



Commission on the  
Integration of  
Refugees

# International Comparisons of Refugee Integration Practices



**Good Faith  
Partnership**

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# Introduction

The past two decades have seen an increasing interest in policies and good practice related to the integration of asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants. A vast amount of literature exists to document and compare how countries have developed their policies and programmes and how this influences integration for new arrivals and the settled community. Whilst it would therefore be impossible to do an exhaustive analysis, this literature review has summarised key examples from comparative countries to the UK (from Europe, the Americas and Australasia) that are generally felt to offer some valuable learning and insight. We have focussed on highlighting examples of good practice from countries comparable to the UK so that the findings are as applicable as possible. For example, similar political systems, attitudes to welcoming refugees, cultural expectations, geographic considerations, and the strength of their faith and civil society all have to be taken into consideration.

Based on the evidence gathered by the Commission to date and information that is available on common indicators of integration, we have focused on the following themes:



**Accommodation  
and Living  
Conditions**



**Education and  
English Language  
Provision**



**Employment and  
Entrepreneurship**



**Health and  
Mental Health**

# Integration and some preliminary notes

## What is Integration?

How different international contexts affect the multiple ways of referring to integration has been widely studied. Different cultural approaches have led to variance in language and meanings, including referring to phenomena such as assimilation, multiculturalism and cultural segregation as elements related to a greater or lesser extent to integration. The most updated commonly held understanding of integration globally refers to “**Integration Practices**”, and this is the language we use in this paper.

The UK’s **Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework** is a model built on the Government’s Integrated Communities Strategy and sets out a vision for integration, defining it as ‘communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities’. While this (the 2019 framework) has been widely influential in Europe and beyond, we must note that not all Governments aim to measure or achieve this type of integration.

The European-wide approach includes an understanding that member states of the Council of Europe all have their own migratory traditions and policies in a way that each country’s fundamental assumptions on the integration of foreigners will differ. However, the Council defined the following indicators as a general framework to evaluate integration:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
|  Access to the labour market |  Participation in political processes and in decision-making  |
|  Housing and social services |  Mortality, fertility, and demographic changes  |
|  Education                   |  Judicial indicators (including things like comparative data on arrest, conviction and acquittal rates to reveal social exclusion patterns from migrants) |

This set of indicators captures many of the points from the UK framework, but also measures potential discrimination, negative perceptions and attitudes towards migrants, as well as multiple demographic and social data in comparison to nationals in the receiving country. In this way, the European discussion focused on demographic data and discrimination indicators as much as active markers that promote integration. Strategies in New Zealand and Australia, on the other hand, put emphasis on other facilitators, such as the prioritisation of family reunification, which, in the UK framework, is only one of the 12 indicators of stability.

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Despite the various themes that are part of integration strategies, some countries may have, by law or by pure political will, a strong focus on one element. These driving indicators become ‘flags’ for governments, and the political narrative tends to divert all efforts into refining and justifying strategies and decisions as per that one stronger (or more important) element. This is relevant in cases such as Denmark, where the notion of integration is primarily driven by economic self-sufficiency as, perhaps, the main desired outcome. Another example would be New Zealand, which, in its integration framework, prioritises participation and inclusion, described as when refugees and their families have a strong sense of belonging and acceptance in their communities and can achieve their personal goals.

### Who are we talking about?

In the context of the UK and European legal frameworks, there is a fundamental distinction between asylum seekers and refugees. An asylum seeker is an individual who has sought protection in a determined country, often arriving as a foreign national and awaiting a decision from the corresponding government on their claim for asylum. During this period, in most legal structures in Europe and the UK, asylum seekers may not have legal permission to work and are often reliant on government support for housing and necessities. In contrast, a refugee is someone who has been granted asylum status because they have been recognised as having a well-founded fear of persecution due to factors such as their race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, or membership in a particular social group.

## Prioritises participation and inclusion, described as when refugees and their families have a strong sense of belonging and acceptance in their communities and can achieve their personal goals.

This differentiation is crucial for a couple of reasons: firstly, it determines different rights and entitlements of individuals seeking protection versus those who have been granted refugee status; and secondly, because the meanings of the terms “asylum seeker” and “refugee” are not universal. In the United States, there is a notable difference between asylum seekers (or asylees) and refugees. Asylum seekers are individuals who request protection while already present within the country’s borders where they intend to stay, while refugees, on the other hand, seek safety by being relocated from a third country.

This paper uses the UK/European frame of reference in terminology, and most countries studied in this report prioritise integration efforts for those with refugee-

settled status, particularly when it comes to federal and national-wide interventions. Beyond the interest in rapid integration driven by economic need, in all studied countries, civil society has a very active role in the integration of asylum seekers or migrants “pre” refugee status, mainly from a human rights / humanitarian perspective. It becomes apparent that asylum seekers’ integration and well-being do rely heavily on civil society and charitable interventions that may not be sanctioned, funded or delivered by national governments.

This distinction between state-led integration efforts and civil-society-led efforts is also important when it comes to the fraught task of measuring integration. Government-based guidelines and policies often prioritise economic self-sufficiency and civic participation as key indicators of successful integration. While all countries analysed include other markers as well, governmental efforts tend to focus on these themes as the key outcomes that precede or dominate their policies.

Conversely, frameworks developed by non-governmental organisations tend to emphasise several other indicators, often highlighting broader inclusivity, mental health, and community engagement. While these frameworks may capture a more comprehensive picture of refugees’ needs, they can sometimes lack the ability (or means) to implement them when compared with government-based frameworks.

Furthermore, having increasingly complex indicators to measure successful refugee integration makes it difficult to measure the positive impact and effectiveness of some

of the initiatives that target such concerns. This challenge in analysing the comprehensive “effectiveness” of integration efforts is integral to markers of social and cultural integration that, by nature, require qualitative assessments. This point is important to this report as it provides a nuanced background to whenever we discuss best practices and things that “work” or “could work” in the British context.

It is in this context that the need to examine integration practices has moved many organisations to launch initiatives to capture a body of literature and solid research, such as the Migrant Integration Policy Index, MigrEmpower, and the Global Compact on Refugees, which we use to refer to good practices in the thematic areas.

# Accommodation and Living Conditions Practices



The majority of legal structures and frameworks in Europe are designed to facilitate or encompass housing within the overall integration strategy. Typically, asylum seekers receive housing support on arrival if required, although the type of support and housing available change depending on the country examined. Later on, once granted refugee status, applicants tend to be allocated to municipal or regional authorities, which in some cases are legally mandated to provide housing.

In other international examples, charities have varying degrees of contribution in those ecosystems (for example, offering resettlement support by linking refugees with schools, etc.) but are rarely responsible for providing housing, with the exception of sponsorship models and resettlement consortiums in North America.

refugees typically receive unlimited permanent residence status in Canada as part of this process and housing is part of the responsibilities private sponsors shoulder. They also have to provide financial support for a duration of 12 months, encompassing start-up costs and monthly living expenses, which collectively amount to approximately \$16,500 CAD (approximately

## Canada has a long-standing tradition of private sponsorship and mixed programs to facilitate the resettlement of refugees, with this initiative spanning over four decades and welcoming more than 327,000 refugees into the country by 2019.

Unlike the models in Europe, North America promotes refugee integration and support mainly via civil society. Community sponsorships bring a “shared responsibility” element to refugee integration and there are many ways to deliver sophisticated models, but it requires a lot of willingness from civil society and a political will to enable refugee integration. In many US States faith groups take a leading role; but at a federal level, large faith-based organisations have also become the leading experts on refugee resettlement.

### Pre-arranged housing

Canada has a long-standing tradition of private sponsorship and mixed programs to facilitate the resettlement of refugees, with this initiative spanning over four decades and welcoming more than 327,000 refugees into the country by 2019. Under this program, sponsors can include both organisations and groups of private individuals, and they possess the flexibility to select the refugees they wish to sponsor, provided they adhere to established guidelines. Eligible sponsors can include organisations that have signed sponsorship agreements or groups of five or more individuals. These sponsorship pathways collectively contribute to Canada’s robust refugee resettlement efforts.

Upon arrival in Canada, refugees may encounter varying accommodation arrangements, depending on the program under which they are admitted. Resettled

12,860 GBP) for one person, covering housing and other essential needs. In recent developments, the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program has emerged as another avenue for private sponsorship. This program matches Canadian citizens or permanent residents with refugees through referral organisations like UNHCR. Under this initiative, private sponsors commit to providing only six months of financial support to cover living expenses, including housing. The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) supplements this private sponsorship by providing an additional six months of public financial support to refugees. For the fiscal year 2023–2024, the Canadian government is investing \$310 million in RAP, with over \$34 million allocated for the Greater Toronto Area alone.

As part of pre-arrival preparations, sponsors often endeavour to secure permanent housing, for this to be available upon arrival. The principle in terms of facilitating housing is always to provide financial support to cover primarily private rental expenses until the refugee individual or family are able to self-sustain their tenancy. However, it is not uncommon for refugees to stay in temporary accommodation for a brief period as they transition into their new housing arrangements. The choice of temporary housing varies based on the specific program and only Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) find themselves in Reception Centres upon arrival.

Once refugees have transitioned into permanent housing, they assume responsibility for paying rent and formally sign the lease, with support from their sponsors when needed. It is possible for refugees sponsored by private groups to reside temporarily in a sponsor's or relatives' home, or stay in hotels for very brief periods. Furthermore and in addressing the need for temporary housing, the Canadian government allocates federal funding to the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP). IHAP provides financial assistance to provincial and municipal governments, facilitating cost-sharing to alleviate the heightened demand for interim housing, particularly since 2017 due to increased volumes of asylum claimants. In the fiscal year 2022–2023, IHAP disbursed over \$164 million nationwide to cover eligible costs associated with temporary accommodation.

Refugees admitted under the Economic Mobility Pathways Project (EMPP) are classified as economic migrants upon their arrival. While they have access to support and information regarding housing, they are generally expected to secure housing independently, often through private rentals. Those in the no-job offer stream must also financially support themselves, although they may be eligible for settlement loans to assist in their integration process.

