

Refugee and Migrant Factsheet: Islington 2015

This factsheet supports Islington Council's **Refugee and Migrant Integration Statement of Strategic Intent**



1 What is meant by refugee and migrant integration?

Integration relates to many aspects of our lives, to how much we are able to participate in society, our social relationships and our cultural practices. Little research has been done into what migrants say about integration; however refugees have defined their integration in terms of their education and employment success, their social interactions and their personal happiness. In addition to immigration status, they have said that tolerance, secure housing, English language proficiency, social networks and the support of professionals have helped them to integrate.

Islington Council are keenly aware that integration is a two-way process and of the many contributions migrants and refugees make to our borough, including to the realisation of a fairer and more equal society. Recognising how cultural diversity enriches our society therefore means ensuring we make appropriate adjustments in how we deliver services in order to ensure everyone is able to contribute to Islington society.

2 Profile of refugees and migrants in the borough

Demographic data relevant to migrants and refugees is provided in detail on the [council's website](#). Although there is little detailed information available regarding exact numbers and countries of origin of recent migrants and refugees in Islington, there are sources of information that can tell us something about their presence.

The key points below summarise what we can learn from the information we have.

For the purposes of this factsheet and for all work relating to refugee and migrant integration in Islington, “migrants” will be taken to mean those legally in the UK who have moved to join family, find work or study, irregular migrants (including refused asylum seekers), and people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF); whilst ‘refugees’ will be taken to mean asylum seekers, and those granted refugee status or another form of humanitarian protection.

2.1 Country of Birth

- Islington is a diverse borough with 36% of Islington residents born outside of the UK. This is double the national average (18%)
- Islington residents born outside of the UK come from a variety of countries, the highest numbers being from: Ireland, Turkey, USA, Australia, Italy, France, Somalia, Bangladesh, Germany, Cyprus, Poland and Spain (in that order)
- 40,917 Islington residents were born outside Europe (19.9% of all residents), 25,661 of whom were born in Africa or Asia (12.4% of all residents)
- The majority of Islington residents born outside of the UK came to the UK when they were under the age of 34 (90%). Just over half (58%) were under 24 when they came to the UK.

2.2 Language

English language skills are vital for integration.

- English is not the first language for 20% of Islington residents. This is more than double the national average of 8%
- The top 12 most common languages spoken in Islington (other than English) are: Turkish, Spanish, French, Italian, Bengali, Somali, Greek, Portuguese, German, Polish Arabic and Chinese (in that order)
- 6,628 Islington residents 'cannot speak English' or 'cannot speak English well'
- Islington residents born in certain countries have particularly high rates of those that 'cannot speak English' or 'cannot speak English well' with over a fifth of residents from those countries declaring this: China (22.5%), Pakistan (22.9%), Poland (24.6%), and Bangladesh (30.2%)
- In addition to the country of origin, the age at which a person comes to the UK, and the level of their literacy in another language also impacts on their ability to learn English. The older a person is when they arrive in the UK, the higher the rate of 'cannot speak English' and 'cannot speak English well'.

2.3 Refugees

- 2005 research into the numbers of refugees in the borough estimated that 5-10% of the population were of first generation refugee origin
- Information about Islington school pupils' first languages, together with information about date of arrival in the country and ethnicity, suggests that in 2013 up to 22% of pupils in Islington primary and secondary schools were from a refugee background
- Refugees and asylum seekers are smaller groups within the migrant population, and should be distinguished as such. However, refugees and migrants do share some important experiences and barriers to integration.

2.4 Migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act (IAA) 1999 states that a person will have 'no recourse to public funds' if they are subject to immigration control; 'public funds' comprise of a defined list of welfare benefits and public housing.

Financial support from a local authority under community care and children's legislation is not a 'public fund' for the purposes of the NRPF condition. This means that should children dependent on adults with NRPF become destitute, or adults are in need of care provided by the local authority, there may still be an entitlement to financial assistance from social services.

Islington have a dedicated team providing support to approximately 60 NRPF clients.

3 The experiences of migrants and refugees

Refugees and Migrants come from a diverse range of backgrounds

Most adult migrants decide to come to UK and they are likely to be keen to integrate and settle down in families and communities they recognise and may even be re-joining. Some migrants in Islington are in well-paid employment and enjoy many advantages. Other migrants are among the most disadvantaged. This makes it difficult to represent all migrant experiences.

However, many migrants will share some common experiences that influence their ability to settle quickly into life in the UK. These can include:

- being resilient in the face of severe challenges, and enduring these with a clear aspiration to improve their lives and the lives of their families
- leaving close family and friends behind, some of whom may be dependents
- coming from a school, workplace or country where people do not speak English
- holding qualifications that are or are not recognised in the UK
- lacking access to the professional or social networks that can quickly help them access services or employment
- being vulnerable to racism and other forms of discrimination.

As well as these, **refugees** have particular experiences that are linked to their being forced to flee their countries. These may include experiences of:

- political violence
- food shortages or drought
- persecution, including detention, torture and sexual violence
- Separation from close family and friends, that can be sudden, and involve children arriving in the UK unaccompanied and alone
- loss of home, family and friends and loss of status
- trafficking or coercion into travel
- interruption to schooling
- lack of access to primary health care.

Because their migration to the UK is forced, refugees and their families can be more vulnerable to social exclusion, prejudice and discrimination than other migrants.

Refugee women can also continuously experience particularly acute barriers to integration, for example when facing gender discrimination both from within and outside of their own families and communities. Their experiences of isolation can therefore be most acute, and they may also be vulnerable to, or survivors of, a range of risks including forced marriage and FGM.

It has to be stressed that women play a key role in supporting the integration of their families as in many migrant and refugee families they are the main carer.

