group⁵. However, the economic contribution that both asylum seekers and refugees could make is great. Whether utilising skills from their countries of origin or developing them in the UK, refugees have great potential to support economic growth and raise employment rates and productivity.

The development of English language skills is an essential first step in utilising these skills. Enabling asylum seekers and refugees to gain qualifications or have their qualifications recognised in the UK is also vital. Access to education provision also has much wider benefits, enabling asylum seekers and refugees to build general skills for employment such as communication, time management, preparing job applications, interview techniques, writing CVs and research and evaluation and IT skills. It can also provide a sense of achievement, and provides the opportunity to meet new people and build relationships.

The overarching priority is to improve the rates of employment for refugees. Employment gives refugees a new professional identity and the means to participate both economically and as full citizens of society and has wider benefits of challenging stereotypes in receiving communities. Through the workplace, refugees are also able to develop new relationships, make links with other agencies and communities and essentially make a greater step towards full integration.

Current issues

- Limited or no knowledge of English can be a serious obstacle both to job searching and to meeting employers' requirements.
- After an abrupt and chaotic departure, verifying skills acquired in countries of origin often proves a major barrier to getting fulfilling work for many refugees.

5. Research carried out by the DWP found an employment rate amongst refugees of 29% compared to 60% for people from ethnic minorities. See Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training (2002), DWP.

- Training provision can fall short of meeting asylum seeker and refugee communities' needs in volume, quality and methods of delivery – especially for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. Asylum seekers and refugees may also have a limited understanding of the UK education system and how to access it.
- Typically, asylum seekers and refugees will have had no or limited UK work experience.
- Refugees will often lack the personal documents they may need for employment checks (for instance, with the Criminal Records Bureau).
- Poor knowledge of job search methods, the work culture in the UK and a lack of knowledge about where to get advice can also reduce refugees' ability to access the employment market.
- Many refugees get only humanitarian protection or discretionary leave, the maximum duration of which is three years. Even for those granted full refugee status, leave to remain has, since 2005, been limited to five years in the first instance. This can make refugees less attractive to employers and reduce the incentive for employers to provide additional training.
- A lack of understanding on the part of employers about refugees' entitlement to work can create fears about the 'legality' of employing refugees. New on-the-spot penalties for hiring migrants that don't have permission to work in the UK can also add to the perceived 'risk' on the part of employer.
- Limited access to employment support schemes such as volunteering, work experience, work trials and mentoring.

Aim 1) To improve access to, and standard of, local ESOL, educational and vocational training courses for refugees

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Map ESOL, and other relevant educational and vocational courses within the local area to identify gaps in provision and to ensure that any provision is complimentary:
 - i. ensuring all potential refugee 'referral agencies' are aware of the courses available in the locality, including cost, so that up-to-date information can be passed on to refugees (particularly via local RCOs).
 - ii. reviewing provision to ensure there are enough courses providing 'job skills' training i.e. how to complete job applications, undertake interviews, develop CVs, and budgeting/finance, Health and Safety etc.
 - iii: influencing the development of appropriate courses based on the need of the client group eg. Women only groups.
2. Co-ordinate the development of mentoring, volunteering or 'work trial' programmes.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Training providers to provide MAFs with information about what ESOL, educational and vocational training provision is currently available.
2. Co-ordinate a 'jobs and training fare' or open day for local refugees.
3. Appropriate agencies to develop 'job skills', mentoring, volunteering or 'work trial' programmes where appropriate.
4. Ensure there is up-to-date information (e.g. from the mapping exercise) to refer refugees to the appropriate ESOL, educational or vocational training provider.

Aim 2) Develop pathways for professional adaptation of the existing qualifications and skills

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Invite and include national / regional specialist organisations (NARIC, IAGs, RAGU, RETAS, etc) to an education themed MAF meeting to present their programs and projects.
2. Ensure all MAF members are aware of NARIC and how to assist refugees to access it's services.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Organisations providing move-on advice to refugees to increase the awareness of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre for all qualified asylum seekers and refugees by providing information, one to one specialist advice, further complimentary studies and complimentary educational funding schemes.