UNHCR research indicates that refugees in Canada are more inclined to relocate to various regions within the country. Dispersal, notably among refugees who arrived between 2011 and 2016, 48% opted to settle in smaller cities and towns, surpassing corresponding percentage among all immigrants, which stood at 44%. This trend underscores the diversity of settlement patterns within the refugee population, highlighting the importance of flexible accommodation solutions to accommodate their needs.

## Housing through inter-agency cooperation

A different approach comes from the sponsorship framework in the United States of America and its USRAP, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which operates as a predominantly “presidential-driven” model, with its mechanisms often dictated by executive orders. However, certain aspects, such as the annual numerical ceilings on refugee admissions, require presidential proposals and congressional approval. Managed by the State Department, USRAP has welcomed over three million refugees into the United States since its establishment in 1980.

The program saw significant shifts during the Trump administration when then-President Trump, viewing it as a security concern, reduced the annual refugee ceiling to a historic low of 15,000 in 2021, a stark contrast to the initial ceiling of 200,000 set in 1980. Since then, President Biden has initiated efforts to expand the refugee program, although rebuilding its capacity has proven to be a challenging endeavour.

There are at least three federal agencies involved in the resettlement programme, in addition to the non-governmental consortium that delivers support. Due to reductions in refugee admissions during the Trump administration, many non-governmental agencies involved in resettlement underwent downsizing, but

the Biden administration allocated additional funds, including over \$6 billion for the Office of Refugee Resettlement in 2023, to restore and support these agencies.

The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) serves as the primary initial point of contact for the U.S. government and coordinates the resettlement process in collaboration with other agencies. The Department of Homeland Security, specifically through its Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) branch, conducts vetting of refugee applicants and makes the final determinations regarding resettlement applications. The dispersal and resettlement matters are primarily managed by nine domestic resettlement agencies, many of which are faith-based organisations. These agencies convene to review the biographical data of refugees chosen by the State Department's Refugee Support Centers abroad and determine their resettlement locations. While they consult with local authorities, final decisions rest with the federal government.

Refugees selected for resettlement through USRAP are eligible for Reception and Placement (R&P) assistance upon their arrival in the United States. Sponsoring resettlement agencies place refugees with local affiliates and provide crucial services during the initial 30 to 90 days, with the Department of State granting a one-time payment of \$2,375 per individual refugee to these local resettlement affiliates. A portion of this payment, \$1,275, is allocated for addressing the immediate needs of refugees, such as rent, food, clothing, and furnishings.

Upon their arrival, refugees are taken to initial housing, which tend to be small residencies that may or may not be shared, with essential furnishings and provisions like food, all provided and organised by the sponsoring charity or agency. Resettlement agencies continue to assist refugees during their initial period in the United States, helping with services like employment enrollment, school registration for youth, medical care access, Social Security card applications, and connections to vital social and

language services. In tandem with publicly supported refugee service and assistance programs, these agencies prioritise assisting refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency through employment as soon as possible after their arrival. After three months, the responsibility for refugees' assistance transitions to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which provides longer-term cash and medical aid, along with additional social services such as language classes and employment training to support their integration and self-sufficiency.

For longer-term housing, there are a number of charities bridging private markets with refugees or influencing landlords to accept refugee tenants; but also, different states and local governments are running various programs and schemes, such as working with developers to build low-cost units or engaging communities to offer sponsored housing/lodgings. Faith groups (particularly Christian Churches) still play a huge role in offering and finding housing support when it comes to permanent residencies.

## Government-arranged and self-arranged: The Swedish experience

These consortium and sponsorship mechanics for securing housing are vastly different to the European models. One of the most praised policy models in Europe in this regard is in Sweden, where a complex structure for housing provision is offered that lasts for a period of two years, with the option of extension, often involving privately owned properties. In the Swedish model, there is an expectation for refugees to pay rent. Housing arrangements often involve shared housing, and if refugees decline the provided housing, they are expected to arrange their own accommodation. The total number of asylum seekers registered in the reception system at the end of 2022 was 61,350 (up from 23,353 in 2021), of which 8,542 were living in Migration Agency accommodation, 38,070 in private accommodation and 14,738 in other forms of accommodation. The increase from the end of 2021 is most likely due to people from Ukraine coming to Sweden. The number of places in Migration Agency accommodation increased from 14,810 in 2021 to 19,593 in 2022.

In detail, Sweden's approach to refugee integration in housing involves several key points: Housing offered by the Migration Agency is either in an apartment in a normal housing area or at a reception centre (a building used exclusively to lodge asylum seekers, where residents, who can freely enter and leave the building, have access to food, healthcare and private apartments if they are family groups). All these options are acquired through public procurement (this modality is called "Faculty accommodation"). Ordinary apartments are usually the Migration Agency's primary option for accommodating asylum seekers. Asylum seekers can choose to live at a centre but in that case, they might need to move to a town where the Migration Agency can offer them a place. Civil society stakeholders are not strong partners in the field of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees, as this issue is deemed to be a government and municipal responsibility.

The ordinary rules for the number of persons per room do not apply to asylum seekers, meaning that more people can live in a 3-room flat than is regularly the case when municipal authorities designate accommodation for citizens. When placing asylum seekers in temporary housing, the Migration Agency also makes individual assessments to find the right place. In some cases when there are special needs, it may be necessary for individuals to live alone. There is no record of hotels, hostels, barracks or other forms of accommodation being used in Sweden other than the reception centres. Asylum seekers may also choose to opt for private accommodation with friends or relatives (“Own Accommodation”), in which case the Migration Agency doesn’t influence material conditions or contracts.

Upon the lodging of the asylum application, the Migration Agency reception officer enquires about the applicant’s financial situation. If asylum seekers have their own resources, they must pay for accommodation themselves. If not, accommodation at a reception centre is free and in some centres, pro bono organisations offer different activities and opportunities to learn Swedish in informal ways.

The government has provided considerable funding to NGOs and educational associations to provide meaningful activities for all asylum seekers and to set up venues where asylum seekers can meet other people. Activities can be beginner’s courses in Swedish, information about Swedish society and the asylum process, children’s activities and outdoor activities. It is possible that asylum seekers are moved around within the centre or to another centre during the processing period.

The Swedish Migration Agency also operates “departure centres” for persons who have agreed to voluntary departure to the home country or Dublin cases.<sup>21</sup> There is ongoing discussion around opening new “return centres” for people who have an enforceable transfer, deportation or rejection order and the people living there can move freely to and from the residence. The return centres would be located close to airports, with the aim of speeding up potential removal from Sweden.

This may change if return centres are implemented. The potential new policy means that everyone with enforceable transfer, deportation or rejection decisions, even those who do not have a planned trip, must be offered a place in a return centre at an earlier stage compared to the current policy.

In 2022 approx. 60% had their asylum application rejected and therefore subject to a deportation decision. This means that a large majority of asylum seekers need to return; and this is a reflection of a changing trend in Sweden, where returns have been prioritised in the last couple of decades. As pointed out by former Minister for Justice, Henrik Malm Lindberg:

*In numbers, the return cases increased significantly in Sweden between 1999–2018. From about 5000 cases per year around the turn of the century to 20,000–25,000 cases in the 2010s. This increase is partly behind why the issue of return was put high on the agenda around 2010, becoming a priority for letters of appropriation. Despite having a reputation and a tradition of being generous in terms of asylum and refugee reception, migration policy was overhauled in a severely restrictive direction and the border controls were increased in the aftermath of the large refugee influx in 2014–2015.<sup>22</sup>*

The Migration Agency provides rejected asylum seekers with incentives for voluntary repatriation, including financial assistance and travel arranged by the caseworker and paid for by the Swedish Migration Board. Where there is deemed to be a low risk of absconding, failed asylum seekers are given between 14 and 30 calendar days to leave the country independently. Additional supervision or detention may be in place if the rejected asylum seeker does not cooperate in their return. Supervision means that the person must report regularly to the Swedish Migration Agency or the Police. If the person receives a decision on detention, they must stay in detention while awaiting their departure.

After a successful resolution of the claim and a favourable decision for a residence permit, people in Own Accommodation continue to be responsible for their own accommodation, while people in Facility Accommodation are transferred from the Swedish Migration Agency-run accommodation to a municipality. In 2016, the Swedish government introduced this expediting and promoting the geographical dispersal of refugee reception as a Settlement Law. This law made it obligatory for municipalities to receive and organise housing for a specified number of refugees, marking a shift in governance from persuasion to economic incentives and ultimately to coercive measures over the years.

However, refugees who resided in Own Accommodation during the asylum process, as well as family members arriving through family reunification pathways, are excluded from access to the planned housing organised by municipalities. This exclusion can present challenges for free settlement. Importantly, the entry pathway and accommodation type during the asylum process plays a pivotal role in determining access to municipal accommodation for newly arrived refugees. As part of Sweden's refugee resettlement policy, integration support is provided for a period of two years, which contrasts with the 12-month support period offered in the United Kingdom.

The Swedish Migration Agency calculates and decides the number of refugees that shall be settled into each of Sweden's 21 regions. It is then up to the regional County Administrative Board to negotiate

with its municipalities and decide the number for each municipality. The political narrative behind this highlighted it as an effort to counteract ethnic clustering, spread the costs among authorities, facilitate the effective use of housing capacity and stimulate positive social interaction.

The mandatory requirement for municipalities to provide housing for refugees has given rise to a diverse range of housing situations, encompassing variations in standards, costs, and temporary solutions. However, studies examining the impact of this policy on refugee settlement have yielded mixed results. Several research findings suggest that centralised control of refugee settlement can hinder integration (Åslund and Rooth, 2007; Edin et al., 2003; Zenou et al., 2006). Specifically, when comparing the employment prospects of refugees who resided in state-funded accommodation to those who secured their own private accommodation (referred to as "eget boende" or EBO) during the asylum process, significant differences emerged, with the latter group demonstrating better outcomes (Bevelander et al., 2019). On the other hand, a report analysing Swedish integration policies for refugees, particularly the 2016 policy mandating refugee reception by municipalities, found that the policy had led to an equitable distribution of refugees across municipalities (Osanami Törngren and Emilsson, 2018). These divergent findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of integration challenges and the need for nuanced policy considerations.

