

An overview of the refugee and asylum charity sector in the UK

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Introduction

This paper describes the landscape of the refugee and asylum charity sector in the UK. It is designed to be of particular use to donors with an interest in funding organisations working in this space. It provides key contextual information about the scale of the refugee crisis, profiles some of the charities and funders operating in this area, gives an overview of the different levels at which funders can work and provides key questions for potential funders to consider.

The plight of refugees and their integration into society are major issues and whilst the sector is facing enormous need, it is relatively overlooked by donors and funders. With the huge flow of refugees rarely out of the headlines over the last twelve months, and an increasing squeeze on the income of charities trying to support people who need help, this work has never been more important. There is an opportunity for smart philanthropy to help transform this sector and the lives of refugees. We hope that by providing clarity on the landscape and options available to fund, more donors and funders will be inspired to support the sector.

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This paper is based on a briefing we prepared for individual donors Elizabeth and Roderick Jack as part of our work to support their giving. Core to our mission at NPC is to disseminate knowledge and support funders to be as effective as possible, so we are grateful for the Jacks' agreement to publish this paper.

Where we mention specific charities throughout this paper, they are included to serve as examples of charities working on specific issues, rather than an exclusive list of all organisations working on a particular issue. Many charities working with refugees and asylum seekers provide multiple services and work at different levels—for example, both assistance to individuals and high level policy and campaigning work. While we have undertaken basic fact checking about charity income levels and areas of operation of the charities mentioned, we have not systematically vetted or undertaken due diligence on these organisations. Readers with an interest in funding these organisations are welcome to seek further detailed advice from NPC, or to undertake due diligence in accordance with their own operating procedures.

Key facts

- There are at least 155,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Numbers are rising as refugee crises both in Europe and across the globe continue to escalate.
- There are around 930 charities in the UK working with refugees and asylum seekers, with a combined income of £1.2bn. However, that headline figure includes charities such as the British Red Cross and Save the Children which work on many issues alongside refugee support.
- When those charities are removed from the mix, the total income of the sector (around 900 charities) is only £97m; of those working exclusively with refugees and asylum seekers, less than 1% have income over £1m. The overall income of the sector is small in relation to beneficiary numbers.
- Funding opportunities exist in the sector at all levels: from assistance with housing and other basic needs, to support for refugees and host communities with integration processes, to broad societal issues such as changing the public narrative about refugees.
- A number of prominent UK foundations are working in this space, but much more support is needed to meet increasing levels of demand. There are opportunities to join a network of interested funders and to work in innovative and collaborative ways.

Context

This overview draws together key figures about the asylum and refugee charity sector in the UK. It is based on a review of existing data sources, Charity Commission data, and discussions with key individuals in the sector.¹

Definitions and terms

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines **refugees** as people fleeing conflict or persecution who must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.² This criteria distinguishes refugees from other migrants, particularly economic migrants, who choose to move to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. In practice, the distinction between these groups can be less clear—a person who does not meet the strict criteria of the refugee definition may still be extremely vulnerable upon arrival in the UK. Philanthropic funding could have a role in combating unhelpful and inaccurate narratives about refugees and other migrants, and this is discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Asylum seekers are individuals who have lodged an application for protection in a new country (ie, the UK) on the basis of the UN Refugee Convention³ or other legislation. Until a decision is reached on their application, that individual is called an asylum seeker. If approval is granted, the person is recognised by the UK as having refugee status and has permission to remain in the UK either long-term or indefinitely. If the application is refused, an asylum seeker has the right to appeal for a decision by an independent judge. If the refusal is upheld on appeal, the individual is expected to take steps to leave the UK voluntarily, or faces detention and then enforced removal from the UK.⁴

European context

Europe is now in the midst of the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. UNHCR figures show that over one million refugees and migrants reached Europe via the Mediterranean sea route in 2015—although nearly 4,000 were missing, believed drowned.⁵ A snapshot from mid-2015 (the most recent statistics available from UNHCR) showed 117,234 refugees, 37,829 pending asylum cases and 16 stateless persons in the UK.⁶

Over one million refugees and migrants reached Europe via the Mediterranean sea route in 2015.

For the fifth successive year asylum applications have risen in the UK. Between March 2015 and March 2016 there were 41,563 asylum applications, a 30% increase on the previous year (32,036)—although still lower than the 2002 peak (103,081).⁷ The largest numbers of asylum applicants in the UK up to May 2016 came from nationals of Iran (4,811), Pakistan (3,511), Iraq (3,374), Eritrea (3,340) and Afghanistan (3,133).⁸ These countries have entrenched civil conflicts and recognised problems with the protection of specific groups, including women and religious minority groups.

41,563 asylum applications between March 2015 and March 2016: 30% increase on the previous year.

The number of asylum applications per head of population in the UK remains low. Britain receives only 3% of asylum applications in the EU, and is ranked seventeenth in Europe in terms of asylum applications per capita.⁹

Policy context

Government policy in this area covers economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and sits within a broader context of public and policy narratives about migrants and immigration. These categories overlap and boundaries can blur; there is significant intersection between refugee and migrant issues (for example, a refugee may need to rely not just on refugee law, but on immigration law more broadly in order to be reunited with family).