Aim 3) Ensure that there are linkages between asylum seeker and refugee communities and employers to overcome barriers to accessing employment opportunities

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Co-ordinate the development of an employer information pack which provides a simple guide (i.e. proof of eligibility and right to work, documentation confirming eligibility, refugees' rights and entitlements etc) to employing refugees.
2. Develop a local list of work experience, volunteering and mentoring projects and promote to refugee community organisations.
3. Organise a refugee 'employment and skills fare' in co-ordination with local employers and employment agencies.

Cont'd.

Aim 3) Ensure that there are linkages between asylum seeker and refugee communities and employers to overcome barriers to accessing employment opportunities

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Develop communication links with major employers in the locality, to raise awareness of employment potential and skills available but also needs of this available group of possible employees.
2. Look to support and promote varied and proactive ways of involving employers in programmes, i.e. Refugee week, volunteering initiatives, mentoring programmes.
3. Encourage employers to develop 'attachments' for skilled and professional refugees i.e. NHS Trusts and PCTs to offer clinical attachments for doctors nurses etc.

Community safety

Community safety is necessary for community cohesion and integration. Research has shown that it is not unusual for those seeking asylum in this country, to experience racial discrimination and harassment⁶.

Factual information about, and positive images of, asylum seekers and refugees are essential in countering prejudice, as is the need for information for asylum seekers and refugees about keeping safe, British law and accessing support. The police also need to be informed about asylum seeker and refugee communities and their needs.

Local mechanisms need to be in place to enable dialogue between established communities, refugees and asylum seekers and the police. Community and voluntary organisations also have a large part to play in developing projects which can respond to concerns and improve community safety at a neighbourhood level.

Current issues

- Asylum seekers and refugees face greater risk of becoming victims of crime⁷, and experiencing the fear of crime. Destitute asylum seekers have especially important implications for community safety as those who become destitute are vulnerable and more exposed to crime.
- Asylum seekers sometimes feel unable to report incidents of racial harassment or violence. Asylum seekers' and refugees' experience of security services as accomplices in persecution, before they fled, will often translate into fear and suspicion of the police and criminal justice system in the UK.

6. Guide to Meeting the Policing Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (2001), ACPO

7. Asylum Seekers Policing Guide (2003), ACPO

- The reception in the UK for asylum seekers and refugees can also exacerbate this. Challenges to their right of residence by the media, and a complex asylum process, can lead to asylum seekers and refugees becoming alienated and leading them to disengage with statutory agencies, such as the police.
- Asylum seekers, especially, may be deterred from reporting crime, or from seeking police protection, for fear that it may affect their asylum claim. Those with a limited knowledge of English may also find it difficult to engage with the police and other agencies.
- Victims of crime may lose confidence and faith in societies' ability to protect them and may be less willing to engage with its institutions. Without intelligence and witnesses, police and other agencies cannot prevent more asylum seekers and refugees from becoming victims of crime. This creates a cycle of threat and exclusion.

Aim 1) To create confidence in the police and improve the relationship between the police and asylum seeker and refugee communities

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Ensure that there is an effective information exchange with the local constabulary on settlements of asylum seeker and refugee communities, including information on their needs and background.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Provide information to asylum seekers and refugees regarding the role of the police, including the dispelling of myths that contact with police may affect their asylum claim or immigration status, through “meet and greet” sessions and where possible through contact with these communities through a community liaison officer. This should also be used to provide asylum seekers and refugees with a mechanism to feedback any views and concerns.

2. Provide information to asylum seekers and refugees on British law (such as those relating to driving, carrying weapons, age consent, drugs etc.) to reduce unwitting criminalisation through “meet and greet” sessions and where possible through contact with these communities through a community liaison officer.

Aim 2) To manage and minimise hate incidents against asylum seekers and refugees

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are aware of their rights and the role of the police and that all asylum seekers, refugees and refugee community organisations possess an understanding about what constitutes a hate incident or crime.

Cont'd.

