Queen Margaret University
INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Support for Scotland's Afghan refugee people: exploring social connections in Local Authorities with little previous resettlement experience

Research Report

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Executive Summary

This document summarises the findings and recommendations of the extension phase of the ABM AMIF*3* funded project 'New Scots: Pathways to Economic and Social Inclusion' focussing on Afghan citizens who have been resettled or temporarily accommodated in Bridging hotels in Scotland. The research component of the project has been led by Queen Margaret University in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council, the Bridges Programme and the Workers' Educational Association.

This project aimed to understand the key social connections that Afghan refugee people, local organisations, and service providers identify as important to integration in local authorities with little previous resettlement experience. Our objective for this study was to amplify Afghan beneficiary voices and to convey and discuss Afghan beneficiary experiences of integration thus far to complement evaluation and assessment activities conducted by service providers and Local Authorities, primarily in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Fife. To achieve this, we investigated the following research question and research aims:

- What are the key social connections that refugee people, local organisations, and service providers identify as important to integration in local authorities with little previous resettlement experience?

- Map Afghan beneficiary social connections, including:

· Identifying the importance of non-refugee specific social connections to Afghan beneficiaries;

· Identifying any social connections relevant to integration identified by Afghan beneficiaries, as well as the ones identified by locals, and service providers; and

· Gaining a better understanding of the multi-directionality of integration.

As well as a literature review, our research consisted of three one-to-one interviews and two group workshops with seven resettled Afghan people who were beneficiaries of our project partners. We followed this with three workshops with local organisations, Local Authorities and project partners, respectively. Across our interviews and workshops, participants represented Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Fife as well as other areas with little previous resettlement experience. Our research was underpinned by a theoretical focus on the indicators of integration and the related importance of social connections in facilitating integration. In our workshops with Afghan people and local organisations, we undertook social connections mapping to highlight key actors and relationships which are or could facilitate integration in each area. Our workshops with Local Authorities and project partners then allowed us to collect feedback on our social connections maps and gain further perspective of the structural issues affecting the building of key social connections.

Key Findings

Social Connections

Resettled Afghan people living in hotels relied overwhelmingly upon Local Authority, Home Office and Scottish Refugee Council caseworkers to provide important advice and support. One of the reasons for this appears to be the isolating nature of this form of accommodation - despite participants voicing a desire to move out, find work and come into contact more with local Scottish people. Afghan people are relying on informal peer networks of other Afghan people living in hotels for psychological support, including for assisting with trauma. For other refugee people in areas with little previous resettlement experience, forging close social connections with historic community residents in clubs and projects was key to positive wellbeing and integration to their new communities.

Accommodation

Living in hotels for extended periods of time was causing physical and psychological distress for Afghan people in Scotland. Preoccupation with insecure housing status meant that Afghan people were finding it difficult to progress with other activities including English language development and job seeking.

Job Seeking

Being unable to work in a fulfilling job had a significantly negative impact on Afghan people's wellbeing and their ability to progress their means and markers of integration. Inability to progress as quickly with English language skills as they preferred was impacting Afghan people's success in finding fulfilling jobs that they were otherwise qualified for.

English Language Development

Afghan people and local organisations shared concerns over the quality and quantity of ESOL courses available in different parts of Scotland.

Mental Health

Living in hotel accommodation for an extended period appeared to be a significant cause of psychological distress for resettled Afghan people in Scotland. It is likely that resettled Afghan people are also suffering from trauma associated with their journey to and arrival in Scotland.

Waiting

The feeling of waiting or limbo is so pervasive in the refugee experience that its impact requires specific attention.

Regional Infrastructure

There is a general lack of critical refugee support infrastructure in areas with little previous resettlement experience which are also overburdened by forces such as Brexit and the Cost of Living Crisis. These gaps include lack of interpreting services, accessible legal aid, community spaces for peer and cross-cultural networking, and a lack of key service provider training in multicultural and trauma-informed practice.

Key Recommendations

For all:
- Support the building of social connections for refugee people and others in their communities – for example, by facilitating inclusive access to local organisations and local activities such as language cafes and sports clubs.

Future integration services should:
- Continue to incorporate discussions of social connections into integration planning and activities.
- Continue efforts to share information between all actors at the local and national levels to develop mutually beneficial priorities.

COSLA, Local Authorities, statutory services and New Scots working groups should:
- Ensure that key service providers in areas with little previous resettlement experience have appropriately equipped interpreting services as well as training in delivering multiculturally sensitive and trauma-informed practice.
- Take part in routine cross-sector, intra-regional, cross-regional and lived-experience-informed forums and operational groups to share best practice and build critical partnerships that benefit community integration and refugee people's wellbeing in different parts of Scotland.

The Scottish Government should:
- Provide ringfenced funding to ensure Local Authorities and local organisations can access training in trauma-informed and multiculturally sensitive one-to-one and community-based practice; can run projects which facilitate integration; and can access interpreting services for clients.
- Increase legal aid funding to ensure refugee people are not unfairly denied access to support and do not have to rely on stretched third sector crisis services across the country.

The UK Government should:
- Entrust Local Authorities to engineer their own housing solutions for refugee people, rather than continue an approach lacking consultation at national and regional level.

Future research should:
- Harness the support of all actors above to facilitate a robust cross-regional study of the effectiveness of national integration policy, analysing geographical nuances and incorporating longitudinal research. Queen Margaret University will actively build upon this previous project's partnership-building to develop this research agenda.

1. Project Background

This report presents findings from the ABM AMIF3 funded project 'New Scots: Pathways to Economic and Social Inclusion' focussing on the experiences of Afghan citizens who have been resettled or temporarily accommodated in Bridging hotels in Scotland.

Formally opened on the 6th of January 2022, the UK government committed to resettling more than 5,000 people during the first year of the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), and up to 20,000 over the coming years. All 32 Scottish Local Authorities (LAs) have signed up for the ACRS in the UK, with 16 LAs resettling Afghan refugee people[1]. While integration services in LAs with previous resettlement experience, such as Glasgow, already draw heavily upon the social connections approach to integration, there is scope to develop and build social connections capacity in LAs with little previous resettlement experience. This study investigates key social connections that refugee people , other locals, and service providers identify as important to integration in three LAs outside of Glasgow: Edinburgh, Fife, and Aberdeen.

The social connections approach to integration focuses on the assessment and provision of bonding (i.e. close and trusting), bridging (i.e. providing new information) and linking (i.e. interfacing with the state and public services) relationships to beneficiaries to conduce processes of integration (see Ager and Strang 2008; Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019; Strang and Ager 2010; Strang and Quinn 2019; Strang et al. 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; see also Szreter and Woolcock 2004).