The Gateway Protection Programme is a government scheme which brings certain particularly vulnerable refugees living outside their home country to resettle permanently in the UK.¹⁰ Through this programme the UK accepts 750 people per year, who are resettled in Yorkshire and Humberside.¹¹ Many refugees in this programme have been living in refugee camps for several years and have no prospect of returning to their own country.

In September 2015 the UK government pledged to accept 20,000 refugees from Syria in the next five years, by means of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS).¹² This was an extension of an original scheme set up in January 2014 in response to a campaign by the Refugee Council, under which the government had agreed to admit 500 Syrian refugees over three years. Between October 2015 and March 2016, 1,602 individuals had been settled in the UK, with over 600 of these settling in Scotland and the remainder settled across England and Wales through local authority-led schemes.¹³ In the year ending March 2016, 2,235 Syrian nationals were granted asylum or an alternative form of protection and a further 1,667 Syrian nationals were granted humanitarian protection under the SVPRS.¹⁴ On 25 April 2016 the government voted down a proposal to admit 3,000 unaccompanied Syrian child refugees to the UK, but in May 2016 the government subsequently reversed this position and under the Dubs amendment agreed to admit an unspecified number of unaccompanied Syrian child refugees.¹⁵

The Immigration Act 2016 came into force in May, with a particular focus on irregular or undocumented migration.¹⁶ It includes punitive measures for landlords and employers who take on undocumented migrants. Perhaps more importantly, the Act extends the government's 'deport first, appeal later' scheme to all migrants, allowing any migrant to be deported to their home country pending the outcome of an appeal against a decision to remove them. Notably, this provision previously extended only 'to convicted criminals with no residency rights or to those people the Secretary of State considered it "conducive to the public good" to remove'.¹⁷ Critically, those asylum seekers who are awaiting a decision on their application will no longer be able to appeal a government decision that refuses to provide them with housing or financial support while their claim is pending. According to prominent charities such as Asylum Aid and Refugee Action, this will force hundreds of asylum seekers into destitution and have a negative impact on their ability to interact with the immigration system, for example due to the costs of travel to attend Home Office meetings or get legal advice.¹⁸ The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012) also restricts immigrant access to legal support.¹⁹

This legislation sits in the broader context of significant cuts to government support for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants generally. Together, these recent acts of legislation present a challenging working environment for refugee and asylum charities.

The asylum system context

There is a striking difference between the levels of support given to resettled refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. While refugees resettled under the Gateway Protection Programme or Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme are the smallest population, they receive much more direct support; other refugees and asylum seekers comprise a much larger population, but government policy actively prevents them from accessing such support. Refugees and asylum seekers are therefore dependent on charitable aid from refugee organisations.

Asylum seekers can encounter long delays in decisions and are prohibited from working. They face potential detention, destitution, even homelessness, with the consequent physical and mental health impacts. Discussions about asylum seekers and refugees can also be politically highly-charged, as reflected in media coverage and policy decisions. The role of politicians and the press in shaping public perception of refugees—for better or for worse—has been much discussed by academics and other experts in recent years.²⁰

As of March 2016, there were 26,492 pending asylum cases in a backlog.²¹ Around half of all asylum seekers are detained at some point during the process. 14,751 asylum seekers entered detention in 2015 and, despite the government's pledge to end child detention, 128 children entered detention in 2015. Just over a quarter of those detained (27%) were held for between 8 and 28 days, while 4% were detained for six months or more.

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Upon release from detention 3,505 were removed from the UK, while nearly all of the rest (10,825) were released or granted temporary admission with their asylum claim still to be determined in the backlog of cases.²² Detention is a particular problem within the asylum system; the length of time in detention is not specified at the outset and so is in effect an indefinite 'sentence'. This is psychologically very difficult for the individuals. The detention centres themselves are also viewed as places where asylum seekers are vulnerable to poor treatment, which can add to the trauma they have already experienced.²³

Structure of the sector

UK-based charities working with refugees and asylum seekers operate both in the UK and overseas, with some organisations operating in both. Within the UK, the refugee and asylum sector comprises:

- Large national and international NGOs that have a stream of work related to refugees.
- National charities dedicated specifically to refugee and asylum issues.
- Specialist charities whose work is linked to the support of refugees and asylum seekers (for example, mental health and housing).
- Regional and local charities dedicated to assisting refugees and asylum seekers in their locality.

Of the 165,000 charities in England and Wales, around 930 charities work with refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, with a combined income of £1.2bn. Stripping out the very large charities whose work with refugees and asylum seekers is only part of their activities (such as British Red Cross, Save the Children and The Children's Society), the income of the rest of the sector (around 900 charities) is only £97m.

The majority of these charities are very small—less than 1% of those charities working exclusively with refugees and asylum seekers have an income over £1m, while 79% of them have an income of less than £100,000. This distribution of income is in line with the rest of the voluntary sector—of all charities in England and Wales, 80% of them have an income less than £100,000. However, the overall income of the refugee sector is small compared to beneficiary numbers.

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In terms of geographical remit, some organisations work only with refugees abroad and in transit, others work with refugees both abroad and in the UK, still others work only with refugees once they have arrived in the UK. Among the latter, some work with refugees across the UK, others work only with individuals in specific areas.

Most of the household name overseas aid and development charities have a stream of work related to refugees. They typically carry out activities abroad including provision of emergency aid, rescue operations (eg, in the Mediterranean), provision of medical care and lobbying for policy change at both national and international levels. With the exception of the British Red Cross, most of these charities do not offer services to refugees in the UK.