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## Local support and municipal good practices

Some good practices come from the local level, where municipalities implement less systemic and more specific interventions or policies around housing that are seen as helpful to meaningful resettlement.

An example coming from a Swedish Municipality, Ljusdal, is the implementation of a support model once the refugee has moved to permanent accommodation. The municipality employs a previously resettled refugee who speaks several common refugee languages as a ‘housing host’, support that is deemed particularly essential to onboard those refugees without experience of living in a modern environment. This specialist role provides flexible housing-related support to both refugee tenants and landlords. Ljusdal engages tenants and other members of the local

community by delivering information sessions on resettlement at schools and tenant organisations, and the ‘housing host’, usually a refugee with experience of living in the community, provides an introductory session that includes issues such as maintaining the apartment, taking care of apartment keys, acting considerately toward neighbours and how to pay the rent. They are also equipped to answer questions about the locality and how services work.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the good practices implemented for municipalities are policy-driven - Ljusdal specifies that social workers must accompany the refugees during the signing of their tenancy agreements, a good practice also modelled in Sheffield.<sup>24</sup>

## Setting housing standards as good practice

On a different level, some good practices around housing refer to the development of systemic standards to make existing lodging arrangements safer or more culturally appropriate. A prime example of this approach to improving housing comes from Germany, where a set of federal policies addressing refugee housing safety were launched by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Protection of refugees in refugee accommodation was funded and designed to be a holistic policy programme focused on establishing uniform standards to provide a safe environment for vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, including children, LGBTQ+ persons, and refugees with post-traumatic disorders. The standards initiated structured checklists to prevent violence or abuse in accommodation provided by public entities and included frameworks to record reliable

data and information on the situation of particularly vulnerable people in refugee accommodation in many areas, to promote adequate monitoring and evaluation. This initiative works alongside various programmes designed to orchestrate safer spaces for refugees and unaccompanied minors, such as “DeBUG” (“Decentralized advice and support structure for protection against violence in refugee accommodation), “BeSAFE” – Recognizing special protection needs upon admission, a toolbox for front line practitioners and healthcare professionals to identify refugees with special vulnerabilities on the first encounter; and “LISTEN UP!”, a streamlined and secure complaint procedure for refugee children in accommodation. All these projects are currently being implemented and rolled out as mandatory standards; and will publish outcomes in late 2023.

# Education and English Language Provision Practices



Studies highlight education as the best intervention for long-term integration, particularly models that focus on validation and investment in supplementary education and improving language skills, with better outcomes for the migrant, including the level of job security and cultural adaption.<sup>25</sup>

This prioritisation of education must be weighed against its trade-off, primarily slowing down or delaying economic integration in the short term. While the UK framework includes education as one of the markers and means and highlights its role not only as an outcome but also as a significant way to create opportunities, current policies lack a clear focus on what that means for an asylum seeker or refugee. There is a scenario where the “education-first” approach is clear in policies across some European and American countries. Generally, children of school age must be enrolled in school levels according to their age, and such insertion in formal education is mandatory and generally free of charge. School districts and/or relevant local authorities have a duty to secure education for all children regardless of their immigration status. However, the scenario is less clear when it comes to adults.

UK’s system is particularly complex when it comes to education opportunities for migrants. Depending on the person’s legal status, different provisions apply; although overall, English language learning (ESOL), functional skills (Maths and English) and essential digital skills tend to be available for free to all applicants. However, the education sector has highlighted a serious lack of capacity due to cuts in funding for general provision over the last 15 years, with some supplementary funding for specific groups such as Syrians as part of resettlement schemes. There isn’t a unified guideline from the national government, so a number of charities and initiatives that specialise in this advice, such as Refugee Education UK, Displaced Student Opportunities and Student Action for Refugees, have emerged, making information and some additional resources available to applicants.

In this chapter, we explore access to language support/training due to its essential nature for meaningful integration and preliminary requirement for any other social or educational interaction, including access to tertiary education as noted by literature as one of the most important integration markers.

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## Language learning and assistance

Language learning and language assistance are two related but distinct concepts. Language learning involves providing refugees with the opportunity to learn the language of their host country, which can help them integrate into their new community. Language assistance, on the other hand, refers to the provision of support to refugees who are struggling with language barriers. Language assistance can take many forms, including interpretation, translation, and availability of resources in their language, as the goal of language assistance is to help refugees overcome language barriers and access the resources they need without significant delays.

While language assistance tends to be indispensable for accessing support and legal services at an early stage, focusing on language learning for refugees can have a significant impact on their resettlement and integration, and it has been recognised as an essential element of improving job opportunities, reducing isolation, improving social connections by increasing the confidence that enables wider participation in the community. Furthermore, the ability to speak the host country's official language proficiently appears to be an essential determinant of health as language barriers can prevent refugees from accessing and using health services. The Integration Handbook of the UN Refugee Agency lists a number of standards and actions that capture good practice in language assistance and learning. While the UK promotes ESOL for resettlement, the way this is implemented varies between local authorities and other stakeholders in the asylum seeker and refugee sector. Some of the integration efforts around language and cultural education rely heavily on the charity sector and/or the proactive engagement of the migrants themselves, who are expected to find opportunities on their own.

Language skills are an education priority for New Zealand in a way that it supersedes entry into supplementary education. Their strategy is for refugees to have sufficient English language skills that help them participate in education and daily life. However, before engaging in national efforts to promote language training, New Zealand has a distinct interest in language assistance (instead of language education) as this is deemed their first priority in the Refugee Resettlement Strategy. This means that they focus on making interpreting and translation services as widely available as possible to ensure people with limited or no English language skills can access public

services and information at all stages of their migration journey. National efforts are focused on delivering a multi-year programme across New Zealand's public sector, including telephone/video Interpreting service, face-to-face interpreting service, and translation services; with guidelines, standards and procurement models driven by national government policies.

Canada also has a nationwide policy regarding language training for refugee resettlement. The LINC and CLIC Programmes (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada/ Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada) have been deemed a priority for the Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) strategy. The federal government holds the responsibility to facilitate the entry of newcomers into the country. This includes the design of LINC curricula and standards for teaching requirements. This program is built around two basic modes of delivery: Classroom training, which is what most refugees are enrolled in, and Home Study through the internet and correspondence. It's also possible to offer personal tutoring. As part of these programmes, clients receive a certificate indicating the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) or Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC) levels they have achieved, which are used as proof of language skills in their application for Canadian citizenship.

LINC and CLIC program content can be delivered by the government (federal or provincial) or by local service providers funded by the Canada Settlement Program, who can offer additional services such as transportation and childcare facilities during the courses. There are existing partnerships with more than 500 third-party services, and around 80% of LINC services offered by those providers have some form of transportation and childcare service in place, although some locations may have less availability. These programmes are free for all resettled refugees (who already arrive in Canada as Permanent Residents and protected persons). While people applying for asylum within Canada are not yet resettled, refugees can access free language training as protected persons or protected temporary residents, a status given by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada or Citizenship and Immigration. It's important to note that Canada's refugee resettlement strategy is built around a referral mechanism, where the applicant receives support before arrival, including facilitating language assessments and accessing language training at that stage, to be continued once the applicant arrives in Canadian territory as a refugee.

In Sweden, Denmark and Germany, proactive approaches are also taken by the national government. This includes an intense focus on language skills training. This ranges from approaches such as in-depth “practical language” to efforts in convening universities and other educational bodies to promote the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in tertiary education and structured mechanisms to promote recognition of foreign education certificates. Most (if not all) of these practices are promoted from a national level, with significant public funding put into various schemes, usually led by government agencies, to this end.

One widespread training program in Denmark is the “Family-Danish” program, which helps refugees and migrants integrate the Danish language into daily life at home. The “Family-Danish” program also provides activities where Danish families can meet refugees or migrant families with whom they share an ethnic background. Furthermore, the support provided by volunteers and non-profit organisations, e.g. the Red Cross and the Danish Refugee Council, plays a significant role in the municipal support scheme. It is mainly based on developing life skills and supporting the integration process in the local community. The voluntary sector can also contribute to basic skills and especially language learning in more informal environments such as in cafés and at home when it comes to basic skills and especially language training.

Despite the existence of government-driven policies, many good practices come from independent projects or civil society-based initiatives, such as the service SPuK in Germany – Sprach-und Kommunikationsmittlung (language and communication mediation) that offers language mediation in the educational, social and health sector in the region of Osnabrück. The coordination of mediations is administered by the Caritas Association and has been an independent project since 2012, where over 60 mediators bridge language barriers and ease cultural misunderstandings for people with low or no knowledge of German in over 30 languages.

Liechtenstein Languages and their LieLa Language Learning Method is recognised as a good practice programme by the Global Compact for Refugees. Its innovative approach derives from its German language teaching tailored to the experience and needs of newly arrived refugees. Course formats change according to need but include basic language classes focused

primarily on interaction with authorities, healthcare settings, orientation in town and communication in housing facilities. They also offer advanced language classes, early childhood classes and language classes for vocational integration. Around 10,000 refugees learned German through LieLa and 300 language trainers were trained since its inception in 2016. The LieLa Language Learning Method has been so successful that it will be deployed outside of German-speaking regions, as a joint pledge between the charity, the Government of Liechtenstein, and the NGO RET International, who will be funding the organisation to apply the model in Turkey to teach Syrian and Iraqi refugees Turkish and English to enable their active participation in society.

SPRING evaluates Venner Viser Vej (Friends Show the Way), a national partnership between the Danish Red Cross and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC); two organisations that already assist municipalities with refugee integration and family reunification that focus on a befriending service as a way of establishing relations between local Danes and refugees, in order to improve refugees’ language skills and their understanding of the receiving society.