In relatively remote LAs, or LAs with little previous resettlement experience, there is scope to improve the provision of integration services through a closer understanding of social connections needs and building social connections capacity across beneficiaries, locals, and service providers. Within this context, LAs have identified the need to build social connections capacity to support newly arriving families both in LAs themselves and in the areas in which Afghan refugee people already reside. There is therefore a clear social connections gap in the provision of integration services in LAs with little previous resettlement experience. This project addresses this gap by engaging holistically with the communities themselves, including refugee people, local organisations, and service providers in the three LAs of this study.

1.1 Research questions and aims

This project was designed to understand the key social connections that Afghan refugees, local organisations, and service providers identify as important to integration in LAs with little previous resettlement experience. Our objective for this study was to amplify Afghan beneficiary voices and to convey and discuss Afghan beneficiary experiences of integration thus far to complement evaluation and assessment activities conducted by service providers and LAs, primarily in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Fife. To achieve this, we investigated the following research question and research aims:

Research question

- What are the key social connections that refugee people, local organisations, and service providers identify as important to integration in LAs with little previous resettlement experience?

Research aims

- Map Afghan beneficiary social connections, including:
- Identifying the importance of non-refugee specific social connections to Afghan beneficiaries;
- Identifying any social connections relevant to integration identified by Afghan beneficiaries, as well as the ones identified by locals, and service providers; and
- Gaining a better understanding of the multi-directionality of integration.

[1]In this report, we avoid using the terms 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers' in recognition of the damaging dehumanising effect that such language can have in reference to people from a countless variety of different backgrounds who are seeking refuge. We want to reiterate here that the terms 'refugee people', 'resettled people', 'people seeking asylum' or 'relocated people' (in the asylum process) can also be limiting as they may not highlight that all individuals are unique from each other and have distinct but equal intrinsic value in society. However, we do use these terms - which at least reaffirm people's status as humans - for the sake of brevity when describing people who are subject to shared laws, policies and some identifiable cultural forces that distinguish them from people who are not.

2. Literature Review

In this section, we provide a brief overview of national and local supports offered to Afghan refugees arriving into the UK following the Taliban's ascent to power in the summer of 2021. We begin by describing UK-wide efforts to support people with refugee status and those seeking asylum, followed by a summary of protection offered to Afghan refugee people in Scotland.

2.1 Supporting refugee people in the UK

The UK has a long history of hosting people seeking refuge from persecution and conflict. This stretches before the United Nations Geneva Convention of 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees, which gave more formal identification and protection of refugee rights (Kirkwood 2012). However, the developing characteristic of asylum policy in the UK has been that of increasing restrictions on access to citizenship and the benefits this entails. This trend mirrors immigration policy development, generally, which has expanded alongside specialist asylum policy to make it increasingly difficult for many people to seek refuge safely and comfortably in the UK (El-Enany 2020).

As many experts have commented (Burns et al. 2022), these policies have created an identifiable two-tier asylum system that grants different levels of key rights to people who have been relocated to the UK as part of UN-sponsored resettlement programmes and those who have claimed asylum after arriving in the UK. Those resettled in UN-partnered programmes such as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Schemes (VPRS) (UK Government 2021a) have been recognised with refugee status upon entry to the country and have been granted access to the labour market as well as many mainstream public services available to British citizenship-holders, such as free healthcare and Universal Credit.

Conversely, those who apply for asylum upon or after arrival in the UK are denied access to the labour market as well as important public benefits such as free or sponsored adult education courses. Instead, asylum-seeking people in this position are forced to survive on Home Office provision which consists of a forty pound-per-week living costs cover and often undesirable housing. This period of claiming asylum in the UK, due to lasting Home Office departmental challenges, commonly leads to a person living in 'limbo' for over six months on a decision to be made on their case. The existence of this two-tier system has been linked to enduring challenges with establishing successful integration policy in the UK (Burns et al. 2022; Mulvey 2015).

Successive UK governments have introduced policies to actively reduce the numbers of people applying for asylum in the country. This has happened partly through the limiting of rights of individuals, for example, through the limiting of access to the labour market and to social security (UK Government 2014). More recently, the UK government has introduced border measures such as its Rwandan returns scheme for people seeking asylum in the UK who have had their cases rejected. However, legal challenges highlighting the government's infringements of human rights agreements have, so far, helped to make the policy unworkable.

Despite significant focus being placed on the apparent burden of people seeking asylum, the UK has hosted comparatively small numbers of people from this background and people who already have refugee status granted. In the year ending September 2021, Germany and France received 127,730 and 96,510 asylum applications, respectively (UNHCR 2022). During the same time, the UK received 44,190 applications. Through both international resettlement programmes and grants of refugee status made through asylum claims, the UK granted protection to 13,210 people (UK Government 2021b). The overwhelming majority of people seeking refuge, by UN calculation, are situated outside the Global North, with Turkey, alone, hosting around 3.7 million (UNHCR 2022).

UK Government Resettlement Schemes

On the 18th of August 2021, the UK Prime Minister announced the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (SPICe 2022), the focus of which is to resettle Afghan nationals and their immediate families who remain in Afghanistan or the surrounding region. Formally launched on 6 January 2022, the scheme prioritises:

- "Those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law.

- Vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)"

Those resettled under this scheme receive indefinite leave to enter or remain (ILR) in the UK, and will be able to apply for British citizenship after 5 years in the UK under existing rules. There is no application process for the ACRS. However, the Scottish Refugee Council has noted concerns with the limitations to eligibility for this scheme, remarking that it would leave many people still at risk of harm in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries (SPICe 2022). As of January 2022, evacuations and resettlements from Afghanistan by the UK Government have taken place via:

- The Afghanistan Locally Employed Staff (Ex-Gratia) Scheme: This scheme started in 2013 to offer training, financial assistance (in country) and relocation to the UK, limited to Afghans who worked directly for the UK Government from May 2006 and had worked for more than 12 months when they were made redundant or resigned. This scheme remained open until November 2022 when it was replaced by the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

- ARAP: launched in April 2021 following the UK Government's announcement of their intention to withdraw from Afghanistan by Autumn 2021.

As of September 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture stated that five Scottish LAs had welcomed 400 people under the locally employed scheme since 2014. Under ARAP, a further 160 people (43 families) arrived in eight Scottish LAs, with a further 70 individuals (20 families) expected in the first few weeks of September 2021.