Within the UK charities work in a number of areas providing support to and advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers. Areas of activity include:

- Campaigning/influencing to change policy; parliamentary advocacy and lobbying.
- Campaigning to change public perceptions of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers.
- Fundraising in the UK for overseas activity (eg, MOAS, Médecins sans Frontières).
- Legal advice for asylum seekers.
- Practical or basic needs support for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Services for particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children, trafficked people, and LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) refugees.
- Mental health and emotional support (for example, to survivors of trafficking, trauma and torture).
- Medical care for refugees struggling to access the NHS (for example, due to immigration status).
- Integration support after successful asylum claims (housing, employment, language and social support).

Summary of charities supporting refugees and asylum seekers

The table below lists the largest charities dedicated specifically to supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, as well as a number of large multi-issue charities that have work explicitly dedicated to refugee support.*

Organisation	Services	Geographical focus	Income
Asylum Aid	Legal advice and representation for asylum seekers and refugees; channelling the evidence from individual cases into policy change campaigns. Special interest in particularly vulnerable asylum seeker groups such as children, LGBTI refugees and people who have been trafficked.	England and Wales	£1m (2014/2015)
Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre	General advice and support for refugees, support with housing and employment, community outreach work.	Warwickshire	£1m (2014/2015)
Praxis Community Projects	Support for refugees and victims of trafficking in London.	London	£1.2m (2014/2015)
British Refugee Council	Support for unaccompanied children, families and individuals with resettlement and integration. Support for newly recognised refugees. Therapeutic support, also campaigning and education and training activities. Support for Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs).	England	£4.6m (2014/2015)
Freedom from Torture	Care, treatment, protection services and promotion of healing for survivors of torture and organised violence.	Five centres in Britain including one in London	£8.2m (2014)
Migrant Helpline	Advice and guidance for asylum seekers, support for victims of trafficking, support for detainees among other activities.	England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland	£8.7m (2014)
Refugee Action	Support and advice for asylum seekers, refugee resettlement services, legal advice, capacity building for frontline organisations and Refugee Community Organisations, community cohesion work, campaigns influencing public attitudes.	England	£10m† (2015/2016)
The Children's Society	Runs ten specialist centres for child and youth refugees across the UK to assist them in settling into UK life.	England	£48.4m (2014/2015)
British Red Cross	Orientation support from volunteers who are themselves refugees, support for young and female refugees, assistance with family reunion and resettlement.	International	£275m (2015)
Save the Children UK	Emergency support for child refugees overseas. Policy advocacy and campaigning work on issues such as access to school and child protection for child refugees.	International	£370m (2014)

* Please note this is only an overview of registered charities with basic information about activities, geographical focus and recent income data. It does not constitute due diligence, so funders should seek further advice or conduct their own process.

† According to Refugee Action, this figure includes £7m in Home Office funding for the Choices Voluntary Return Programme, which was withdrawn in June 2015. Excluding this funding, Refugee Action's income for 2015-2016 was around £2.6m, with projected income for 2016-2017 of around £5m.

Current funding for refugee charities

Government funding for charities working with refugees has been subject to cuts in the past two years, and from 2016 funding has been set to withdrawn significantly. For example, Home Office grant funding for Refugee Action fell from £19m in 2014, to £11.6m in 2015, to £1m in 2016.²⁴ Most of this grant reduction is due to the government's withdrawal of support for the Choices Assisted Voluntary Return Programme when the government took over the running of the scheme. Most government funding cuts relate to curtailment of funded schemes, service closures and removal of funded contracts for schemes that the government takes in-house.

Compared to other issue areas, philanthropic support for refugee and asylum seeker charities is relatively limited, however there are some notable foundations and individual philanthropists working in this area and there is scope for funders to join a community of interest working on refugee and migration issues. Some of the funders working in the asylum and refugee sector include the Sigrid Rausing Trust, City Bridge Trust, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Unbound Philanthropy, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is also a significant funder of charities working with refugees and migrants: its Shared Ground Fund provides grants to help organisations test new and innovative approaches in aid of supporting young migrants and encouraging community integration.²⁵ The Supported Options Initiative, delivered by Paul Hamlyn Foundation in partnership with Unbound Philanthropy, encourages and supports innovation in helping children and young people with irregular immigration status in the UK to live full lives.²⁶ It provides over £2m of grant-funding to seven pilot programmes to leverage support for grassroots organisations supporting refugee integration.

In response to an upsurge in public interest and an increase in demand, a number of foundations (including Paul Hamlyn, Barrow Cadbury, Comic Relief, Pears, Lloyds Bank and Rayne Foundations) together created UK Community Foundations' New Beginnings Fund.²⁷ The fund supports local groups working to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into local communities. It recently awarded its first tranche of grants to a total of £525k. Migration Exchange is another collaborative funder network, bringing together the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Migration Foundation, Oak Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Trust for London, and Unbound Philanthropy to promote informed public debate about migration, promote a fair immigration system, and recognise the potential contributions of immigrants to communities and society.²⁸ The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) runs an Issue Based Network (IBN) on Asylum, Refugee and Migration that brings together funders in this area.²⁹