Aim 2) To manage and minimise hate incidents against asylum seekers and refugees

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

2. Develop an understanding among asylum seekers, refugees and the local community of race hate procedures (protocols and clear means of reporting incidents), rights under the Race Relations Act and other civil rights legislation, including information about third party reporting.
3. Ensure that victims of hate crimes are aware of the support available to them.

Aim 3) To ensure that asylum seeker and refugee needs and issues are included in community cohesion and safety plans.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Engage in the LAA process to ensure asylum seeker and refugee issues are included in community cohesion and safety plans.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Local authorities work with the police to monitor hate crime statistics and community tensions, and use this information to inform policy decisions.
2. Local authorities and the police ensure that there is effective liaison with refugee community representatives and refugee community organisations to develop co-ordinated approaches to tackling racial harassment and crime and disorder issues that affect asylum seekers and refugees and that each of these sectors is represented in key partnerships and fora targeting these areas.
3. Local authorities work to reduce tensions at neighbourhood level between local and refugee communities. For example, by providing community 'advocates' (bi-lingual staff that go out into community to provide mediation services).

Community development

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) are uniquely placed to understand the very diverse backgrounds of the people they see and the traumatising experiences and journeys they may have endured.

RCOs provide guidance and support tailored to their most pressing needs. They help build up their members' confidence and ability to cope with daily situations such as getting their children to school, seeing the doctor or just doing the shopping. Through social events and English lessons they also help asylum seekers and refugees gain a better understanding of the culture of the society they live in.

Not all asylum seekers and refugees will participate in RCO's but finding this kind of support is important for those who are particularly vulnerable to isolation and social exclusion. RCOs also play an invaluable role in bridge-building with the wider community.

Current issues

- Limited participation and engagement of refugee sector in policy and strategy development.
- Diverse range of refugee groups with varied understanding of community development, community groups and support with limited access to training, information and advice to support the development of their practices.

Aim 1) Improve participation and engagement with refugee community organisations

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Encourage and enable participation in meetings, i.e. considering different venues, times, focus of meeting etc. Or establish a formal mechanism for engaging and consulting with refugee and migrant worker community organisations e.g. a 'community forum' consisting of community organisations
2. Encourage partnership activities such as sharing volunteers, work initiatives etc.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Explore different methods of engagement with the refugee sector, i.e. organising focus groups, community consultations, bilingual community workers, always ensuring the objective is clear and feedback is provided.
2. Local authorities should work to develop RCOs via their 'community development officers/teams'.

Aim 2) Ensure equal access to community development/voluntary sector infrastructure support at a local level for refugee community organisations.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Encourage RCO membership of local infrastructure bodies or create communication links to ensure they have knowledge of new arrival communities
2. Publicise (or provide) awareness/cultural training for community development workers.
3. Assist in providing information and understanding to the refugee sector of the role of community development and activities and how to access support

Cont'd.

Aim 2) Ensure equal access to community development/voluntary sector infrastructure support at a local level for refugee community organisations.

Recommended actions for MAFs:

- 4. Identify the resource needs of refugee communities and recommend action to meet those needs

- 5. Ensure that community plans (LSP & LAA) and community cohesion strategies develop community development strategies that also reflect the needs of refugee sector

- 6. Assist in providing information and understanding to the refugee sector of the role of community development and activities and how to access support

Culture, leisure and sports

Participating in mainstream cultural and leisure activity brings people together and can be used as a tool to build better understanding within and across communities. It provides asylum seekers and refugees with the opportunity to meet people from different sections of the community, learn about other cultures and become more included in society, but also allows them, through developing their own artistic, cultural and leisure activities, to contribute significantly to the diversity of culture, and educate other communities about their cultural background.

Current issues

- Lack of access to, and representation in, mainstream cultural, sports and leisure activities for refugees and asylum seekers, including real and perceived barriers to mainstream leisure activities.
- Focus on initiatives like Refugee Week only rather than on integration with mainstream cultural and leisure activities and strategies.
- Lack of consultation on the use of funds and development of activities.
- Refugee and asylum seekers often face barriers in accessing mainstream venues, funds and organisations in order to develop their own cultural and leisure activities.

