

# Refugee Integration Best Practice Guide

# Logo - Refugee Integration Service and EU FundingPart 1 – Overview

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## Introduction

This guide is a good practice guide for local authorities delivering services to new refugees. As part of the Refugee Integration Yorkshire and Humber Project, Migration Yorkshire has coordinated the delivery of the Refugee Integration Service by our local authority partners. The Refugee Integration Service aims to support new refugees transitioning from the Home Office’s asylum support system to mainstream support services. It aims to support newly granted refugees to access the relevant services, avoid destitution and put in place a framework to build their lives in the UK. This guide aims to support the Refugee Integration Service and other local authority services supporting this group of new refugees transitioning from asylum support.

As part of this best practice guide, we have developed 11 Quick Guides covering key areas of refugee integration.

## Needs Assessment

Each service will have its own good practice guidance and procedures for working with new clients. For any new refugee service user, it will be necessary to carry out a full needs assessment at that initial point of access. Refugees may often have multiple complex needs so an holistic assessment may be needed to identify support needs, what can be met by the service and what may require signposting and referring to other more specialist agencies.

For a holistic needs assessment, as a general guide, the following information may need to be obtained:

* **Basic information** – Including contact details and service user information.
* **Service User Information** – Gathering details of accessibility issues or any vulnerabilities or health conditions that may impact the service users’ ability to access the service or the work you undertake on their behalf.
* **Immigration status** – Clarifying the services users’ immigration status is key. Do they have a grant of refugee status or some other form of immigration status? See our quick guide on the different types of status that people can receive following an asylum claim.
* **Housing** – What is their accommodation situation and what support is needed? See the section on housing for more detail.
* **Financial situation** – Does the service user have financial support? Do they need support accessing income, food or other essentials? What are the barriers? See our quick guides on welfare and finances and opening a bank account.
* **Family/social life** – Is the service user alone or with family? Do they have family abroad? What steps are they taking to connect with others in their new life? Do they want support connecting with religious or social groups?
* **Education/employment** – Is the service user undertaking any studies currently such as learning English? Do they want to or need to access further education?
* **Service user goals** – What does the service user actually want from you? A needs assessment should be person-centred. Even the most thorough needs assessment might not always pick everything up so it’s important to remember that the service offered should be guided by what the service users’ needs are.

## Working with Interpreters

The use of interpreters will be a common occurrence working with new refugees as many will have limited or, in some cases, no English at all. Despite that, new refugees many have been in the UK for some months while being an asylum seeker, they may still require language support. Even where someone can speak some English, the use of interpreters may be required during casework sessions to avoid any misunderstandings which could have significant negative consequences.

Some key tips when using interpreters are:

* **Roles** - The role of the caseworker is to lead the session, not the interpreter. Brief the interpreter before the session begins, explaining the purpose of the session and possible outcomes. Make clear the need for client confidentiality and impartiality from interpreter.
* **Professionalism** – Use trained and qualified interpreters were possible. You can access the National Register of Public Service Interpreters or your local authority may have its own interpreters or may hold contracts with trusted interpretation firms. Professional interpreters will not only be trained to offer a quality service but will also be familiar with the importance of behaviours such as around professional boundaries and etiquette.
* **Face-to-face versus telephone** – Telephone interpretation may be quicker and cheaper and in some situations may be the better option. However, in some cases, a face to face interpreter may be essential. Always check with the service user what they are happy with and use your own judgement.
* **Personalised approach** – Always check with the service user that they are happy with the interpreter and whether they have any specific needs from an interpreter such as gender or dialect. It’s not uncommon for refugees and survivors of trauma to want an interpreter from the same gender for example, or to not want an interpreter from a particular background such as from the same national group if they are a persecuted minority. Also, in many cases although the service user and interpreter may speak the same language, dialects such as amongst Arabic speaking countries can vary significantly.
* **Physical environment and body language** – in face-to-face sessions, consider the seating arrangements to ensure the caseworker is making eye contact with the service user. Caseworkers should always talk to the service user, not the interpreter.
* **Family and friends** – Never use children as interpreters. It’s also recommended to avoid using friends or family where possible as sometimes this can affect the quality of interpretation but also affect disclosure and, in some rare cases, it could be masking any safeguarding issues or exploitative relationships.
* **External factors** – It is not always the interpretation that is causing problems. Caseworkers may find that the service user is unable to understand the advice or they may have difficulties understanding the service user. With refugees and survivors of trauma, in some cases, it is possible that other factors are at play such as mental health. A thorough needs assessment may be able to pick up any vulnerabilities which may affect communication.

## Refugee Move–On

The refugee move-on period can be challenging for new refugees as they leave a supported environment and for the first time must independently secure support and accommodation. A number of barriers and bureaucratic issues can cause new refugees to experience a crisis like destitution during this period. We’ve broke down the key areas at play and how a crisis can be avoided.

## Asylum Support

New refugees may have been supported by the Home Office under asylum support. Once their asylum claim has been fully determined and they have been granted refugee status, they will cease to be eligible for asylum support. Refugees are given 28 days’ notice from the Home Office that their asylum support is going to be discontinued. This is known as the ‘grace period’, This 28 day notice technically starts from the day the Secretary of State informs them of the decision however, in practice Home Office have committed to provide discontinuation notices starting from the date the new refugee receives their Biometric Residence Permit.