It is difficult to predict how many Afghan people have arrived under each scheme and how many will arrive over the next few years in the UK seeking refuge by either claiming asylum at the point of arrival or by resettlement. The Migration Observatory (2021) states that "in the ten-year period from 2011 to 2020 inclusive, an average of around 2,000 Afghan nationals claimed asylum in the UK per year. It is reasonable to expect this number to increase but it is not clear by how much". It may be instructive to consider how the Syrian war in 2015 affected the number of Syrian people seeking refuge in the UK. In 2014, the UK received 2,353 applications from people coming from Syria (UK Government 2017). In 2015, at the height of people fleeing Syria, these applications rose only to 2,794. This was at a time when Europe was receiving hundreds of thousands of asylum applications from Syrian people (Migration Observatory 2021).

It is also difficult to predict where Afghans in the UK will reside. Despite asylum dispersal being widened in the UK, and Afghans being accommodated in emergency accommodation sites in a diverse range of regions, onward migration has been common among people in similar circumstances in the past. In the UK, most Afghan-born people reside in London, Manchester, and Birmingham (Migration Observatory 2021). Stewart and Schaffer's 2015 study showed that people may move to areas where there are already established communities to assist with their integration and progress in the UK. Their study also showed that people resettled in the UK already with refugee status are less likely to move on to other areas than those dispersed whilst claiming asylum. This may point to the greater support given from day one to those seeking refuge who move via resettlement programmes, and how this supports the building of important networks in their host communities.

2.2 Supporting refugee people in Scotland

In Scotland, Afghan-born networks are most likely to be established in Glasgow than anywhere else, not least due to its historic position as the only Scottish dispersal region for people waiting on their asylum claims. This may make onward movement to the city an attractive proposition for many Afghan people being resettled and dispersed in different Scottish regions.

The balance of powers between Westminster and Scottish Parliament has complicated Scottish government efforts over the last two decades to establish a strategy of integration from day one of a New Scot's arrival in the country. As Westminster maintains control over immigration policy, asylum can generally be viewed as a reserved matter – with the Home Office taking responsibility for determining most aspects of procedure and reception in relation to asylum-seeking people. However, devolved powers like housing, health care, education, equalities and justice (in the case of legal aid) can be and are used by the Scottish Government to influence the lives of asylum-seeking people and those with refugee status (Scottish Government 2022). One significant example of Scottish integration policy which has acted to contest 'hostile environment' policies (Paterson 2022) pursued by successive UK governments is the right to free access of ESOL and some other further education courses for adults. This policy has formed part of a wider New Scots strategy that has helped establish lasting and practical partnerships between public bodies and civil society.
Much of this successful partnership work has taken place in Glasgow, which was Scotland's sole designated asylum dispersal area up until the then Home Secretary, Priti Patel, announced in 2021 the Home Office's plan to widen asylum dispersal to all LAs in the UK. Whilst Glasgow City Council announced its intention to withdraw from the UK's asylum dispersal scheme in 2020, 2021 figures show that it was hosting more asylum applicants than any other UK LA. 4,400 people seeking asylum were being hosted in the city, compared with 1,737 in Birmingham, which hosted the next largest amount of people from this background (MAC, 2022).

Following the Afghan and Ukraine crises, the Home Office arranged directly with its private asylum housing provider, Mears, to secure ex-hotel accommodation for resettled Afghan and Ukranian refugee people in Falkirk, South Lanarkshire, Aberdeen City, Perth and Kinross and Edinburgh (SPICe 2022).

Whilst the Scottish government celebrated its success in 2019 of resettling Syrian refugee people in every one of its LAs, including in regions with comparatively small and remote populations such as in the Highlands and Islands, the

Convention of Scottish LAs (COSLA) and its LA members have stressed issues with infrastructure and resources that present a challenge to new arrivals and their host community members (SPICe 2022). Nonetheless, there is potential for shared insight and best practice to support these LAs with comparative little resettlement experience to host further arrivals and support both resettled refugee people and host communities to integrate and thrive.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

Our research builds on two main distinguishable theoretical areas: indicators of integration and measuring social connections. Through its focus on areas with comparatively little previous asylum resettlement or dispersal experience, this research applies these frameworks in spatial contexts that have been given less attention in contemporary refugee integration literature.

3.1 Indicators of Integration

The 2008 Indicators of Integration framework (Figure 1) identifies several domains through which to understand and analyse the process of refugee integration, and distributed across four dimensions of markers and means, social connections, facilitators and foundation (Ager and Strang 2008). In 2019, the Home Office together with partner academics and practitioners produced an expanded version of the Indicators of Integration framework (Figure 1) (UK Government 2019).