**In the UK, a voluntary network of universities, “Universities of Sanctuary” collates and promotes good practice around three principles that universities can embrace in their practice to get awarded a “University of Sanctuary Award”: Learn (understanding what it means to seek sanctuary), Embed (take positive action to become welcoming, safe and inclusive), and Share (with other universities and beyond).**

## University Education

Further opportunities for integration come into play when considering refugees' insertion into tertiary education. In this context, the barriers change depending on the country's educational structure. In the UK, people with refugee status or Humanitarian Protection are legally allowed to go to university and are eligible for student finance on the same basis as national students. Asylum seekers are legally allowed to go to university unless they have 'no study'

An interesting comparison comes from the European experience, where barriers are not so much financial, but responded historically more to factors like legal challenges due to the migration status, lack of language skills and recognition of qualifications. Academics have conducted studies and made commentary on how there are substantial gains from occupational recognition and inclusion in University education for employment rates and wages among immigrants, which has ignited political will to address these obstacles.

**The Lisbon Recognition Convention, which aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have adequate access to an assessment of the qualification in another country in a fair, flexible, and transparent way. ENIC-NARIC networks, a platform that the UK is part of, deploys support in this context, including good practices and guides for credential evaluators.**

immigration bail conditions but are not eligible for student finance or other loans in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland being the exception. The Home Office does not publish statistics on the number of asylum seekers who don't have the right to study, nor the specific reasons that justify this measure. Since 2018, charities and asylum caseworkers have stated that the imposition of study restrictions has been spreading. The Home Office's response to a freedom of information request revealed that between 15th January and 31st May 2018, of the 53,901 individuals given immigration bail forms (a document defining the conditions of a person's immigration bail) by the Home Office, 12,642 individuals (24%) were prohibited from studying.<sup>26</sup>

Given that UK regulations permit universities to charge higher fees to overseas students than to home students, the primary barrier tends to be financial, as asylum seekers are routinely classed as overseas students, and are thus liable to pay overseas student fees for university education. These fees are normally prohibitive for someone seeking asylum. This is especially the case considering the lack of access to most public funds and work-derived income. Additionally, and primarily driven by charities or by the university's initiative, some institutions agree to offer scholarships, on a limited, individual basis.

An example of this is the framework from which European countries have operated since 1997, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have adequate access to an assessment of the qualification in another country in a fair, flexible, and transparent way. ENIC-NARIC networks, a platform that the UK is part of, deploys support in this context, including good practices and guides for credential evaluators. Nevertheless, many asylum seekers are refugees who are coming from countries that are not ENIC-NARIC members.

Additional tools have been developed by the Council of Europe and partners to assess refugees' qualifications for which there is insufficient evidence, such as the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), a standardised document developed in 2017. It explains the qualifications a refugee is likely to have based on the available evidence, containing information on the highest qualification(s) achieved, academic discipline, other relevant qualifications, as well as relevant job experience and language proficiency (in cases where it is possible to substantiate it). Although not a formal recognition act, the EQPR can be used by refugees when they apply for jobs or further education in Europe and is recognised by several countries, including Germany, France, and the United Kingdom and its success rate of recognition is around 83%-84%.

However, despite being available since 2017 and having a high success rate, reports claim that, by 2022, only 600 refugees have received EQPRs, which points towards the need to review what may be some of the barriers to this type of resource being more widely utilised.

The focus on equivalence to reference qualifications or occupations, even in formally non-regulated occupations, has been a particularly difficult obstacle in Germany, despite all these European efforts. While higher education is free at public universities to all students, international students were expected to match their skills or previous education with existing qualifications in Germany and were having many challenges to insert themselves in university education, so a comprehensive response was developed and funded by the German government.

The Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) or German Academic Exchange Service has been integrating refugees into German higher education through a holistic approach since 2016. GCR includes the Integra programme as an exemplary good practice where more than 30,000 refugees have been successfully integrated into the German higher education system in Bachelor, Master or Doctoral levels. The scheme focuses on four areas of investment to build on existing structures as much as possible. The “Four-phased model” channelled public funding into the following areas:

Entrance (recognising prior qualifications and orientation)

Preparation (ensuring language and subject-related skills)

Study (academic progress, mentoring and supplementary modules)

Career (successful transition into the workforce)

All areas are served by schemes that operate in collaboration with around 200 higher education institutions in Germany and several online platforms, as well as examination centres such as TestAS. Some data suggests that Syrian students (around 15,000) have become the third largest group of foreign students in German higher education. The DAAD also developed a series of targeted scholarships and programmes for nationals.

The way this platform has been developed and promoted by the federal government proves there is a focused effort to establish a structured model that not only expands capacity but is also tailored to refugee educational needs and obstacles. It has been continuously publicly funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and has been studied as a potential reference practice to target other vulnerable groups. Austria has a programme called “MORE”, that systematically delivers German classes, and academic and social activities with buddies in all the 22 public Austrian universities. It started with over 600 participants in 2015 and increased to more than 1000 for the following term, with high satisfaction reports from students. While enrolment in MORE wasn’t designed to convert participants into university students in the same way the German programme does, outcomes for integration were positive in many ways: A 2020 study reports that about 38% of MORE students reported obtaining a German level of B2 or above and 22% of MORE students moved to the labour market and a similar percentage moved to the educational system.

In the UK, a voluntary network of universities, “Universities of Sanctuary” collates and promotes good practice around three principles that universities can embrace in their practice to get awarded a “University of Sanctuary Award”: Learn (understanding what it means to seek sanctuary), Embed (take positive action to become welcoming, safe and inclusive), and Share (with other universities and beyond). This initiative proves that there is an interest in and recognition of the role these institutions can play across the UK as a driver of welcoming communities and refugee integration and it provides valuable resources on potential activities and guidance on scholarship assignment.

However, it’s essential to emphasise that the effectiveness of such programmes relies heavily on the prevailing political and societal conditions, as well as the legal framework. Unfortunately, in numerous countries, there has been a noticeable trend towards increasingly stringent regulations in recent years. For example, as the Universities of Sanctuary network is driven primarily by charities, opportunities to expand its impact or take some of the good practices implemented by individual institutions and push them in broader ways are limited, as there is no funding from the British government nor (currently) the political will to take these principles further through national or local policy. Consequently, integration programs at this intermediate (or small scale) level encounter great obstacles in terms of scaling highly praised “education-first” practices and may be one of the themes where further expansion can secure long-term successful integration.

# Employment and Entrepreneurship Practices



Refugee integration through economic and job market insertion represents a critical facet of building inclusive and cohesive societies in host nations. The United Kingdom, as outlined in the Home Office Framework for Integration 2019, recognises the significance of empowering refugees to become self-reliant and contributing members of their adopted communities. Creating pathways to facilitate economic opportunities underpins not only the quality of life for refugees and their families but also the essential need of balancing rights, duties, needs, and the fiscal impact migrants can have in host countries.

## Rapid employment

A focus on rapid employment can be a driver of early economic independence for the migrant, which also translates into less reliance on public funds and, therefore, an often attractive policy dynamic for countries particularly concerned about public spending. With “rapid employment” or “job first”, we are referring to practices that promote legal and social structures and support to get refugees into the job market as soon as possible, in any opportunity available to them, prioritising this over other aspects of integration such as formal education or language training.

Denmark is the primary example of this (Job First) policy, where attachment to the labour market or economic participation is the primary driver of integration according to their legal and political narratives. Prioritising employment integration came from the sense that utilising public welfare for this group of people can be “catastrophic for Danish society”.<sup>1</sup> The framework in which rapid employment policies have been designed was therefore prioritising self-sufficiency to reduce public spending in this area (for example, by capping welfare benefits that refugees can access or locating asylum centres in third countries instead of processing applications in Denmark). Further legal and operational mechanisms promote early returns (for example, revoking residence permits if the situation in home countries changed).<sup>2</sup>

This focus on temporary asylum lost traction after government changes in 2022, and changes in regulations made it possible for refugees to stay in Denmark for longer. While the political narrative has shifted over recent years, the legal basis of integration in Denmark is still built primarily around employment, as stated in Article 1 of the Integration Act, which explicitly states that: “making newly arrived aliens self-supporting as quickly as possible through employment” is a key objective of integration efforts.<sup>3</sup> “Working from day one” remains a priority in Denmark’s immigration system.

**A focus on rapid employment can be a driver of early economic independence for the migrant, which also translates into less reliance on public funds and, therefore, an often attractive policy dynamic for countries particularly concerned about public spending.**

It’s important to note that this practice is focused on *refugees*, as *asylum seekers* in Denmark are restricted from accessing employment, as in most European countries. Although they are not allowed to work until their claim is approved, there is an ongoing interest in approving permission to work if their application has been pending for six months or more - with an interesting exception for displaced Ukrainians, who can access a special mechanism that bypasses regular asylum claims and can get expedited special permits that give them access to employment and residence, generally within 30 days of filling a special online form.<sup>4</sup>

Once applicants are granted refugee status, they are required to engage with a number of intensive “job-focused” policies. They are allocated to a municipality, which is responsible for providing housing and for offering an introduction program that must be initiated within a month after arrival, with participation strongly incentivised. If refugees decline the offer or fails to participate in parts of the program, they are sanctioned financially, as access to the full integration benefit (equivalent to half the social security benefit Danish nationals are eligible for) is only given to those enrolled in the programme. Municipalities are incentivised to promote the programme as local authorities receive additional bonuses if they succeed in matching refugees with job opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

This program, catering to refugees and their family members (dependants and/or spouses), consists of an onboarding process with employment-oriented offers in the form of guidance and advice regarding education, business practice, and employment with wage subsidies. This is implemented with a contract that must describe the immigrant’s employment and education goals and a detailed description of the activities that the applicant will engage with, ensuring that the goals are met. Thus, the contract is tailored to each individual and specific goals, and the identifiable means leading to employment must be described in the contract.<sup>6</sup>

Refugees who are assessed to be ready to work must actively search for a job and participate in active labour market programs when required to. While the expectation is for the refugee to take on employment within a year, the programme can be extended to four additional years if employment is not achieved. This intensive support for new refugees to access the labour market in Denmark contrasts with the UK, where employment support has been piecemeal and inconsistent over the last decade, with many refugees in the UK struggling to access the help needed to find work.