Aim 1) To improve access to culture, sports and leisure activities for refugees and asylum seekers

Recommended actions for MAFs:

1. Ensure that sport, leisure and culture officers or representatives are attending MAFs on ad-hoc basis, and/or organise a themed MAF around this subject, both with the aim of:
 - Improving the accessibility of information for refugees and asylum seekers about opportunities, resources and funding in the sector.
 - Broadening cultural sector policy and practice to embrace the diversity of refugees both as audiences and participants.
 - Ensuring that there is consultation with asylum seekers and refugees during the development of activities.
2. Provide coordination and encourage development of Refugee Week activities in June to provide a platform for asylum seekers to develop and participate in activities, and provide an opportunity to interact with host communities.

Recommended actions for MAF member organisations:

1. Consult and involve individual refugee cultural workers, refugee community organisation-leaders and refugee and asylum seeker networks about their cultural, sport and recreational needs when developing activities.
2. Ensure that asylum seekers, refugees and RCOs are aware of the leisure and cultural activities available by updating Welcome Packs and other information hubs regularly.
3. Explore the possible inclusion of asylum seeker and refugee cultural projects and art events on the Regional Festivals and Local Fares.

Recommended MAF organisations

(NB. Some agencies will be relevant to particular topics rather than as permanent members)

Citizens Advice Bureau

Clearsprings

Connexions

Education (Statutory)

Health (Statutory)

Information Advice and Guidance Providers

Learning and Skills Council

Legal Services

Job Centre Plus

Local Area Agreement/LSP representative

Local Authority – Adult Social Services

Local Authority – Children’s Services

Local Authority – Cultural Services

Local Authority – Housing

Local Authority – Public Relations and Press Officers

Local Authority – Social Inclusion

Local Councillors

Local Journalists and media agencies

MENTER

Mental Health

Regional UK Border Agency

Police

Racial Equality Council

Refugee Community Organisations/Refugee Association

Refugees and Asylum Seekers (individuals) – *This link can be direct or indirect.*

Strategic Migration Partnership

Voluntary Sector Organisations – incl. Refugee Council/Red Cross

Case studies and useful resources

1. Information and advice

Needs analysis research

The research investigated the needs both of asylum seekers and services providers to plan for a new dispersal of asylum seekers to Norwich.

Lead Agency: Refugee Council 12-14 Museum Street IP1 1HT, Tel: 01473 297900

2. Communications and the media

Media Good Practice Guide

Available at: <http://www.eera.gov.uk/Text.asp?id=SXD551-A77FA107&cat=40>

Lead agency: East of England Strategic Migration Partnership
Lead contact: Hannah Shah Tel: 01284-729433, email: Hannah.shah@eera.gov.uk

Media Training for Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) – Peterborough New Link/Refugee council

Refugee Council Press officer delivered support and training in 3 areas (i) Media Training to RCOs to build their understanding and confidence (ii) To provide ongoing advice and support including prior training for interviews, and on the day interview support. (iii) To build up the relationship with the local press – this included meetings, forwarding stories and arranging interviews for them.

Lead agency: New Link, Lincoln Road, Peterborough PE1, Refugee Council 12-14 Museum Street IP1 1HT
Lead contact: Leonie McCarthy Tel: 01733-864308, email: leonie.mccarthy@peterborough.gov.uk

Refugee Council Talks Team

The Talks Teams is made up of refugees and non-refugees who visit schools and other groups in their local areas. Generally a refugee and a non refugee will attend the talk or workshop together providing factual information and personal experience.

Lead agency: Refugee Council 12-14 Museum Street IP1 1HT, Tel: 01473 297900

Cont'd.

Myth Busting

The Suffolk MAF produced leaflets aimed at the public providing factual information on migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees.