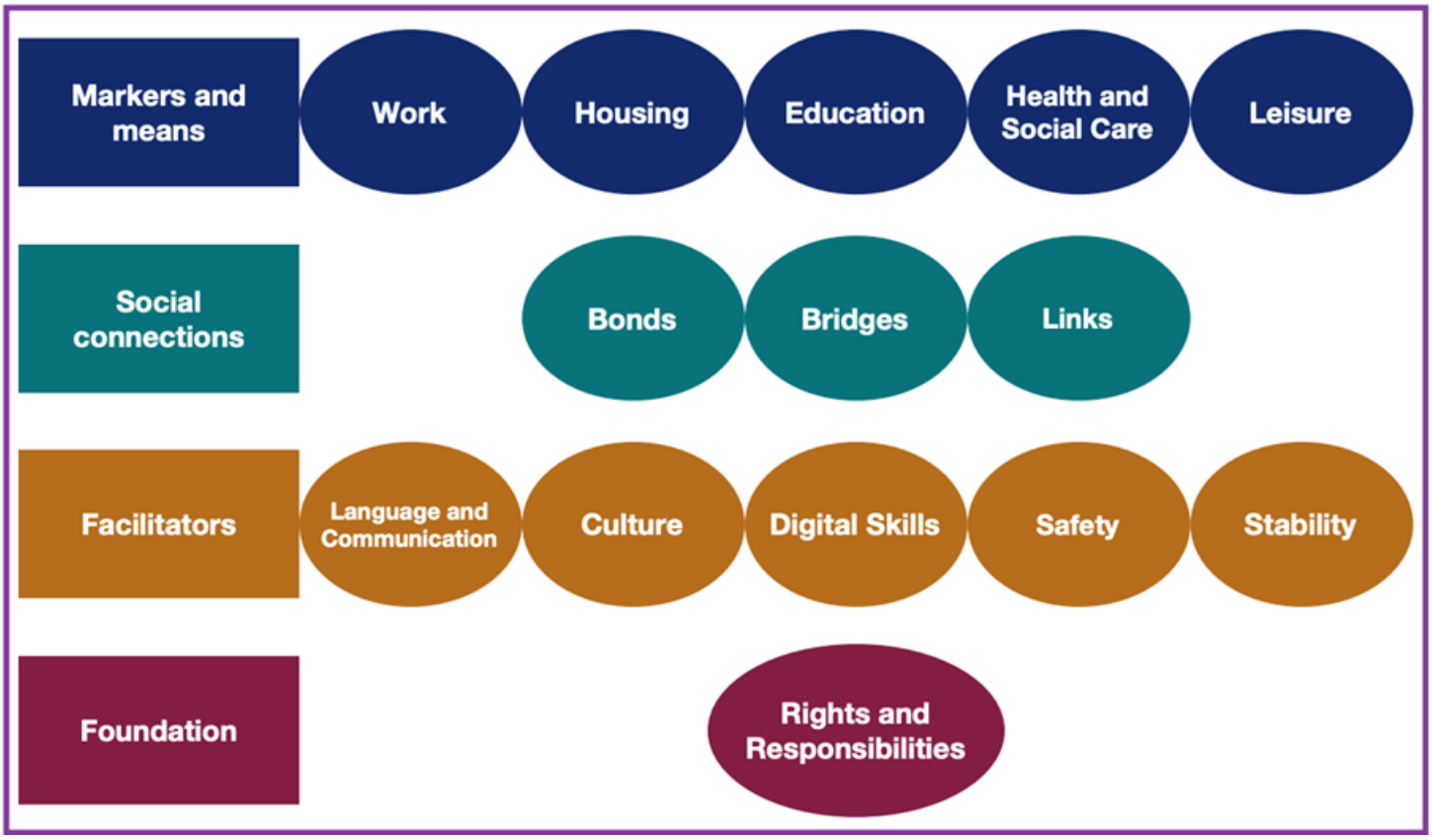

Figure 1: Indicators of Integration framework

3.2 Measuring social connections

As the framework demonstrates, social connections emerge as a crucial component of the integration process. The Indicators of Integration framework elaborates three key types of social connection: links, bridges and bonds. Links refer to contact with the hierarchies and institutions of society including access to services. 'Bridges' are connections with members outside of one's own community. 'Bonds' refers to connections between members in the same community. Social interactions such as seeing loved ones, meeting friends, colleagues and acquaintances, engaging in the community, taking part in community activities and developing networks with a wider group of people in the community mitigate against social isolation and loneliness (BMA 2020).

The Indicators of Integration Framework identifies "time, place and person" as the three core factors shaping integration (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019: 7). Scholars agree that integration takes place locally, and that measures designed to promote integration must take account of local realities (see, for instance, Mulvey 2015; Kearns and Whitley 2015; Thomas 2019). Integration at the local level is heavily impacted by economic deprivation, competition for local resources, availability of housing and jobs, and diversity and history of settlement (Atfield et al. 2007). It is known to require time to develop, and it is indeed not linear, rather it is "an active, on-going dynamic process which can take years or may never be achieved" (Cheung and Phillimore 2013: 7).

Social connections are important because they yield access to material and informational resources as well as acting as a precursor to wellbeing. This can be significant for people whose social networks have been disrupted due to (forced) migration (Strang and Quinn 2019). A lack of connectedness, which can occur in the form of isolation from others, has been linked to deteriorating physical and mental health outcomes (see for example, Silove 2013; Hobfoll et al. 2007). Further, connectedness is an important component of enabling people to exercise their own agency in navigating and influencing the systems around them. Social connections are fundamental to our understanding of integration, and to refugee people's wellbeing (Baillot et al. 2020). Below we explore their role in the design and implementation of this study.

4. Methods

4.1 Overview

This study is comprised of two work packages employing a qualitative methodology that considers interviews with an illustrative sample of Afghan resettled refugee people (work package A) and a series of shared learning workshops (work package B) with Afghan beneficiaries, local organisations, LAs, and our research partners.

4.2 Sampling and recruitment

Resettled Afghan nationals who are 18 years or over, living in temporary hotel accommodation and who are beneficiaries of the Integration Service through our partner organisations: Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), Bridges Programme (Bridges) and the Worker's Education Association Scotland (WEA) were invited to participate in this study. The aim was to select an equal number of male and female respondents meeting these criteria and determined using an opportunistic sampling frame, constrained by the project duration as outlined in the research contract.

Children under the age of 18 and people seeking asylum but who have not yet been recognised as refugee people, who may be accessing other services provided by the research partnership organisations were not eligible to participate in this study. Participants from the refugee cohort were recruited with support from our partner organisations. Contacts within these organisations referred any potentially interested and eligible service users from their respective organisations.

A sample of nine Afghan refugee participants was obtained by an Integration Advisor at SRC from those recorded on the database as being supported by SRC and living in temporary hotel accommodation. These individuals were then contacted by our research team to arrange a suitable time to interview them and to invite them to the beneficiary workshops.

Participants for our Afghan beneficiary shared learning workshops were recruited from this same sample and from chain referral to other eligible partner project beneficiaries.

To recruit for our local service provider workshop, our research team conducted a search online to identify community organisations from Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Fife – known regions supporting resettled Afghan people in Scotland. Added to this list of organisations were those previously known to the research team or associates of the research team. Invites were then sent out to a shortlisted group of organisations from each region developed through representative sampling. This

sampling was done to ensure among invitees a spread of types of work or social issues focused on – for example, covering areas such as gender, family, health and general community development work.

For our LA shared learning workshop, contacts were recruited from the researchers' own networks or from chain referral to ensure representation from several Scottish LAs with comparatively little previous refugee resettlement experience.

Finally, with project partners SRC, Bridges and WEA, the research team held a shared learning workshop for this specific project and other shared learning activities operated in partnership with other integration research projects taken on by fellow researchers in the same institution, Queen Margaret University. Project partners asked staff working with resettled refugee people to attend the research event.

4.3 Qualitative interviews

Between August and September 2022, three Afghan individuals living in temporary hotel accommodation in Scotland were interviewed individually to gain insight into their experiences.

Two of the interviews were conducted in person and supported by an interpreter. The third interview was held using Zoom and an interpreter was not needed. Interviews followed a semi-structured topic guide inclusive of informed consent and ranged from 40 to 90 minutes in length. The semi-structured topic guide along with other research tools were developed by our research team and refined as needed throughout data collection.