These job-first programmes have shown some positive outcomes, but there are nuances to this. Studies from 2016 show that employment rates and cumulative work hours at a given number of months after arrival are slightly higher for those enrolled in the programme (versus a control group with similar demographics that wasn’t). There are also improvements in employment one year after settlement in Denmark. However, results are less consistent when comparing data for women and when considering the degree of precariousness of such positions and results in longer-term employment. Furthermore, this intense version of ‘job-first’ policy has been scrutinised by the NGO and academic sector as coercive, disregarding migrants’ experiences, who tend to feel pushed into positions that do not reflect their education and skills.<sup>7</sup>

Academics have argued that Denmark generally has lower employment levels than other Scandinavian countries, and their increase in refugee employment generally only applies for the initial years and for men. Furthermore, some of the longer-term effects may have been affected by the degree of repatriation efforts. Higher employment levels, in these studies, are usually linked to efforts around education, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

While academic analysis finds it difficult to provide direct causation links, this type of practice could lead to lower rates of irregular (or ‘illegal’) employment as Denmark has a low level of irregular employment compared to other countries.<sup>8</sup> In this way, there is an argument to be made that legally enabling rapid employment also has a positive effect on securing stability within the general working population, who would be adversely affected by the proliferation of unregulated employment. Refugees could be compelled to work illegally, in order to survive, under a policy that does not prioritise early and intensive support for accessing the labour market legally.

Italy provides a different example of access to employment in that asylum seekers are allowed to work 60 days after making their asylum application. They can then register with the local public Employment Centre, which means they are immediately available to work. While they have the right to work during the remainder of their asylum procedure, this does not grant them the right to work permanently but rather is a permit that gives access to the labour market while their asylum procedure is ongoing.<sup>9</sup> Once they have been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection, they receive a residence permit, which gives them the right to work in Italy without restrictions.<sup>10</sup>

This legal capacity to access employment, however, is usually affected by the lack of language skills most refugees experience on arrival, hence making the availability of work permits an insufficient enabler to give refugees full access into the labour market. Due to its proximity to North Africa and the Middle East, Italy often serves as an initial entry point into Europe for many refugees who subsequently aim to reach other European nations. This transit status and language barriers are both likely to negatively influence refugees' engagement in the job market, and these dynamics have steered Italy's approach to refugee integration to focus on temporary and initial assistance rather than long-term settlement and integration, which is more characteristic of countries further north and west.

Nevertheless, more recently, the National Agency for Active Labor Policies (ANPAL) in Italy coordinated an experimental program implemented by the Piedmont Labor Agency (APL) called Forwork to find answers to the issue of integrating refugees into the labour market. Funded with the help of the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) program, the Forwork project offers individual support from a job mentor with additional optional activities such as profiling, placement services, language and civic education courses, and short professional training. The project worked exclusively with asylum seekers hosted in emergency centres.

According to the European Commission, the findings demonstrate that combining individual support and tailored services included in Forwork can significantly enhance employment outcomes. Notably, an impact evaluation reported an increase of up to 20% in the participants' employment rate, accompanied by a notable boost of up to 35% in income and a substantially improved grasp of the Italian language. Participants have also conveyed a heightened likelihood of meeting, trusting, and establishing lasting relationships with Italians, which has yielded numerous positive effects in terms of community cohesion and integration.<sup>11</sup>

The UK has recently piloted a more holistic approach to refugee integration through the Refugee Transition Outcomes Fund (RTOF). This is an outcomes-based commissioning model, whereby payments are made by the Home Office to social investors for specific outcomes as they are achieved. It was a £14m cross-government initiative which aimed to increase the self-sufficiency and integration of newly-granted refugees, helping them to move into work, learn English, access housing and build links in their local communities. The programme is being piloted across 26 Local Authorities to address the challenges and barriers faced by newly granted refugees and the evaluation is due in 2024.

**Notably, an impact evaluation reported an increase of up to 20% in the participants' employment rate, accompanied by a notable boost of up to 35% in income and a substantially improved grasp of the Italian language.**

## Sponsored economic-based migration

Integration by employment takes on a different nature in Canada, where since 2018 the Economic Mobility Pathways policy (EMPP) launched an approach to fast-track integration for Highly Educated Refugees into the labour market. The pilot proved to be successful in helping Canadian employers find skilled people to meet their labour needs while providing safe and durable solutions for refugees in need of protection.

Two-thirds of resettled refugees who access Canada do so through private sponsorship, and EMPP admitted about 700 refugees and their families, with the vision of admitting 2,000 skilled refugees in upcoming years.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the facilitation measures under the EMPP include:

- › Processing 80% of cases within a standard of 6 months through a dedicated team
- › Allowing alternative proof of work experience and other required documents
- › Waiving permanent residence application fees and biometrics fees
- › Allowing the use of grants and loans to meet the requirement of demonstrating settlement funds
- › Covering pre-departure medical services and the immigration medical exam through the Interim Federal Health Program
- › Providing access to the Immigration Loans Program to help with travel costs, start-up costs and the right of permanent residence fee

The programme is highly sophisticated, with several types and streams that cover Federal sponsored pathways for applicants who already have a job offer, but also offering a “no job offer” stream, where the applicant must prove that they can support themselves and their families financially in the settling process. Regional pathways, on the other hand, include programmes that are tailored to specific job markets (rural, provincial, atlantic). Successful EMPP applicants arrive in Canada with a clear pathway to permanent residence and have access to integration services that are offered to all economic immigrants. It is important to note that Canada’s efforts in promoting economic migration for refugees are also the result of longstanding traditions and contextual considerations. For example, they have about 3.2% annual labour shortage and 500,000 vacant jobs every year. Furthermore, refugees are on average 11.1 years younger than those born in Canada and often arrive early in their lives, so they stay active in the economy for longer. Canada’s geographical position also gives it a status as a ‘destination’ rather than a ‘transit’ country for most refugees.

A combination of this context and the political will to integrate refugees securely makes Canada one of the countries that fare the best in employment outcomes:

- The unemployment rate for refugees aged 25 to 54 is 9%, close to that of Canadian-born citizens (6%). This outcome is notably positive when compared to Europe, where average unemployment rates have reached 44%<sup>13</sup> and it takes them up to 20 years to attain an employment rate similar to that of the native-born;<sup>14</sup> or the United States, where refugees are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to other types of immigrants.
- Half of refugees (51%) working in Canada are employed in high-skilled jobs. In 2016, 33% of refugees worked in jobs that required high school and/or job-specific training, which stands out when compared to data from other countries, where refugees are 60% more likely than host populations to be working in the informal sector in areas such as manufacturing or food.<sup>15</sup>
- This access to secure, high-paying opportunities allow refugees to join Canada's middle class within five years of their arrival and there is a positive relation between these annual earnings climbs and their tax contributions.<sup>16</sup>
- 14.4% of refugees who have been in Canada between 10 and 30 years are entrepreneurs, compared to 12.3% of people born in Canada, which leads them to become employers themselves in the long term.

This type of practice, which includes organised pre-arrival services and expedited residence permits via work visas, has been receiving more political and fiscal backing from governments and international organisations to reach higher numbers of applicants. A key feature of these policies is treating the refugee as a sponsored or protected economic migrant, facilitating their access to the host country with stable residence and employment rights, while being aware of their differentiated background.

Belgium offers another example of this approach, with targeted policies on fast-track integration for refugees as economic, highly educated migrants, such as All-in-one 4 HER. This is an initiative funded by the Flemish government and the European Social Fund to address the existing employment gap Belgium has seen in the past few years, with low levels of refugee employment for the most educated groups<sup>17</sup>, and 38% of those born outside the EU working in positions they are overqualified for. This platform has received public and private funding to expand its services, both to applicants and employers or organisations that wish to contribute by becoming stakeholders. It has a web platform and a Welcome App that refugees can start using at any point to connect with mentors and employers, and it has recently been launched in Ukrainian and Turkish to cater directly to those audiences.

In Belgium, asylum seekers apply for international protection and receive an unrestricted work permit if their claim hasn't been resolved within 4 months. Once they acquire this permit, regional offices for employment are available by default to offer free vocational training. Programmes such as 'All-in-one' enrol them in culturally appropriate career coaching, language training and support services for qualification equivalencies, while also extending the support after being on the job (for example, guiding them on how to join trade unions and continue their language development) and creating platforms and resources for pre-arrival support. Furthermore, Belgium has been leading the work on the Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E) to match talent from Jordan and Lebanon with employers in Europe.

Many of these policies are the result of non-state organisations' advocacy such as Talent Beyond Borders (TBB), which is driving refugee labour mobility internationally as one of the most promising schemes to open global pathways for refugee talent with 70,300 displaced job seekers supported to register themselves on the database (or "catalogue") of refugee candidates. Utilising economic routes is deemed and advocated for as one of the safest migration pathways for displaced migrants. While the UK has signed up to schemes such as the DT4E, the offer had to coexist with other regulations such as the Shortage Occupation List or remain limited to charity-led platforms such as TBB's talent pool website that,

In contrast, the UK has occasionally been criticised for its approach, which appears to place a stronger emphasis on economic incentives. The UK's Shortage Occupation List, which allows employers to pay migrants less than domestic employees in certain occupations<sup>18</sup>, can be seen as a measure to fill labour gaps but may also raise concerns about exploitation and wage disparities. While economic incentives are essential to attracting businesses and investment, a more balanced approach that places greater emphasis on the broader social and cultural advantages of refugee integration, as seen in Canada and Belgium, could potentially lead to a more holistic and sustainable integration strategy in the UK.

**Half of refugees (51%) working in Canada are employed in high-skilled jobs. In 2016, 33% of refugees worked in jobs that required high school and/or job-specific training, which stands out when compared to data from other countries, where refugees are 60% more likely than host populations to be working in the informal sector in areas such as manufacturing or food.<sup>15</sup>**

while commendable in facilitating job placements for refugees, may fall short of constituting a holistic legal programme for integration comparable to Canada's EMPP.