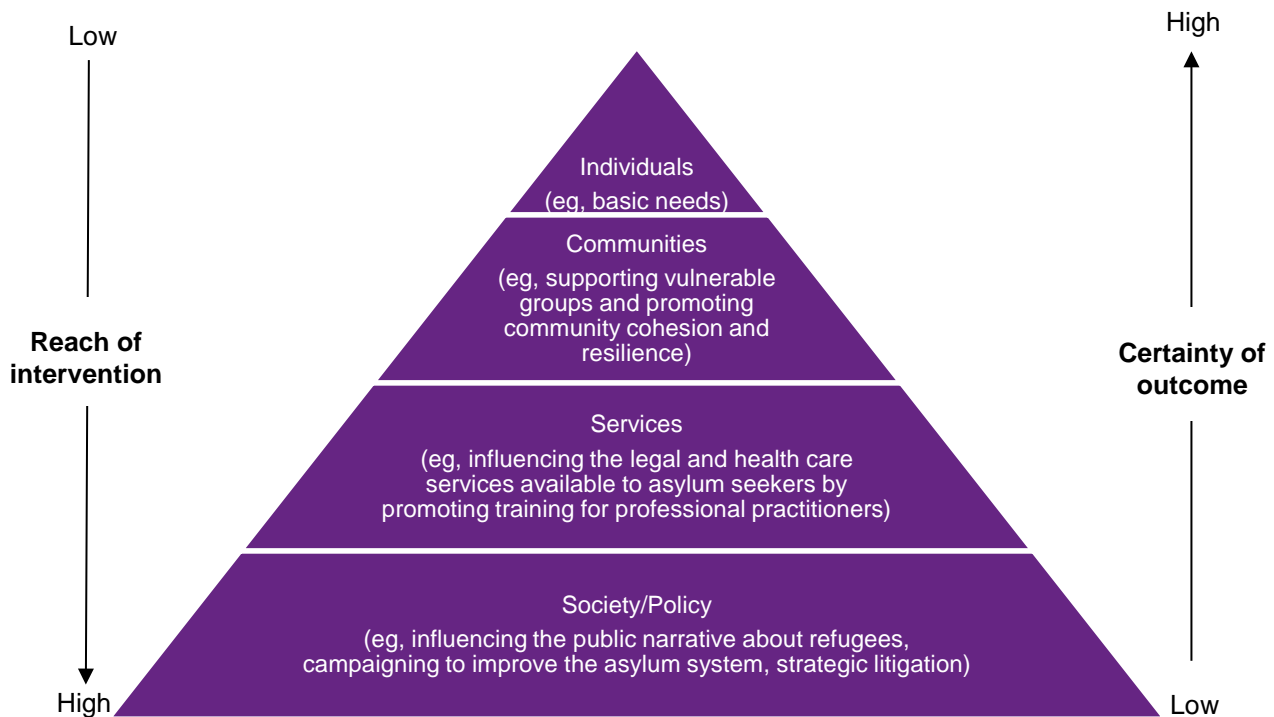
In 2015 the Guardian newspaper chose refugees as the focus for its Christmas appeal, following the significant coverage of the Syrian-European refugee crisis.³⁰ NPC acted in an advisory capacity to create a long-list of asylum and refugee charities, from which the Guardian chose the six organisations to benefit from the appeal. The appeal raised nearly £2.6m from over 22,000 donors, a record high for the annual appeal. While this shows the public are willing to engage and support refugees given the right appeal, there is nonetheless concern among charities that public levels of support will decline in 2016 if other issues push the refugee crisis out of the headlines.

Funding opportunities

For funders thinking about supporting this sector, NPC’s funding levels model is a useful starting point. This helps funders think through the trade-off between having a quick, direct, relatively certain impact on a small number of people versus creating change for a huge number of beneficiaries at the society/policy level, which is much less certain and could take a long time to achieve. By considering the reach of an intervention in relation to its level of certainty, funders can make key decisions about what types of refugee organisations they might want to fund.

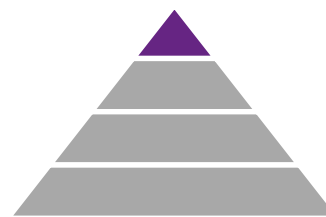
Figure 1 gives an overview of the different approaches, with detail following throughout this section. With high and rising levels of need and diminishing funding, it is important to note that there are opportunities for philanthropist to have a significant impact at each funding level: supporting individual refugees, helping communities with the refugee integration process, improving the asylum system and processes that affect refugees, and changing the public narrative and influencing policy about refugees and asylum seekers. Many of the charities operating in the UK refugee and asylum sector work across these different levels, but it may be possible to fund streams of work or programmes working at a particular level.

Figure 1: Funding levels for supporting refugees and asylum seekers



Supporting individuals

As noted, individuals resettled under the Gateway Protection Programme or Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme receive relatively high levels of government support (eg, housing, school places, assistance with English language and employment support) as they arrive in the UK having already been granted refugee status. A twelve-month programme of individual case work ensures these refugees have sufficient knowledge and skills to live independently, with support from mainstream benefits and services.



By contrast, refugees who have arrived ‘spontaneously’ and then been granted asylum are largely without support. The UK government does not fund any integration services for these refugees—the national programme was abolished by the coalition government in 2011.³¹ These people still require significant levels of assistance—from basic support with food, housing, clothing and medical care to employment and education advice. This comes mainly from charitable organisations³², so there are clear opportunities for funders to support this work.