The aim of each interview was to map the social connections of this cohort, such as:

- those accessed through structured service provision; and
- 'hidden' connections that are not part of structured service provision

Drawing upon their everyday lives, identifying these social connections may complement the integration pathway elaborated by each beneficiary. This mapping is intended to complement existing service mapping resources and shared with project partners and participating LAs. We were equally interested in hearing about their experiences arriving and settling in Scotland in order to identify any challenges or facilitators to integration. Table 1 demonstrates the profiles of the three interview participants.

Participant number	Pseudonym	Location of hotel	Gender and family status	Time in Scotland
Participant 1	Asadi	Fife	Male, living with wife and 7 children	3 months (at time of interview)
Participant 2	Aarash	Edinburgh	Male, living with wife and 3 children	3 months (at time of interview)
Participant 3	Khaled	Edinburgh	Male, living with wife and 3 children	4 months (at time of interview)

Table 1: Interview participants

4.4 Shared learning workshops

The research team held a total of 5 shared learning workshops as demonstrated in Table 2:

Workshop number	Attendees	Numbers attended	Regions represented
1	Afghan beneficiaries/service users	5	Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh, Fife
2	Afghan beneficiaries/service users	2	Edinburgh
3	Local organisation representatives	6	Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Fife
4	LA representatives	12	Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Moray, Perth and Kinross
5	Project partner representatives	8	National (Scotland)

Table 2: Shared learning workshop participants

For its shared learning workshops, the research team drew on a participatory social connections mapping approach that has been adapted from that used in previous studies such as Strang and Quinn (2019). Given a focus on participatory action research, the researchers also aimed to inform and strengthen networks of participants to tackle some of the social issues discussed in workshops and in this report.

Beginning with the Afghan beneficiary workshop, researchers facilitated discussion around people or organisations from whom they would seek assistance or advice from by positing the following scenarios:

Who would you or someone you know speak to or go to help if you or they:

- needed a job?
- were victim of theft?
- were suffering from deep sadness?

These scenarios were designed to facilitate discussions of a broad range of social connections relevant to key means and markers of integration as highlighted in Ager and Strang's (2008) Indicators of Integration.

4.5 Data storage and management

Workshops and interviews were recorded with the participants' permission on one of two online applications depending on which online platform was used and if the data collection activity was held in person: 1) Microsoft Teams recording function; and 2) for in-person activities, a recording and transcribing application (Otter) which was uploaded to the data collectors' mobile phones (provided by QMU) for the purposes of this research. Interview and workshop audio recordings were transcribed by a professional third-party transcribing company. Audio recordings, exported transcriptions from the online apps, and professional transcriptions were downloaded onto each respective data collector's password protected laptop and stored onto the research team's password-protected cloud-based Microsoft Teams file folder. All transcripts and fieldnotes have been anonymised with personal identifying information omitted. All Afghan beneficiary interview participants were assigned an identifying code and pseudonym to ensure that they not be identifiable in any of the research outputs. Afghan beneficiaries who took part in the workshops were kept anonymous and were not assigned identifying codes or pseudonyms. All audio recordings were deleted upon completion of the final report.

4.6 Ethical issues

All research tools and activities were reviewed and approved by the Queen Margaret University (QMU) Ethics Committee.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants of this study. Information

sheets (including consent process) were made available to potential participants prior to data collection. A detailed verbal description was also read to the participants by the researcher(s) at the start of each data collection activity and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions prior to commencing.

All participants were notified of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without the need to provide an explanation. Assurance of their anonymity and confidentiality was explained and guaranteed both before and after each data collection activity. Further, as some of the issues discussed during the interview process may have been of a sensitive nature, participants were provided with contact details of an external network of support that they could approach at any time if needed.

4.7 Limitations

The requirements of the research partnership contract meant that the research team could only recruit Afghan beneficiary participants registered with our project partners. A combination of factors, outside the control of the partners, led to the pace of these registrations being slowed and only a small pool of nine potential participants being available for individual interview and shared learning workshop attendance. All nine participants were contacted via email or text message, however only three were available for one-to-one interviews and five for participation in the beneficiary workshops.

We noted a disproportionate number of men in our refugee sample, resulting in limitations to obtaining equal representation of female Afghan refugee people. Reasons for this are discussed further throughout the findings sections of this report.

4.8 Data analysis

A thematic analysis framework and coding system based on the social connections mapping framework along with Braun and Clarke's (2006) series of iterative steps to thematic analysis was developed for analytic comparisons of the context, mechanisms, and processes of participants' experiences with social connections and integration. The coding framework was input into Microsoft Excel which facilitated raising codes into relevant themes and analytical categories. We present these categories below.

5. Findings

5.1 Social connections

One of the central aims of this study was to map the people and organisations that Afghan refugee people have available to them. The social connections questions and mapping exercises included in the interviews and workshops enabled discussions about the role each connection plays in people's lives and the ways that they encountered or came to build a relationship with each connection. This allowed the research team to develop an understanding of key social connections that refugee people, other locals, and service providers identify as important to integration in LAs with little previous resettlement experience.

Afghan beneficiary shared learning workshops

The discussions held during the social connections workshops with Afghan beneficiaries involved researchers drawing spider-diagram-like social connections maps in session, with feedback from participants also given on its relevance. On the maps, shown in Figures 2-5, relevant actors were illustrated alongside comments on the nature of relationships – for example, whether these relationships were trustworthy, insignificant or absent. Some relationships between actors were also illustrated, sometimes indicating participant cross-referrals. At the end of the workshop, participants were given a list of resources and public organisation contacts that they could utilise for extra information and support. This list was compiled by the research team by searching online for relevant community-level support and development opportunities available for locals in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Fife.