In Canada and Belgium, the incentive for companies to engage actively with refugee job seekers often centres around the recognition that refugees present a significant talent pool. By integrating refugees into their labour markets, these nations not only bolster their economies but also strengthen their social fabric by fostering inclusivity and multiculturalism. This approach goes beyond economic considerations and embraces the broader societal advantages of diversity.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities for the UK in making fuller use of refugee talent with targeted policies to this end. TBB did and continues to do significant advocacy work that resulted in a Displaced Talent Mobility pilot in the UK, that started in 2021. This pilot is a promising scheme where applicants have access to a 5-year Skilled Worker Visa and safeguards in the event of job loss/change to ensure they are not returned to countries where they may face danger. This scheme could become the government-driven legal pathway response to programmes such as Canada's EMPP, with the distinction of being time-limited versus the granting of permanent residency status from arrival.

## Programmes targeting low-skilled migrant workers

Economic integration practices can also be designed to support low-skilled migrants. A successful example of this is Sweden's "Welcome to the Future" program, known as Välkommen till Framtiden. An innovative initiative funded by the Swedish Public Employment Service and the City of Gothenburg aims to facilitate the labour market integration of low-educated refugees.<sup>19</sup>

This program, initially led by a local authority, addresses the pressing need to integrate newly arrived, low-skilled refugees into the workforce, acknowledging that this demographic constitutes a significant portion of recent immigrants in Western countries, including Sweden. Low-skilled refugees face substantial challenges in entering the labour market due to their weak initial position. In response, Välkommen till Framtiden employs a multifaceted approach, consisting of intensive language training, supervised work practice, job search assistance, and a collaboration between the local authorities and the largest real estate company in the region.

While this type of programme may seem familiar at first, as it provides what could be expected from established practices such as standard English for Speakers of other Languages (ESoL) provision or Job Clubs in the UK, the program's intensity and the involvement of a large company are the key features that distinguish it from others. The inclusion of the largest real estate company in the region meant having a willing participating employer that secured work practices and training for applicants in all their branches. The programme was particularly intensive, compared to other types of provision, as the work practices include close supervision from up to three managers and close to full-time language training which far exceeds the regular 15 hours of teaching that are offered as standard in the Swiss resettlement context. Evaluation conducted by the Institute for Evaluation of Labor Market and Education Policy showed that approximately 30% of program participants found employment during the first year after completing the program, compared to an average of around 15% in the control group.

## Corporate Initiatives and Self-Employment

Other approaches such as those led entirely by private companies who are big players in the employment sector (such as banks or financial institutions), with the capacity to activate various forms of lending and micro-financing, can be innovative and effective ways to provide further opportunities for the economic integration of job seeking refugees.

Since 2015, companies in Germany have played an increasingly active role in integrating refugees through two key approaches. Large companies have been offering comprehensive training programs to equip refugees with the skills necessary for the German job market (without necessarily employing the refugees that participate in this training directly). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been addressing labour shortages by providing a unique combination of training and fast-track job placements. This approach not only benefits refugees by offering swift integration into the workforce but also fulfils the pressing demand for skilled labour in various sectors of the German economy.<sup>20</sup>

An interesting example of economic and employment integration efforts aimed at asylum seekers from a private company recognised as good practice by the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) Digital Platform Good Practices, is the Siemens Internship of Refugees Program. Rolled out in 2016 in the German division of Siemens after a successful pilot, it offers a unique opportunity for limited-time employment, education and network-building to asylum seekers. The company delivers a programme where people with qualifications who are going through the asylum process can access paid internships that are generally two months long. The programme includes running preparatory workshops for eligible candidates with relevant qualifications from their country of origin, through cooperation with job centres. Once enrolled in the internship scheme, all participants are assigned a mentor as part of a 'buddy system'.

Large multinational companies are also making pledges to hire more refugees via mobilisation platforms such as Tent, Adecco, ManpowerGroup, and Randstad, which are the world's largest staffing agencies that have committed to connecting 152,000 refugees to work; while Hilton, Marriott International, and Teleperformance have committed to hiring 13,680 refugees into their workforce over the next three years.

A distinct good practice in the employment theme are those that promote self-employment. Open Doors, an Irish programme with a key focus on diversity and inclusion of intersectional minorities, has been recognised for its good practice for refugee employment that includes a path to self-employment. The program provides training, apprenticeships, community support, and employment for refugees and has helped 42 people establish a company, either self-employed or in partnership.

MigrEmpower highlights how interventions of this nature can be highly effective. Schemes focused on promoting self-employment, self-financing, fundraising and crowdfunding can be innovative ways of addressing specific employment gaps and promoting capacity building. Some of the most praised examples of this type of good practice come from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which has co-launched lending schemes in Jordan for Syrian refugee women. This has excellent repayment profiles and has been able to improve the lives of the recipients while contributing to the local economy. Charities like TERN are doing similar programmes in the UK, providing mentorship, advice, networking and access to funding for UK refugee entrepreneurs.

Although in Europe practices of this nature are still primarily led by charities, the United States has developed various government-based or government-funded programs to promote entrepreneurship for refugees. For example

- › the Microenterprise Development Program which is sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement;
- › the Minority Business Development Agency, an incubator for minority entrepreneurs, including refugees;
- › the Individual Development Accounts (IDA) Program, which helps refugees who have been in the United States for less than five years, save for one of four assets: car, home purchase, post-secondary education or to start or support a business.

This proves there are many opportunities for government funding to be funnelled into supporting refugee integration via economic development, not limited to standard job programmes.

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## Charity-led wrap-around support

Other good practices that have been analysed and indexed in the MigrEmpower Project as distinct initiatives that have had a positive impact on refugee labour integration are being delivered by charities in Germany which are not built around economic insertion, and do not operate as ‘job-first’ policies. MigrEmpower approaches integration practices as those addressing social connections and health and social care markers as the main purpose, but stresses that their impact *“is a general improvement of the living conditions and the activation of integration processes that bring together language learning, professional training and activation of job placement”* (p. 36)

In principle and since 2020, asylum seekers in reception centres in Germany were not allowed to work, with permits given only to those who have been waiting between 9-18 months for a decision. However, those recognised as “tolerated” (known in German as “Duldung”), can apply for work permits after 3 months and can be allowed to work straight away based on their residence permit. However, access to a work permit does not necessarily translate into ease of insertion in the job markets, and further efforts are usually required. In this context, holistic interventions such as those outlined below are considered practices that are relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable in positively impacting the migrant experience of insertion in the job market:

Mosaik Leipzig e.V. (Centre of Competence for transcultural dialogue) offers psychosocial counselling focusing on individual life contexts. Professional migration counsellors start from individual support requirements and develop an action plan together with the clients. This differentiates from job clubs or other forms of employment support as it includes arranging German language training and psychological counselling for adults who may have suffered from psychological trauma.

Start with a Friend is a befriending charity that offers 1-year training for cultural mediators or volunteers, who engage with refugees spending free time together and building a social network and offering help with papers or errands. This is highly relevant particularly when viewed against the background of the difficulties refugees face in integrating in the job market, primarily lacking a network with locals. The benefits of learning and practising the German language in a social, less-pressurised context, have a considerable impact on the refugee’s communication abilities and self-confidence. Befriending services tend to be widely available through charity and non-governmental provision,

however, while identified as good practice, its delivery nature tends to be limited in scope, scalability and measurable impact.

It is important to note the high prevalence of charity-based interventions when it comes to this type of holistic support and the crucial role played by nonprofit organisations. These entities often boast extensive experience in working with vulnerable populations, including refugees, and possess the necessary expertise and networks to provide vital services with modern and humane approaches that tailor interventions more than any public policy could. Their involvement can significantly enhance the prospects for successful integration by offering more comprehensive and culturally sensitive assistance. This active role can help distribute the financial burden of refugee reception. It leverages the resources and capabilities of both realms, thereby leading to a more efficient allocation of resources. However, studies like those conducted by MigrEmpower show that public funding remains the most representative type of funding for this type of work, underlining the government’s substantial role in supporting refugee integration efforts.

In this collaborative approach, the responsibility for interacting with and supporting refugees is somewhat shared between government entities and nonprofit organisations. This dynamic offers valuable insights into the complexities of refugee reception and integration. Nonetheless, challenges may emerge within this cooperation regime. Coordination between public, NGO and private actors can be complex, potentially resulting in gaps or overlaps in services. The charity sector also tends to grapple with financial constraints, which can jeopardise their sustainability and their capacity to adapt to the evolving needs of refugees. Moreover, the involvement of ‘not for profit organisations’ may introduce variability in the quality and availability of services, contingent upon factors such as their size, capacity, and geographic location.

Recognising the prominence of public funding in this context underscores the government’s pivotal role in facilitating and sustaining refugee integration efforts, but this type of delivery is not the only type of practice that can support refugee integration. All these different models, policies and practices are helpful examples of structured interventions that could open the horizons of practice in refugee integration via economic opportunities in the UK. Ultimately, striking the right balance between economic and social incentives is crucial for promoting the successful integration of refugees into the workforce and society at large.

# Health and Mental Health Practices



The UK Framework for Integration addresses health and social care as a marker and means for integration specifically measuring equity of access to health social services and responsiveness of such services to the specific needs of the individual.

Although it is widely understood that health is an essential indicator of quality of life and essential in any integration process, how policies and practices are designed often responds to what countries prioritise in healthcare in general as opposed to specialised or individualised approaches to the health of refugees.

Furthermore, policies on “formal” accessibility and legal entitlement (ie. a legal mandate to offer healthcare) do not necessarily transfer to the actual usage of services. It also doesn’t speak to the quality or relevance of services in order to provide a comprehensive picture. Trying to respond to asylum seekers’ and refugees’ health needs requires a degree of understanding of such needs, which, by their nature, are as diverse as migrants themselves. Yet it’s understandable that national and even regional or local health policies are meant to be overarching mechanisms rather than fully holistic health practices, that often require flexibility and collaboration to ensure equitable access to support integration.

Language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of trust in the healthcare system can negatively impact refugees’ access to and use of healthcare services but some good practices, such as the use of interpreters, cultural mediators, and community health workers, tend to improve outcomes.<sup>27</sup>

European, Australasian and North American settings encounter challenges in meeting the healthcare expectations of refugees, with differences in healthcare systems often conflicting with the higher expectations refugees may have, influenced by their prior experiences in their countries of origin. The language barrier consistently emerges as a significant obstacle in doctor-patient interactions.