Lead agency: Suffolk Multi-agency Forum

Lead contact: Allison Coleman Tel: 01473 265160, email: allison.coleman@csu.suffolkcc.gov.uk

3. Housing

Living in Peterborough

Training course which enables and supports asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to acquire the necessary range of skills to enable them to become fully integrated citizens. The training covers being a good citizen, outlining rights and responsibilities for new arrivals, such as dealing with waste management and Houses in Multiple Occupation.

Lead agency: New Link , Lincoln Road, Peterborough PE1 and Refugee Council 12-14 Museum Street IP1 1HT

Lead contact: Leonie McCarthy Tel: 01733-864308, email: leonie.mccarthy@peterborough.gov.uk

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Network

Available at: http://www.islington.gov.uk/Health/ServicesForAdults/nrpf_network/default.asp

4. Health and well being

Regional Health Network

Lead agency: East of England Strategic Migration Partnership

Lead contact: Alex Collis email: alex.collis@eera.gov.uk

Zimbabweans in Luton: The pachedu-Zenzele Health and Social Care Intervention Model

To address the health inequalities in Luton by developing evidence-based culturally sensitive health and social care strategies that meet the needs of people from sub-Saharan Africa.

Lead agency: Public Health Team Luton PCT, 94 Inkerman Street Luton, LU1 1JD, Tel 01582 657595

5. Employment and training

National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC)

Available at: www.naric.org.uk

Cont'd.

Timebank mentoring project Time together/ The Refugee Council Ipswich/Norwich

A mentoring service for refugees in Ipswich and Norwich.

For more information please visit the [Time Together website](#) or Refugee Council, 12-14 Museum Street Ipswich IP1 1HT, Tel: 01473 297900

'Build Up' ESOL for Construction

A model for English language programmes that enhanced the employability of asylum seekers, especially for those with skills and experience relevant to the construction industry.

Lead agency: Peterborough Regional College, Park Crescent, Peterborough, PE1 4DZ. Tel.

Lead contact: Louise Cottom, Project Co-ordinator, Tel: 01733 767366

East of England Deanery Refugee and Overseas Doctors Group

Information and encouragement to refugee doctors who wish to re-qualify in the UK.

Lead agency: East of England Multi-professional Deanery

Lead contact: Vijay Nayar, Associate Director of Postgraduate GP Education, email: vijay.nayar@eoe.nhs.uk

6. Community safety

Community Facilitation Project

'Community advocates/mediators' (bi-lingual support staff) to resolve problems or reports of anti-social behaviour when they arise between host community members and new arrivals.

Lead Agency: New Link Centre, Peterborough

Lead contact: Leonie McCarthy Tel: 01733-864308, email: leonie.mccarthy@peterborough.gov.uk

Let's Talk events in Suffolk led by the Suffolk Constabulary

Themed road show communication events around key issues such as housing, health or community safety, usually targeted at specific community groups.

Lead agency: Suffolk Constabulary

Lead contact: Peter Haystead, peter.haystead@suffolk.pnn.police.uk

Cont'd.

Community Safety project Cambridgeshire Constabulary

The Community Safety project identifies the new arrival communities examining how best to meet their policing needs. Including, the recruitment of Police Community Safety Officers from within the new arrival communities, work to reduce tensions between communities through a partnership with the local mediation service to deliver conflict resolution, and improved knowledge of staff about the new arrival groups with the launch of a dedicated internal micro-site.

Lead agency: Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Lead contact: Paul Phillipson, Email:

Paul.Phillipson@cambs.pnn.police.uk

7. Community development

Norwich Asylum Voice

Asylum Voice is a second tier community meeting group initiated by the Norwich MAF to specifically focus on helping identify the basic integration needs of asylum seekers and refugees. The forum provides an effective mechanism in keeping the client group informed of the work of the MAF and in reporting back issues affecting the community to the main forum.

Lead contact: Pa Musa Jobarteh,

pmjobarteh@redcross.org.uk

8. Culture, leisure and sports

City of Refuge

For information visit

<http://www.newwritingpartnership.org.uk/cityofrefuge>

Lead agency: New Writing Partnership

Lead contact: Shenaz Kedar, email:

Shenaz@newwritingpartnership.org.uk

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