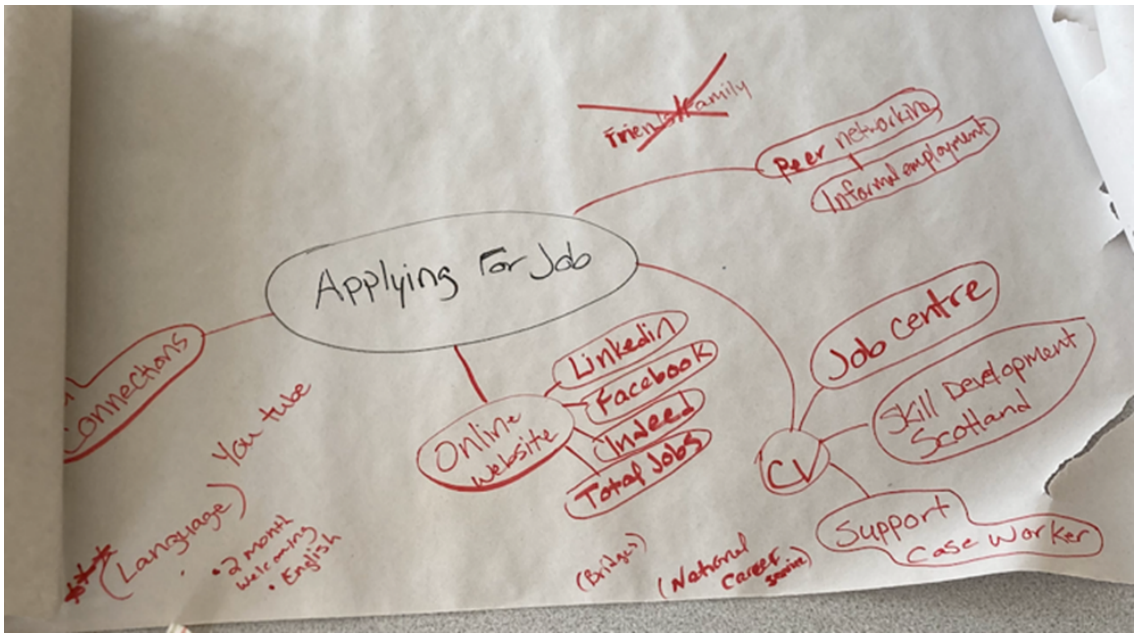

Figure 2: Workshop 1 with Afghan beneficiaries/service users (Scenario: job seeking)

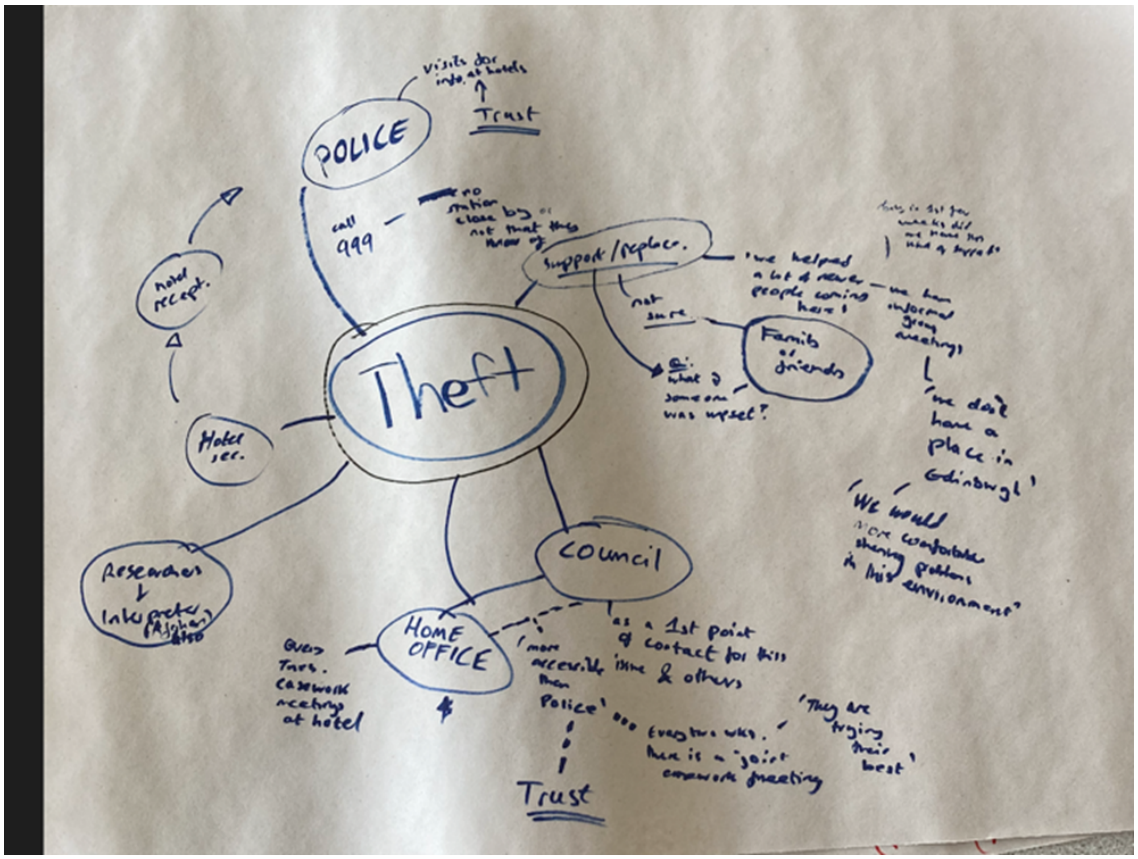

Figure 3: Workshop 1 with Afghan beneficiaries/service users (Scenario: theft)