Within most healthcare systems, the financial coverage for translation services is often unclear and limited, leaving refugees and asylum seekers to navigate medical appointments without professional language assistance. While linguistic aids like Google Translate or telephone conversations with friends or family who speak the native language can be employed for acute somatic complaints, addressing psychological issues, such as anxiety management or post-traumatic stress disorder, proves to be far more challenging due to the language barrier. In these cases, the depth of language skill and trust required for effective communication is often lacking although particularly needed for asylum seekers and refugees.

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However, some countries are making significant progress in reversing this challenge. Within the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), Switzerland’s migrant health policies, which are grounded in the principle of universal access to basic healthcare, hold the #1 international ranking in health, sharing this position with New Zealand, and Sweden. Ireland is also praised in the health remit given its increased support for research on migrant health and the efforts on strengthening a national consultative body (Consultation of foreign residents), thanks to its 2nd National Intercultural Health Strategy 2018-2023.

## Language and culturally appropriate care

Switzerland's pioneering "Migration and Health" program has garnered worldwide recognition for its comprehensive approach to improving the health outcomes of immigrants. This program ensures that all categories of migrants have access to inclusive and responsive healthcare services. Key initiatives within this framework include the multilingual migesplus.ch website, the INTERPRET Centre offering community interpreting services via telephone, the establishment of national networks like the Swiss Hospitals for Equity Network, specialised training modules, and robust research/monitoring mechanisms.

Another example of culturally appropriate care is being promoted in New Zealand, through training for health professionals working with migrants and former refugees via the Waitematā CALD service (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Service). Funded and endorsed by the national government, CALD provides competency training for the health workforce to cover culturally and linguistically diverse needs. The service started in the Auckland Region in 2008 and it has been a national practice since 2015. In 2019 the Waitematā District Health Board developed eCALD, a culturally and linguistically diverse online training for health providers working in the emergency quota refugee regions. The CALD Service uses an integrated approach of face-to-face and online learning platforms to deliver training to health professionals working in the primary and secondary health sectors across New Zealand. The service was expanded to include health professionals working in the NGO sector from 2022. Both CALD and eCALD training programmes are improving patient experience and health and equity outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse groups across New Zealand. By July 2022, over 49,000 people had enrolled for courses. Learners have been overwhelmingly positive about the impacts on their cultural awareness and increased confidence in engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse patients.

The US healthcare system is also gaining some recognition for its practices for offering culturally sensitive services, as MIPEX highlights how it stands out among many countries for its heightened focus on migrant and minority health, a commitment rooted in long-established federal policies that emphasises accessibility and cultural competence. This dedication is coordinated by the Office of Minority Health, underscoring the nation's ongoing efforts to address the unique healthcare needs of these communities. This department is dedicated to improving the health of racial and ethnic minority populations in the United States, providing support to agencies and organisations in the public and private sectors to eliminate health disparities among racial and ethnic minority populations. Their repository of resources includes access to online document collections, database and funding searches, and evaluation planning guidelines.

In Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants: Experiences from Around the World, WHO also cites the example of Belgium, stating, "In Belgium, an innovative video-remote intercultural mediation program was introduced to offer cost-effective and efficient intercultural mediation services in hospitals, primary care centres, and medical services within reception centres for asylum seekers. This initiative ensures easy and free access to such services. It involves a network of over 100 intercultural mediators proficient in 20 different languages. These mediators are integrated into the healthcare system, employed by hospitals or primary care centres, and receive funding from the Federal Public Service Health, Safety of the Food Chain, and the Environment, as well as the Public Health Insurance Institution.

## Mental health services

A different protracted challenge tends to be the need for specialised mental health care as a critical aspect of refugee resettlement. Indeed, refugees often experience significant trauma and stress before, during, and after their migration journey, which can lead to mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression.<sup>28</sup> Mental health issues can impact a refugee's ability to integrate into a new country and can cause cycles of intergenerational trauma.<sup>29</sup>

An example of good practice in addressing this is what has been done at the local authority level in Germany, where Vivo International e.V, with financial support from district and municipalities, has been offering a number of health-focused interventions for refugees, including trauma-informed therapeutic offers for pregnant women and mothers; conducting outpatient clinics offering psychological support, with specialised practitioners for teenagers and young people, people who fled conflict and other specific target audiences among refugee groups. Their focus is on psychotherapeutic care for psychologically burdened refugees, through securing simpler, more regular access for refugees and asylum seekers to the public health system or through direct delivery by filling certain gaps, such as those relating to interpretation services, local availability and cost.

WHO has highlighted an example of good practice from Turkey on their work prioritising mental health of Syrian refugees, an initiative from the Ministry of Health Mental Health Department and the WHO Refugee Health and Mental Health Programme started in 2017,

focused on strengthening the capacity of primary health care providers to diagnose and treat mental health problems and to deliver psychosocial support. Since most mental health conditions were being left undiagnosed, the key element of this programme was to develop training for health care professionals that would be available in a range of languages, free of charge and in an online, self-directed format. Training programmes were developed in Arabic and Turkish for all health providers involved in providing services to refugees and migrants. A 2021 impact assessment demonstrated that the training was well-received by health providers and had led to improved rates of diagnoses, compliance with treatment guidelines and high satisfaction rates among service users.

These practices convey a need for both individualised attention (focusing on the specific vulnerabilities of different refugee demographics) and the training of medical professionals in mental health play a pivotal role in promoting refugee health integration. Refugees often arrive in host countries with a complex set of physical and psychological health needs, many of which are a result of trauma and displacement experiences. Mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, are prevalent among refugee populations. To facilitate successful integration, healthcare providers must possess the knowledge and skills to identify, address, and provide appropriate care for these mental health challenges.

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## Further specialised interventions

Furthermore, refugee health may require different interventions depending on the routes asylum seekers and refugees have taken, as well as other indicators that may differ from region to region. Different countries may be able to observe different patterns of disease or poor health in their migrant groups and designing policies to respond to such cases become the best practice that could be implemented. An example of these highly specialised or targeted policies comes from Serbia, where as part of The Refugee and Migrant Child-Health Initiative of UNICEF, the Serbian health authorities deemed it necessary to apply a particular thematic focus to the prevention and early detection of substance abuse among adolescent refugees. This included a number of holistic interventions, including expanding services for individuals requiring mental health support but also funding more research on this point.

Such specialised approaches don't need to be thematic (e.g. substance abuse) to convey good practices. Some UK-based interventions and policies that have been recognised as good practice have worked approaches focusing on a larger demographic (for example, all children and adolescents) from a general health perspective, such as the programme implemented by the Birmingham Children's Trust and the Children in Care team, that created a new service to support the health needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, offering young people a health assessment with a nurse and supported by a social worker, support worker or foster carer within 1–2 weeks of arriving in the United Kingdom. Results were shared with the young person who would get further support via follow-up arrangements with medical professionals.

Australia developed another specialised practice focusing on antenatal care, promoting group pregnancy care models for women from refugee backgrounds. The Australian Antenatal Care Guidelines introduced an innovative model promoting health literacy, self-efficacy, and improving access to preventive healthcare, having understood that women from refugee backgrounds giving birth in Australia were experiencing poor perinatal outcomes and persistent health inequities. The practice implemented the facilitation of fortnightly group information sessions led by a midwife, a maternal and child health nurse, and bicultural workers. Further clinical antenatal care is provided by another midwife and an onsite hospital-employed interpreter. These sessions are free, culturally appropriate, and generally conducted in the refugee women's language, enabling referrals to other necessary services. It has operated since 2014 through an interagency collaboration between public maternity hospitals, refugee settlement services, and maternal and child health services, engaging community and multi-agency staff in codesign processes to enhance women's access to antenatal care, and was scaled up in 2019.<sup>30</sup>

The development of a refugee health assessment toolkit for specific populations to support primary care such as the London health community of practice (CoP), established in September 2021 to respond to the arrival of Afghan refugees is also an example of a good practice. The CoP provided a structure in which the NHS, the Association of Directors of Public Health, local and regional public health teams, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the United Kingdom Health Security Agency London Region and the Greater London Authority could facilitate multi agency conversations, identify issues and pragmatic solutions, escalate operational challenges, share practices and advocate for the health of refugees.

Because access to healthcare systems in the nations that asylum seekers or refugees have left are likely to be very different to those in the UK, education programmes for new arrivals on how to look after themselves and access healthcare systems appropriately are very valuable. One example where such training is taking place on a small scale is in the North East of England where the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) in collaboration with a Refugee-led network called Regional Refugee Forum (RRF) has developed a Welcome to the UK course that includes information about accessing healthcare appropriately. It is designed to be delivered in the language most accessible to those attending by someone from the country that most attendees are from who not only knows their language but also the culture and can be a trusted advocate for the dissemination of accurate information to address myths and hearsay within a community. Courses are also attended by a representative from the health sector to build bridges and understanding between the community and health providers. Although small in scale, excellent anecdotal evidence has been gained of the value of these courses that also address access to education, parenting, your rights and responsibilities and engaging with the police.

There are also resources that have been rolled out on a larger scale for longer, such as the Migrant Health Guide, a valuable online resource managed by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities in the United Kingdom since its launch in 2014 that influenced countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand to launch similar guides in subsequent years. The UK Migrant Health Guide has served as a free tool to assist primary healthcare professionals in caring for migrant patients. The guide covers various sections, including NHS service entitlements, health topics (such as COVID-19 and other diseases), guidance on health assessments for new migrant patients, and over 100 country-specific health profiles. It also offers updated guidance for new groups of refugees arriving in the UK, and addresses topics like vaccination, language interpretation, women's health, children's health, and data sharing between health and immigration authorities. While widely used in the UK, receiving over 276,000 unique page views per year, developing this Guide is a resource-intensive exercise, which requires constant review of the published evidence, of global health dashboards and other sources of data.

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## Research and data-gathering as good practice

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and charities all over the world tend to promote and campaign for the inclusion of migrants and refugees' health protection as part of mainstream public health policies, but reinforce the particular need for having a better understanding on health indicators and data on this particularly vulnerable group.