Basic needs

The support available to asylum seekers is limited and often subject to delay, whether in processing applications for state support or in accessing mainstream benefits once protection has been granted. An asylum seeker will spend an average of nearly 18 months on state support (also known as Section 95).³³ Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and therefore have to rely on state support, which is below mainstream benefit levels and amounts to £5.28 per day to cover food, sanitation, clothing and travel.³⁴ The Children’s Society reports that around 10,000 children of asylum seeking adults are living in severe poverty for long periods of time as a result, with many families unable even to pay for basics such as clothing or nappies.³⁵ Older children receive a considerably lower level of support than younger children, in contrast to the mainstream benefits system.³⁶ Not all asylum seekers are entitled to statutory support, although 40% of cases deemed ineligible are overturned on appeal.³⁷ Housing is provided, but asylum seekers cannot choose where in the UK this is and it will often be in ‘hard to let’ properties that do not meet established UK regulatory standards.³⁸ These properties are often also in difficult to access locations and in poor condition.

At times, the situation is also the result of Home Office decisions on both the asylum application and applications for support—ie, a case officer has to agree that an individual needs support.³⁹ This is particularly critical for those asylum seekers who have been refused refugee status but remain in the UK with no support. Charities including the Refugee Council provide both advice about housing, and assistance finding suitable private rented housing for refugees, while Refugee Action provides assistance to asylum seekers at risk of homelessness.

Accurate and up to date data on migrant, refugee and asylum seeker poverty is unavailable. However, data from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) shows that 57% of the 7,581 people sleeping on London’s streets between April 2014 and

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March 2015 were foreign nationals (up from 6,508 the previous year).⁴⁰ Refugee Action makes the case that the ‘real’ migrant destitution figure is even higher, since estimates like this do not include ‘hidden homelessness’ such as those who ‘sofa-surf’ in friends’ accommodation. The charity has also witnessed increased demand at its drop-in destitution services in the first half of 2016, following government cuts to services and legal support. It expects to see further surge in demand as the effects of government funding and service cuts take hold.

Physical and mental health

A number of factors can have a damaging effect on the physical health of refugees and asylum seekers well after their arrival in the UK: conditions in their home country of origin, the process of migration and settlement, government policies in the receiving countries (eg, detention), and both structural and cultural difficulties in gaining access to healthcare services.

A study by the British Medical Association (BMA) suggests one in six refugees suffers from physical health problems severe enough to affect their lives.⁴¹ The University of Oxford Migration Observatory publishes annual statistics about the health of migrants to the UK, including refugees.⁴² There is a strong positive correlation between good physical health of refugees in the UK and entry into employment, which in itself is correlated with higher levels of integration into UK society.⁴³ The Refugee Council runs the Department of Health funded Health Access for Refugees Programme (HARP) which aims to help refugees and asylum seekers access health and social care, and also operates therapeutic services for both child and adult refugees.

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In addition to the risks to physical health, refugees are also at high risk of mental health issues. The BMA study suggests that two thirds of refugees experience significant mental distress, while The Royal College of Psychiatrists has highlighted the negative effects of the UK asylum system on refugee mental health.⁴⁴ Research from the mental health charity Mind found that refugees are socially excluded by restrictive policies on healthcare, education, accommodation and employment and that this social exclusion can exacerbate existing mental health problems and cause mental distress.⁴⁵ Refugees who have experienced torture are a particularly vulnerable group of people in need of significant levels of support. The charity Freedom from Torture has a particular interest in supporting refugees and asylum seekers with mental health problems resulting from experience of torture.

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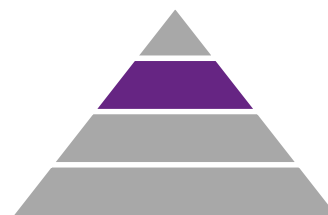
Employment and education

In addition to basic physical and mental health needs, refugees trying to build a new life in the UK need access to support for employment and education. At a basic level, this may involve English language support. More complex forms of support (for example those supported by the Refugee Council) include helping refugees to understand the nature of the school system or the labour market in the UK; assistance with understanding UK workplace culture; and help with CV development, the application process and interview skills. Many mainstream providers do not have refugee support specialists in their supply chains and the government's Work Programme, for example, does not track refugee progression.⁴⁶ It is important to remember that, contrary to some of the most negative portrayals in the media, many refugees will have had successful professional lives in their country of origin and have a potentially significant contribution to make to UK society[‡].

[‡] This point was made at Alliance Magazine's panel event on migration and philanthropy 5 April 2016, and is linked to the potential for philanthropic support to change the public narrative about refugees and asylum seekers.

Supporting vulnerable groups and communities

There are a number of different ways funders can support communities. This might mean supporting groups of individuals within the wider refugee population who share particular vulnerabilities or experiences—even if they do not consider themselves to be a ‘community’ per se. These vulnerable groups include young refugees, female refugees, stateless individuals, LGBTI refugees, and people who have been trafficked. Each of these groups have multiple and complex needs over and above the basic needs described in the previous section. The charity Asylum Aid has a particular interest in supporting the asylum claims process of vulnerable refugees.



Another way that funders can support communities is through Refugee Community Organisations and collaborative working with organisations that build the capacity and resilience of the communities into which refugees integrate. In the UK, Unbound Philanthropy has a particular interest in collaborative partnership working with other funders to assist in community-based initiatives to support refugee integration.