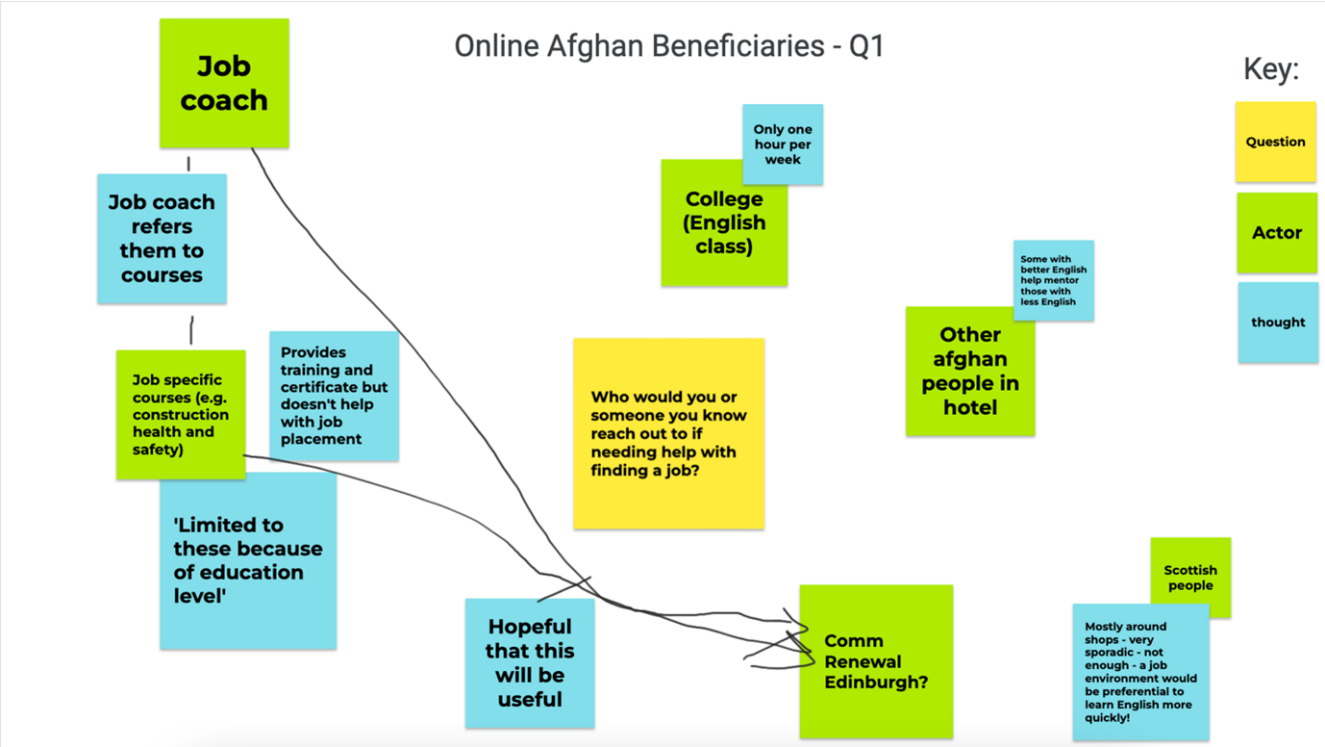

Figure 4: Workshop 2 with Afghan beneficiaries/service users (Scenario: job seeking)

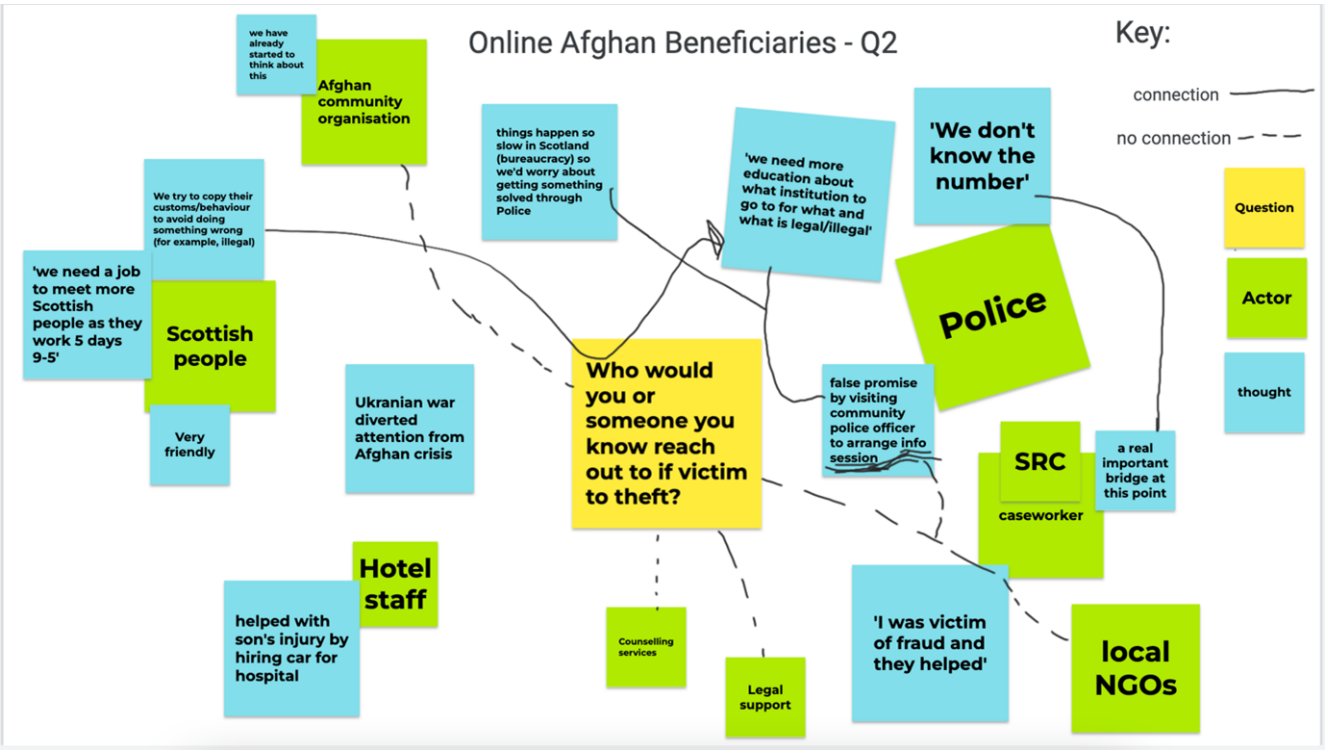

Figure 5: Workshop 2 with Afghan beneficiaries/service users (Scenario: theft)

In these Afghan beneficiary workshops, important social connections discussed by participants were LA, Home Office, Scottish Refugee Council caseworkers and hotel staff – all of whom were routinely accessible in people's accommodation. Connections with local Scottish people were desired but participants expressed difficulty in forging these and linked this to their housing and working situations. Instead, our Afghan participants brought attention to the supportive role of caseworkers as well as informal peer networks of Afghan residents in hotels.

Local organisation shared learning workshop

The research team then carried out a similar format of workshop alongside local organisations from Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh and Fife (Figures 6-7). Whilst positing the scenarios used in the first workshop with Afghan beneficiaries, the researchers informed organisation representatives about actors cited by Afghan participants. This allowed the researchers to gather feedback and further data on the nature of and representativeness of these relationships for refugee and other local people in different regions. Local organisation representatives were also asked to give their feedback on structural issues in their regions affecting integration.