Strengthening health monitoring is something that the UK has been implementing, particularly via publicly funded research such as the Million Migrant Study, a linked population-based cohort study of health care and mortality outcomes in non-EU refugees and migrants in England. This intersectoral and intercountry initiative that involves the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities; the Health Security Agency and a number of universities has been profiling hospital-based health care performance. It has done this by identifying existing health conditions and examining hospital admissions, re-admissions and the duration of hospital stay for these refugees and migrants compared with the general population in England. It has also been investigating mortality outcomes by health condition for non-EU refugees and migrants in comparison with the general population; or the retrospective, population-based cross-sectional study of the immunisation status of incoming refugees conducted by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the Migrant Health Research Group from St George's, University of London and the IOM.

Administrative action can also lead to good practices, such as the establishment of Peru's Functional Health Unit of Migrant and Border Populations in October 2020. A unit tasked with formulating and proposing public policies, monitoring policy implementation, updating health regulations, disseminating information, and promoting social protection in health for migrant and border populations. The specialised unit has led targeted interventions, for example, in the vaccination process, through special regulatory efforts to accept various forms of identification for vaccination registration. Additionally, the unit has introduced nationality variables in health records to better monitor the healthcare needs of migrants. The unit coordinates health campaigns for migrant populations, partnering with international organisations and grassroots civil society organisations to provide services such as screening for chronic and communicable diseases, and guidance and counselling for health prevention and access.

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In general, when developing health-based policies for refugee integration, highly sophisticated frameworks have been developed, such as the Global Action Plan to promote the health of refugees and migrants by WHO that focuses on six priorities:

Promote the health of refugees and migrants through a mix of short-term and long-term public health interventions.

Promote continuity and quality of essential health care, while developing, reinforcing and implementing occupational health and safety measures.

Advocate the mainstreaming of refugee and migrant health into global, regional and country agendas and the promotion of refugee-sensitive and migrant-sensitive health policies and legal and social protection; the health and well-being of refugee and migrant women, children and adolescents; gender equality and empowerment of refugee and migrant women and girls; and partnerships and intersectoral, intercountry and interagency coordination and collaboration mechanisms.

Enhance capacity to tackle the social determinants of health and to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including universal health coverage.

Strengthen health monitoring and health information systems.

Support measures to improve evidence-based health communication and to counter misperceptions about migrant and refugee health.

While challenges persist, many countries and organisations are taking proactive steps to provide equitable, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive healthcare services to these vulnerable populations. By drawing inspiration from these examples and incorporating these principles into its healthcare and integration policies, the UK can create a more inclusive, responsive, and effective healthcare system that better serves the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

# Conclusion

The examination of international examples presented in this report provides valuable insights for the UK context, offering the opportunity to enhance the existing Integration framework and align more closely with best practices. It becomes noticeable that the UK's Home Office Integration Framework is well-structured, and its solidity is further reinforced by how influential its understanding has been in international settings. Furthermore, it can be particularly encouraging to note that many policies and good practices discussed in this paper do reflect partially or fully, with the UK's approach, means and markers highlighted in the framework, indicating a solid theoretical alignment with what are deemed some of the best practices for refugee integration. However, there is often a big gap between theory and practice or promising pilot and business as usual.

There are also multiple examples from different countries that could serve as valuable additions to the UK's integration system, that could complement or even challenge the way the UK is currently engaging with integration practices in all themes. Some noteworthy points that emerge from these comparisons:

## Status is key

The significance of conferring legal status through efficient decision-making processes is evident in fostering better integration outcomes. Systems that expedite asylum claims are much more conducive to successful integration.

In the UK, once an asylum seeker receives a positive decision on their claim, they get leave to remain for 5 years; which contrasts with the North American examples and their approach to resettlement, where applicants immediately get permanent residency as part of their refugee status. Given Canada's legal structure and sponsorship-modelled policies, most refugees arrive as permanent residents. This is an essential marker and means for integration as there is a pre-existing framework that immediately activates the support needed to join Canadian society long term.

Pre-arrival services are also key to the ease with which the refugee gets integrated into Canadian society. It not only offers material support (such as covering travel expenses) but also specialised training, including how to navigate the norms of the housing market and other preparatory concepts. All refugees in the programmes have guaranteed support for one year, to enable them to insert themselves into the education/job market. In the US, an integral feature of the resettlement model is that a person's refugee status (called "asylum status" in the US) never expires, which significantly influences their long-term integration prospects and security.

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In general, applicants for asylum in Europe receive their refugee status more quickly than in the UK with an average procedure time of 2-8 months. In the United States, people can secure refugee status through the affirmative asylum process where the individual must be physically present in the United States or along the border at any port of entry. Typically, a decision is rendered within approximately two weeks after the interview. In Canada, refugee resettlement policies are mainly sponsorship or referral pathways that may take up to four months for a refugee to reach Canada. Sponsorship applications are typically processed within one week, and it usually takes an average of eight weeks for refugees to obtain their necessary paperwork, such as visas and exit permits, depending on their location, but arrive in Canada with full legal status. These examples starkly contrast with the UK asylum claim average waiting times of currently between 1 and 3 years.

Legal pathways that confer status speedily, before or shortly after arrival, as well as policies and legal frameworks that secure permanent residence, significantly improve the integration process as they confer the legal stability required to fulfil longer-term social, cultural and economic growth and meaningful resettlement.

### Cross-sector alignment

The alignment between national and local government, as well as between the state and civil society, is crucial for holistic integration. When present, this alignment allows a successful combination of “harder” policy-driven enablers, such as housing regulations, legally binding standards and responsibilities, and government-driven decisions to better refugee insertion in economies or educational settings; with “softer” aspects of integration, such as community-led support, social enablers, culturally sensitive approaches and additional language learning via effective cooperation among the different stakeholders that promote or own such integration practices.

In the USA, the Resettlement and Placement (R&P) Program, at its core, represents a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors. Resettlement agencies work closely alongside local communities, and both asylum seekers and refugees enjoy eligibility for all mainstream federal benefits. Under this model, specific agencies are contracted by the federal government to provide crucial support for initial housing and employment. However, in the USA many refugees often have family members or friends already settled in the country and there are ongoing efforts coming from both government and the agency’s consortiums to relocate them near these ties. This can be seen as a mechanism to facilitate a smoother transition for a new arrival but can be criticised as a way to silo communities from wider American society.

Having understood the holistic and complex nature of integration, addressing it from different fronts, as long as they are built on the same principles, seems to provide the most effective and well-rounded efforts. This alignment can operate in the form of highly sophisticated community sponsorship models such as the ones in the North American examples, or wide networks of publicly-funded cooperation such as those in existence for education in Germany.

### Political narratives are impactful

This alignment relies on political narratives that can gain buy-in from civil society and voters across political divides. The absence of a unifying political narrative in the UK context is a significant factor when considering current integration outcomes. Positive political rhetoric, as seen in countries like Germany and Canada, plays a crucial role in long-term integration success. Conversely, countries with more volatile or anti-refugee rhetoric tend to face challenges in integration or their successful outcomes lack the stability of longer-term, meaningful resettlement.

Regulations and boundaries can be part of welcoming political narratives. Countries like Canada and the United States operate with quotas that are dictated by the Government. In Canada, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for Canada, revisits the plan each fall to adjust planned levels for the coming years, as required. In the US the president sets the annual quota; although the flexibility within this framework can pose challenges or sway in different directions, the expansion of quotas as part of emergency responses and appeals can provide unifying grounds for authorities and advocates alike.

**The absence of a unifying political narrative in the UK context is a significant factor when considering current integration outcomes. Positive political rhetoric, as seen in countries like Germany and Canada, plays a crucial role in long-term integration success. Conversely, countries with more volatile or anti-refugee rhetoric tend to face challenges in integration or their successful outcomes lack the stability of longer-term, meaningful resettlement.**

## A holistic approach is vital

Given how interconnected many of the issues raised in this paper are, the overarching reflection from other examples highlighted is the need for a holistic approach. For example, without safe and secure housing, stable immigration status or appropriate access to health care, progress on learning a new language, accessing employment or softer integration measures such as community engagement are likely to be limited regardless of how sophisticated these interventions may be. This builds on all three of the previous points that need to complement each other to provide the most conducive environment for long term successful integration.

To improve integration outcomes in the UK, it is imperative to incorporate the lessons learned from international examples into the existing framework, ultimately delivering its guiding principles into actual funded and rolled-out practices and programmes. It is not enough to know what integration looks like in theory. Investment should be made to ensure that interventions are properly resourced to enable practice to align with policy and aspiration so that the contribution of refugees can continue to strengthen and enrich the UK, rather than making it harder for some refugees to become confident and independent members of British society.

**The alignment between national and local government, as well as between the state and civil society, is crucial for holistic integration. When present, this alignment allows a successful combination of “harder” policy-driven enablers, such as housing regulations, legally binding standards and responsibilities, and government-driven decisions to better refugee insertion in economies or educational settings; with “softer” aspects of integration, such as community-led support, social enablers, culturally sensitive approaches and additional language learning via effective cooperation among the different stakeholders that promote or own such integration practices.**

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- <sup>11</sup> Italian example of helping refugees with job search (2022).
- <sup>12</sup> As per informed by Canadian ministers in 2022 <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-nov-29-2022/economic-mobility-pathways-pilot.html>
- <sup>13</sup> This number is from very comprehensive studies from 2016. It is likely the average unemployment rate has changed but equally comprehensive data is not as available. Data quoted is from OECD.
- <sup>14</sup> We are also aware that the influx of Ukrainians in recent times has affected this statistics positively, as in a few European OECD countries, the share of working-age Ukrainian refugees in employment is already over 40%.
- <sup>15</sup> This is UNHCR data, analysing the average on countries that host a very large number of refugees: Colombia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Peru, Türkiye, and Uganda.
- <sup>16</sup> Although there is no public data available on how much refugees contribute via income, it is recognised that Canada and the United States have notably narrow gaps between income tax paid and benefits received. For example, in 2019, refugees contributed about \$25 billion in taxes in the US.
- <sup>17</sup> In 2016, about 37% of refugees in Flanders were highly educated (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2016; as cited by All-in-one 4 HER)
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