Young refugees

Young refugees are the subject of dedicated work streams for a number of charities straddling several areas of activities.

3,043 separated children claimed asylum in the UK in 2015.

Unaccompanied or separated children are particularly vulnerable;

child refugees in transit are at high risk for exploitation and trafficking. In 2015 3,043 separated children claimed asylum in the UK.⁴⁷ In addition 6,464 dependants were included in adult asylum applications.⁴⁸ 66% of unaccompanied young asylum applicants in the fourth quarter of 2015 were from just four countries: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Albania, and Iran.⁴⁹ The needs of young refugees are complex due to their vulnerability; but at the same time intervention in the lives of young refugees has the potential to create significant and long-lasting impact and promote integration. Compared to other groups with multiple complex needs, programmes for young refugees are comparatively well funded.

Legal services for young people require sensitivity and liaison with other services involved with the child such as social workers and foster parents. Outside of the UK, young refugees are often at risk, for example with young unaccompanied refugees being held in the same refugee camps as adults, and being vulnerable to exposure to volunteer workers who have not been subject to any safeguarding checks[§]. The Children’s Society operates specialist centres for young refugees across the UK, offering a range of support services, while Asylum Aid provides specialist legal services to unaccompanied child asylum seekers. The Refugee Council is funded by the Home Office to provide independent advice, guidance and advocacy for young refugees. It also provides specialist services for young refugees apprehended at Dover, and in cases where there is an age dispute with a young refugee.

Female refugees and families

One third of asylum applications in the UK each year are from women. Female refugees have particularly complex needs because of the gendered experience of their journey to

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asylum. Some forms of persecution are particular, although not exclusive, to women such as domestic violence, rape, sexual violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The Refugee Convention however does not allow for these issues as it was drawn up in response to the plight of male refugees after World War II. Lawyers still need to use the Convention to protect women’s rights, even though it was not originally drafted for that purpose. This means that legal cases are often more complex and as a result women are disproportionately likely to receive poor decisions on asylum claims.⁵⁰

[§] As discussed at the Alliance Magazine event on 5 April 2016, which included representatives from Barrow Cadbury Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the European Programme for Integration and Migration.

Women are also more likely to have children in their care. For these reasons both their legal and psycho-social needs are higher and they need more support than male asylum seekers.⁵¹ Integration can be more difficult as they are more likely to require support for confidence building for integration in UK life.

It can be difficult for any refugee to integrate when they have left family behind. The British Red Cross offers specialist support to young refugees, female refugees, and support for family reunion. Family reunion is recognised as key to successful outcomes for refugees and may be the subject of collaborative work by philanthropic funders in late 2016.⁵² Asylum Aid and Women for Refugee Women both work on lobbying and campaigning on women's issues. The Refugee Council has also run a pilot project for women who disclose during the course of Home Office interviews that they have previously experienced sexual violence, to ensure that they are referred for treatment and support following the interview.

LGBTI refugees

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) refugees also face tremendous challenges in terms of integration and their support needs are largely unfunded. Persecution has increased in many countries in recent years and homosexuality is still criminalised in 80 countries, with the death penalty applying in 13.⁵³ Figures on how many people seek asylum on the basis of their sexuality remain unknown—many people in this situation are reluctant to be open because of previous persecution or trauma—but the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) provides support to over 1,000 LGBTI people seeking asylum every year⁵⁴.

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The asylum process, already complex, can be even more traumatic for LGBTI refugees. Following reports of individuals being asked to 'prove' their sexuality, investigations into the handling of sexual identity claims found unhelpful stereotypes and inappropriate questioning in asylum interviews.⁵⁵ Even if successful in their asylum appeal, LGBTI people are unlikely to receive support from their ethnic communities in the UK and may encounter discrimination when seeking further support.⁵⁶ LGBTI refugees need support at all steps in the asylum and integration process—there are organisations, such as UKLGIG the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group, working on this specific issue.

Victims of trafficking

The needs of people who have been victims of trafficking are also complex for different reasons. Although there is a reasonably high level of media profile around trafficking issues, asylum and refugee charities view it as an underfunded area. Trafficking victims require a high level of legal support as they are often involved in proceedings for their asylum application alongside legal proceedings for criminal activity they may have been forced into. They also need for protection from their traffickers, even in the UK. Alongside legal support, these refugees often need psycho-social support (eg, counselling and therapy), as well as access to basics like shelter and health services which help these men, women and children rebuild their lives in the UK. As with other vulnerable groups, it is difficult to ascertain accurate statistics for numbers of trafficked people who are in the asylum system. However at least half of women involved in off-street prostitution were migrants and a significant proportion of these were deemed to be possible victims of trafficking.⁵⁷ In London, Praxis Community Projects has a particular interest in working with individuals who have been trafficked, while Asylum Aid and Freedom from Torture also work with trafficking victims. The Refugee Council provides therapeutic and legal services for child and young adult victims of trafficking.