The ability to ‘move-on’ from asylum support is dependent largely on the receipt of the necessary documentation. These documents include:

* Refugee status grant letter
* Biometric Residence Permit
* National Insurance Number (NINo)
* Asylum Support Discontinuation letter
* NASS 35 letter

In our Quick Guide on the 28 day Transition Period, we have outlined in more detail these documents, how the process works during this period and how to resolve any issues such as bureaucratic delays in receiving documentation.

## Housing

Access to accommodation will be the first and most urgent need for new refugees. New refugees moving out of the asylum support system will need to find their own accommodation. They may have to weigh up making choices between long-term aspirations and hopes and meeting immediate needs.

As the 28 day grace period comes to an end, new refugees may be looking at several types of accommodation options:

* Council housing provided by the local authority may be an option but this is limited in availability and preference is given for those with established priority needs such as those with children. A new refugee may however, wish to start bidding for available properties early.
* Social Housing providers may offer a possible solution with some providers running projects specifically targeted to accommodate new refugees.
* Private accommodation may be the only option available but can sometimes be the most challenging to access. See our Quick Guide on Private Renting.
* Emergency housing assistance from the local authority may be needed where individuals have been unable to secure permanent accommodation at the end of grace period. In order for local authorities to have a duty to provide this, in most cases, the person will need to be in a priority need group

Other challenges to accessing accommodation include location. A new refugee may wish to relocate to a new city in order to seek employment opportunities, be close to friends or family or a well-established community. However such decision can come with challenges. Access to public funded housing is limited to those who have a local connection. See our Quick Guide on Local Connections.

Other key considerations around location will be around the local neighbourhood, community safety and cohesion. New refugees may also want to settle where there are established communities, the availability of faith institutions and international food stores.

## Welfare Benefits and Finance

Access to income will be the other main priority for a new refugee as their asylum support payments come to an end.

New refugees may be looking to access employment now that they have the right to work but, as this can take time, access to immediate financial support will be necessary. New refugees now have recourse to public funds so they can access welfare benefits like Universal Credit. There may also be other sources of income available such as Refugee Integration Loans from the Home Office and Local Welfare Assistance Grants from the local authority. See our Quick Guide on Welfare Benefits and Finance for more detail on which options are available for new refugees.

Some key barriers that exist here will be the need for advice and support to apply for welfare benefits. Support accessing Job Centre services to apply for Universal Credit is also available with Home Office contractor Migrant Help providing a ‘move-on’ service in partnership with Reed In Partnership, supporting new refugees during this period. Other barriers include the access of necessary documentation such as NASS 35 letters or NINo that facilitate the process for new refugees to access benefits.

The ability to access banking services can also be a major obstacle as a result of difficulty opening accounts. The absence of a bank account will result in a delay in receiving payment of any benefit. We’ve developed this Quick Guide to opening a bank account for new refugees.

## Integration

New refugees will also have long-term objectives to enabling them to settle and thrive in their new life. The process of integration can be lengthy and challenging and experiences can vary for different individuals.

A new refugee may be looking to undertake employment, restart or begin a career journey. They may be looking to study, learn English or study higher education. They may also be looking to reunite with family and rebuild their lives together in the UK.

## Education

Access to education can be important for refugees on a journey to learn English or improve their employment opportunities. There are different types of education that may be relevant to different individuals – ESOL provision, higher education but also compulsory education for children. We have developed this Quick Guide exploring education opportunities available for refugees.

Access to education can, however, be difficult. Access to higher education can be impacted by immigration status and tuition fees. People with refugee status are entitled to Home Fees but other forms of status resulting from an asylum claim may not be. See our Quick Guide on Education for new refugees for more information on this.

The availability of ESOL provision can vary from location to location, however there may be the option of non-accredited English language classes through local voluntary and community sector groups.

For children between the ages of 5 and 16, it is a legal requirement that they are in full-time education in England. New refugees may face difficulty applying for schools or accessing financial support available to facilitate child education although they do have entitlement for support

## Employment

Accessing employment is another important goal for many new refugees and is essential to the process of integration, building self-confidence and independence. For long-term financial stability, refugees need to be able to enter the labour market.

In order to access employment, new refugees may need additional support such as with CV writing, finding jobs, coaching or accessing training opportunities. Many may find they need to obtain ESOL qualifications or undertake other studies to improve their job prospects such as receiving accreditation for qualifications gained in their home country.

Partnership working and mapping of local voluntary and community sector services that support access to employment may be beneficial.

## Family reunion

Another key need for many new refugees is reuniting with family members who have been separated through conflict. People with refugee status are able to travel and leave the UK following the conclusion of their asylum claim. This means they can now visit family members separated through conflict, as long as they do not return to the country they have fled persecution from. Refugees can apply for a Convention Travel Document to enable them to travel internationally.

Refugees in the UK are also able to apply for a Refugee Family Reunion Visa to sponsor their spouses, dependent children under 18 and in some cases other family members to join them in the UK. This is an essential part of the refugee journey as many refugees seek to secure status in a safe country with a view to be reunited with their family once they have obtained protection.

Refugee family reunion is a complex immigration matter and new refugees should seek legal advice and support to make applications. It is also costly and is not covered by legal aid. Our Quick Guide on Refugee Family Reunion contains more detail on the process.

Family reunification is essential for new refugees to be able to settle and re-build their lives. Without support accessing family reunion opportunities, new refugees can find themselves indefinitely separated from family, isolated and this can have a negative impact on their ability to integrate. Knowledge of key services for signposting who can advise and support here can be an important resource.

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