4 Issues and barriers to integration

Integration is not just about refugees and migrants acquiring the tools to be able to succeed and fit into their new society, but also about removing the barriers that stop them from doing so. These barriers are multiple, inter-relate and often reinforce each other.

Significant barriers can include language barriers, racial or cultural discrimination and restrictions arising from immigration rules. What can compound refugees and migrants overcoming these barriers is that the most vulnerable individuals within migrant and refugee communities are often the hardest to reach, and therefore the most vulnerable to exploitation.

The areas addressed here reflect the themes of Islington Council's 'Refugee and Migrant Statement of Strategic Intent', and are intended to show the backdrop against which strategy to promote migrant and refugee integration is developed.

4.1 Employment, accommodation and welfare

Employment

Refugees and migrants suffer from relatively higher unemployment than the UK and London population as a whole. Some groups have limited entitlement to work, or may not be allowed to work at all.

Some labour migrants have access to high wage jobs. However, many refugees and migrants are employed below their skill level and in low-grade, low-pay jobs. Migrants are also over-represented in the informal labour market, and in sectors more subject to exploitative labour conditions and declining pay. Some Labour migrants live in accommodation provided by employers and tied to jobs; this is often overcrowded, can be of poor quality, and at risk of fire.

Accommodation

Migrants are overwhelmingly housed in the private rented sector but have different housing patterns and experience multiple barriers in the housing market. Refugees are among the most likely groups in London to live in overcrowded or sub-standard housing.

While refugees, in particular refused asylum seekers, are at risk from homelessness and destitution, this can also affect labour migrants from the accession states, due to precarious employment and limited entitlement to benefits. Asylum seekers must vacate provided accommodation within 28 days of a positive decision, putting this group at risk of homelessness.

Some refugees have limited awareness of their entitlement to housing benefit, how to search for accommodation, and their rights around tenancy and housing standards. Limited English language fluency and fear of retaliatory actions by landlords may be further barriers.

Welfare

EU labour migrants are subject to restrictions on jobseeker's allowance, housing and child benefit, and may not be offered interpretation services unless they are deemed vulnerable. JCP now requires all jobseekers to have English to ESOL level 2, and those signing up must improve within six months or face sanctions.

4.2 Education pathways

- Language needs of migrants and refugees vary greatly, from pre-entry level ESOL support to workplace-focused language learning. Barriers to migrants accessing English language learning include long working hours, and the cost and accessibility of courses.
- Poverty and long working hours amongst migrants and refugees can lead to isolation, with reduced opportunities to access advice, services and community. Children of migrants and refugees are also at risk of isolation and increased vulnerability. Overcrowded accommodation can affect children's ability to study or do school homework, exacerbating difficulties with getting used to a new school system.
- The experiences of family separation, interruptions to schooling and coming from different school systems, can detrimentally affect the progress and achievement of migrant and refugee children in schools. Where there is a lack of understanding of English by parents and/or children, this can also lead to difficulties at school, for example accessing the curriculum, understanding school systems and practices, and affecting parents' capacity to help with homework. Children with uncertain immigration status, including asylum seekers waiting for a decision, can find it difficult planning education pathways, and many migrant and refugee families in temporary accommodation are vulnerable to frequent moves which can lead to frequent school moves also.

4.3 Inclusion and Community Safety

Migrants face the same concerns around crime and safety as other Londoners. However some very particular criminal activities correlate to very specific migrant groups, and there are crimes to which migrants might be particularly vulnerable as victims, such as some hate crimes and exploitation, due to hostility or ignorance. There is evidence that migrants, and irregular migrants in particular, do not have the confidence to report hate crimes and other crimes to the police.

Barriers to migrant and refugee participation in civic life include lack of information and understanding of relevant decision-making processes; lack of time, childcare or resources (e.g. to attend meetings); lack of confidence and scepticism about their ability to make a difference. Research shows that refused asylum seekers and newly arrived migrants experience these barriers most sharply.

4.4 Health and Wellbeing

Barriers to health care include language, lack of knowledge of the system due to newness, and the cultural competence of health care systems. Mental health and other treatments offered may not be culturally appropriate or relevant, and migrants may lose access to indigenous healing practices that are effective. Refugees and new migrants are less likely to be aware of interpretation services, and sources of advice and information on health.

Asylum seekers in particular can experience stress and fear in anticipation of possible dispersal, refusal or detention. Stress can lead to mental and physical illness, and can prevent the development of communication skills and contact with services. This also impacts on children, who may miss school to support their parents, and can in some cases lead to deterioration of family relationships and even domestic violence. Other sources of stress may include experiencing prejudice-related bullying, racism or abuse, and family separation or bereavement, where, with lack of access to community support networks, wellbeing can be affected.

Refugees and new migrants may, due to circumstances beyond their control, not be able to provide correct documentation to register with a GP, and may fear revealing this. There may be lack of clarity around entitlement to healthcare for failed asylum seekers and others with NRPF which increases fear of

4.5 Support for those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

- Many of the barriers to integration experienced by migrants affect those with NRPF most acutely. In some areas, the barriers are greater. For example, failed asylum seekers and other categories of irregular migrant have their access to primary care limited by the discretion of GPs as to whether to register them, along with requirements at surgeries for proof of immigration status/residence due to the lack of clarity around entitlement.
- Feedback from local drop-in centres working with homeless people have reported that over the last ten years they have seen a deterioration of physical and mental health of both migrants and refugees who have no recourse to funds who use their centres for showering, food and other services. They have seen an increase of substance misuse amongst this group who have remained without any resources.
- Whilst research shows there are many failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants with NRPF, it is impossible to measure how many; this group are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in the informal labour market, homelessness and destitution.