Statelessness

Someone is defined as stateless when he or she is not considered a national of any state under the operation of its law. In practice, this means that no national government is committed to looking after your welfare, and no overseas embassy will provide you with help.⁵⁸ People can become stateless through a number of circumstances, for example inability to complete administrative processes such as birth registration in conflict and post-conflict

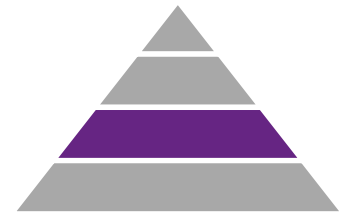
zones; when discriminatory laws prevent a woman passing on nationality to her child with an unknown or undocumented father; when a state of nationality ceases to exist; or when resident in a territory in which statehood has never existed (such as the Palestinian territories). The needs of stateless individuals, or those who were formerly stateless, is an area of specific need. Impact is difficult to measure because until 2013 there was no way to register as stateless and so it is difficult to measure the numbers of people in this situation. However, there is significant destitution and detention among stateless people and integration is virtually impossible until an intervention is made by applying through the statelessness procedure. This is a priority group for assistance in a partnership between Asylum Aid and UNHCR in the UK, and the European Network on Statelessness also works in this space.⁵⁹

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs)

Another way to fund outcomes at the community level is to consider funding Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), either individually or under an umbrella organisation. There are a large and diverse number of RCOs operating in the UK, including some 600 in London alone. These are mostly small organisations, typically run on limited budgets and led by volunteers and refugees. They are traditionally organised around a particular identity, such as nationality, ethnicity or faith, and are seen to provide invaluable support and culturally sensitive services to new arrivals. But they lack a coordinated and unified voice and have struggled to compete with larger charities not only for resources but for wider recognition and influence at strategic policy levels. Many RCOs are 'below the radar' groups which are generally concerned with two types of activity: filling gaps in public services where the mainstream has failed to meet needs, and cultural solidarity or identity. While RCOs can provide links to the host society and help with the integration process, some concerns have been expressed that this can perpetuate the marginal status of some refugees.⁶⁰ The Refugee Council works directly with Refugee Community Organisations to support them in delivering services and engaging stakeholders in local service delivery⁶¹, while Refugee Action supports these organisations to support their communities to integrate and influence public perceptions⁶². The UK Community Foundation's New Beginnings Fund awarded its first tranche of grants in 2016 and is open to the involvement of philanthropists interested in grant-making to small community groups.

Influencing services

One of the most important ways funders can effect change at the service delivery level is to support legal aid to help asylum seekers navigate the asylum process. The process can be drawn out and government asylum policy, which includes dispersing asylum seekers across the UK away from support networks, can have a negative impact on integration. Because asylum seekers are unable to work while an application is pending, many are at high risk of falling into destitution. This problem is compounded as most asylum seekers who have been refused refugee status feel unable to return to their home country and lodge new claims, causing further delays.



Access to reliable, high quality legal advice is crucial for asylum seekers. Those who receive no legal advice, or poor quality legal advice, can end up living as undocumented migrants who are then subject to UK immigration law for migrants living illegally in the UK, which is separate to asylum law. Family reunion law is also treated separately in law, so in the absence of high quality legal advice, asylum seekers may remain separated from family. The absence of legal aid at the outset of the process can also create errors of judgment that are difficult to reverse, particularly if subsequent legal aid is not provided.

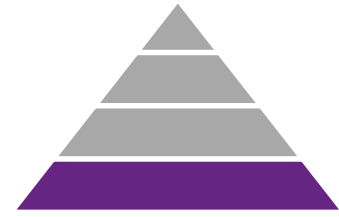
Despite the clear importance of legal advice services for asylum seekers and refugees, significant cuts to legal aid mean that few firms now run asylum legal programmes. According to Refugee Action, following the withdrawal of legal aid from most immigration cases under the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) (2012) and local authority funding cuts, many law centres have drastically reduced services and eleven have closed. Furthermore, the closure of generalist asylum support services, such as the Home Office-funded 'One Stop Shop' service which helped people identify their options, has placed unmanageable pressure on smaller organisations. The charity has identified 'immigration advice deserts'—where there is no legal service provision available to asylum seekers—around many regional refugee destitution support organisations.

Many law centres have drastically reduced services and eleven have closed.

Following the cuts to legal aid, the provision of legal services to refugees and asylum seekers is now largely fulfilled by charities that are increasingly dependent on foundation and private funding.⁶³ Among others, Asylum Aid, Refugee Action and Unbound Philanthropy are working not only to support individual asylum seekers, but to change and improve the legal systems and processes, both through campaigning and work with those in the legal profession. There are clear opportunities for funders to help improve the legal advice service provision for refugees and asylum seekers. This might be achieved by directly funding services, or by funding expert training in immigration legal advice for small, community legal providers such as Refugee Action's Refugee Advice Training Project. In a similar vein, Freedom from Torture creates change at this level by providing training for medical and social service professionals in working with people who have experienced torture.⁶⁴

Shaping policy and societal perceptions

There are also opportunities for funders to create impact at the broadest level, on the systems themselves. One opportunity here is to fund work on campaigning and shaping policy. There is also a need for support for strategic litigation and capacity building for discussions at the European level, for example on the asylum system and the creation of safe and legal routes for refugees.⁶⁵ Asylum Aid has also indicated a need to change Home Office policies to be gender-sensitive to reduce the barriers to women as gender is not currently recognised as grounds for asylum under the Refugee Convention. Organisations including Asylum Aid and Unbound Philanthropy are working to influence the policy framework to protect and enhance the rights of refugees. There are opportunities for philanthropists interested in working at this scale to support and work in partnership on initiatives such as lobbying and strategic litigation. At the same time, charities such as Refugee Council undertake policy and influencing work to persuade the government and officials to change the asylum system to improve it for those seeking asylum. Over the years there have been a number of changes that impacted on the experiences of asylum seekers, such as the introduction a 72-hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women.



Many refugee charities coordinate their policy work, for example the Detention Forum brings together a network of over thirty migrant and refugee charities, and supported the first parliamentary enquiry into immigration detention.⁶⁶ The cross-party inquiry panel concluded that too many immigrants are held in detention and that a 28-day limit on immigration detention should be introduced—the UK is the only country in Europe that does not have a time limit on detention. Although this recommendation was not included in the Immigration Act 2016, the government's defeat by the Lords on this issue demonstrates the collective power of coordinated policy work. For the first time ever there is legislation that requires automatic judicial oversight of immigration detention, which is an improvement and also helps demonstrate the slow process of policy change and the variety of intermediate outcomes that can be achieved. The European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM) is another initiative that brings together a network of funders interested in constructive policy approaches to migrants in Europe through grant-making, capacity-building and networking.⁶⁷

In addition to supporting the direct needs of refugees as outlined, there is a consensus in the sector that philanthropic funding could also play a key role in shaping the public narrative and societal perceptions about migrants that form the context for policy discussions about refugees and asylum seekers. To have an impact on both the root problems that

Philanthropic funding could play a key role in shaping the public narrative around migrants.

cause people to become refugees in the first place, and large scale humanitarian crises overseas, government-scale funding is required—but public attitudes affect legislators and policy makers' political will to commit these resources. At present, the public debate can tend to pit 'deserving' refugees against other migrants. The fact that refugees and asylum seekers are part of a broader, contested debate about migration can be a barrier to effective policy changes. A number of high profile foundations, as well as refugee charities, have identified a significant funding gap in terms of strategic communications for policy and advocacy in order to change the public narrative about refugees. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Barrow Cadbury Trust have particular interests in building public will to support refugees and in movement and coalition building. Migration Exchange brings together many of the main refugee charities and other NGO partners to address the public narrative on refugee and migration issues.

Conclusions

As this paper demonstrates, the growing scale of the European refugee crisis, situated within the broader context of migration issues and government policies, is increasing the demand on UK charities working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The rising need is not currently being met by adequate funding in what is already a relatively underfunded sector. This gap leaves significant opportunities for funders to create impact at both individual and system levels.

Questions for funders to consider

This information in this paper is designed to provide context about the current situation of refugees in the UK, together with an overview of the refugee and asylum charity landscape and the areas of their work where funding is needed.

We recommend philanthropists thinking about working in the refugee and asylum sector consider the following questions:

- Do you want to help the refugee and asylum sector at a particular level?
(eg, individuals, communities, service development, system/policy change)
- Would you be interested in supporting particularly vulnerable groups of refugees to have a greater impact on a smaller group of individuals?
(eg, women, children, LGBTI or people who have been victims of trafficking)
- Are you interested in supporting refugees in a particular geographical location, or do you prefer to work across the UK or even internationally?
- Are you happy to fund small, local grassroots organisations or would you prefer to fund large, national charities?
- Would you be happy to fund a large organisation where refugees are one strand of its work, or would you rather focus on organisations solely working in this sector?
- Are you interested in learning from and collaborating with other funders that are already active in this space?

We would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in this paper with interested funders. Please get in touch with Plum Lomax via 020 7620 4850 or info@thinkNPC.org.

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- Maurice Wren, Refugee Council.

Further resources

For funders interested in further exploration of the refugee and asylum charity landscape, the following additional resources may be useful:

Alliance Magazine, 21(1), March 2016 Issue: '[Refugees and migration: Philanthropy responds](#)'

Asylum Aid, 'Random Acts', a play on the Asylum Aid website: <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/play-random-acts/>

Asylum Aid (2013) [Rethinking Asylum Legal Representation: Promoting quality and innovation at a time of austerity.](#)

The Refugee Council (2016) [England's forgotten refugees.](#)

Still Human, Still Here (2010) [At the end of the line: Restoring the integrity of the UK's asylum system.](#)

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- ³ <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/1951-refugee-convention.html>
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- ¹⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21668005>
- ²⁰ On the way some politicians and media outlets have associated refugees with criminality and threat, see Greg Philo, *Bad news for refugees* (London: 2013) and <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/migration-news>. For analysis of how the media might be used to promote a different view of refugees and asylum seekers, see <http://news.trust.org/item/20140124112940-69sqy/>
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- ²⁶ <http://www.supportedoptions.org/>
- ²⁷ http://ukcommunityfoundations.org/programmes/new_beginnings
- ²⁸ <http://global-dialogue.eu/migration-exchange/>
- ²⁹ <http://www.acf.org.uk/networksandevents/list-of-networks/>
- ³⁰ For articles covering the Christmas appeal, see the Guardian's website: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/guardian-charity-appeal-2015>
- ³¹ The Refugee Council (2016) *England's Forgotten Refugees*.
- ³² Interview with Wayne Myslik, Chief Executive of Asylum Aid, 22 December 2015.
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- ⁵³ International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (2016) [*State sponsored homophobia world survey*](#).
- ⁵⁴ <http://uklgig.org.uk/>
- ⁵⁵ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (2014) [*An Investigation into the Home Office's Handling of Asylum Claims Made on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation*](#).
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TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

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