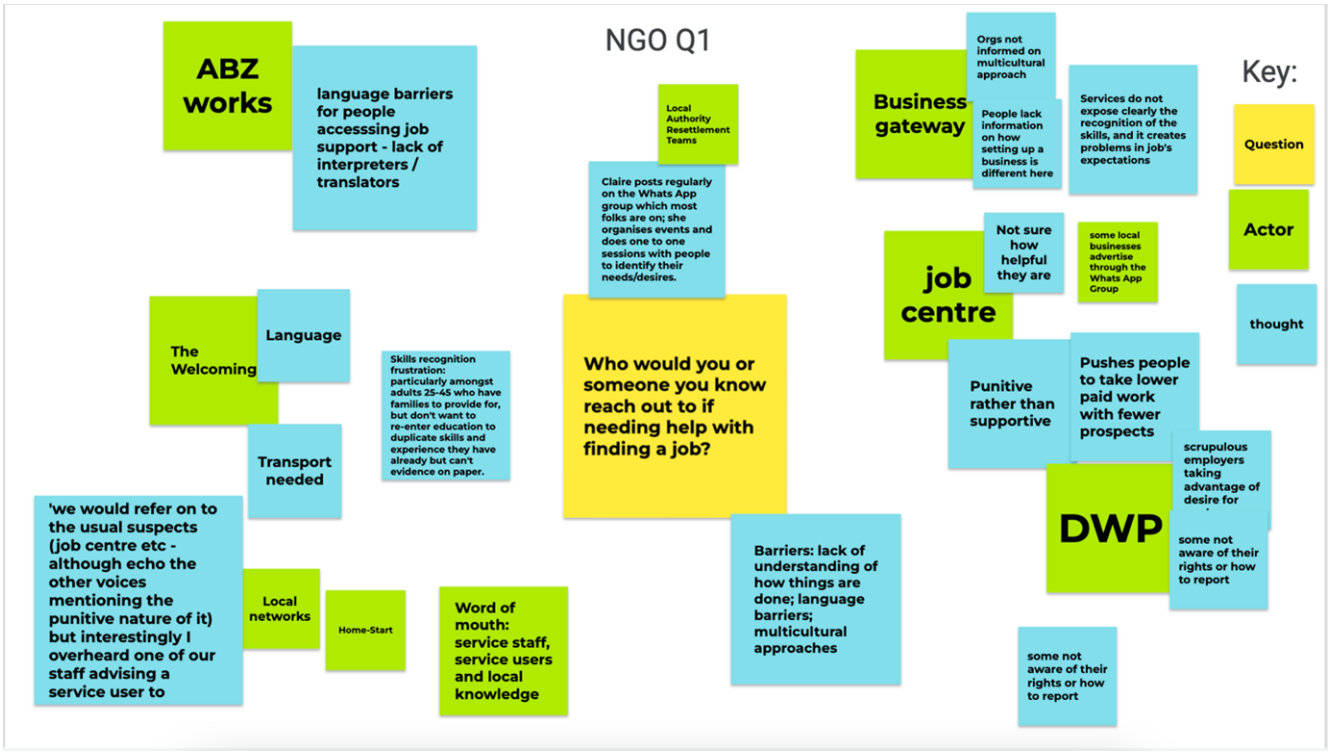

Figure 6: Workshop 3 with local organisation representatives (Scenario: job seeking)

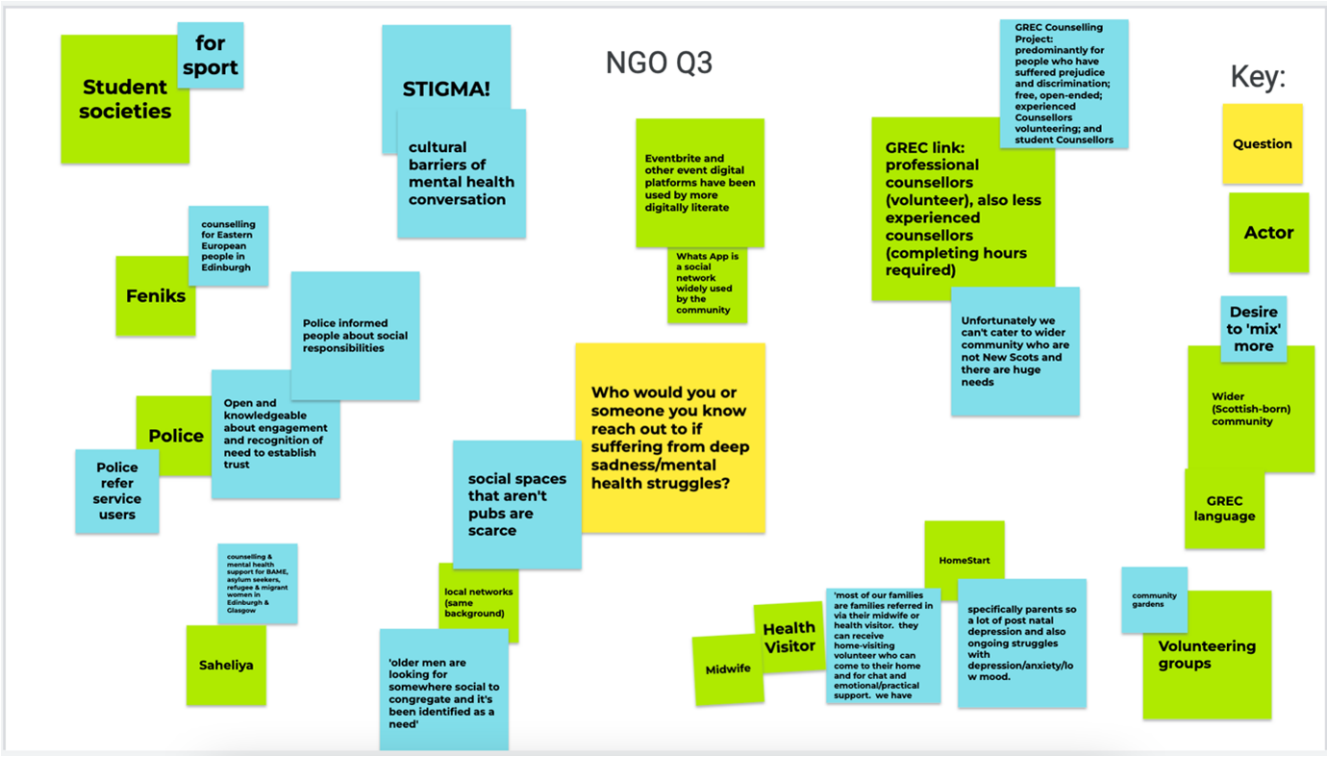

Figure 7: Workshop 3 with local organisation representatives (Scenario: deep sadness)

Our local organisation representatives in the workshop described the crucial role they played in supporting refugee people such as relocated Syrians, especially given their location in areas with previously little resettlement experience – where gaps were described in relation to the training and knowledge of key statutory services and other service providers. When discussing the absence of social connections between many refugee people and other local community members, our participants gave as one key explanation the lack of available or suitable public social spaces for such interactions to take place.

LA shared learning workshop

For the shared learning workshop that took place with LA representatives from several different regions with little previous resettlement experience, social connections maps created in the Afghan beneficiary and local organisation workshops were presented for feedback in a semi-structured group interview format. LA representatives were working in their Authority's refugee resettlement teams or working with resettled people in some other capacity. The session maintained a focus on social connections as well as structural issues at regional, national, and international level. During this workshop, the researchers scribed and grouped participant comments by theme on an online whiteboard (Figure 8).

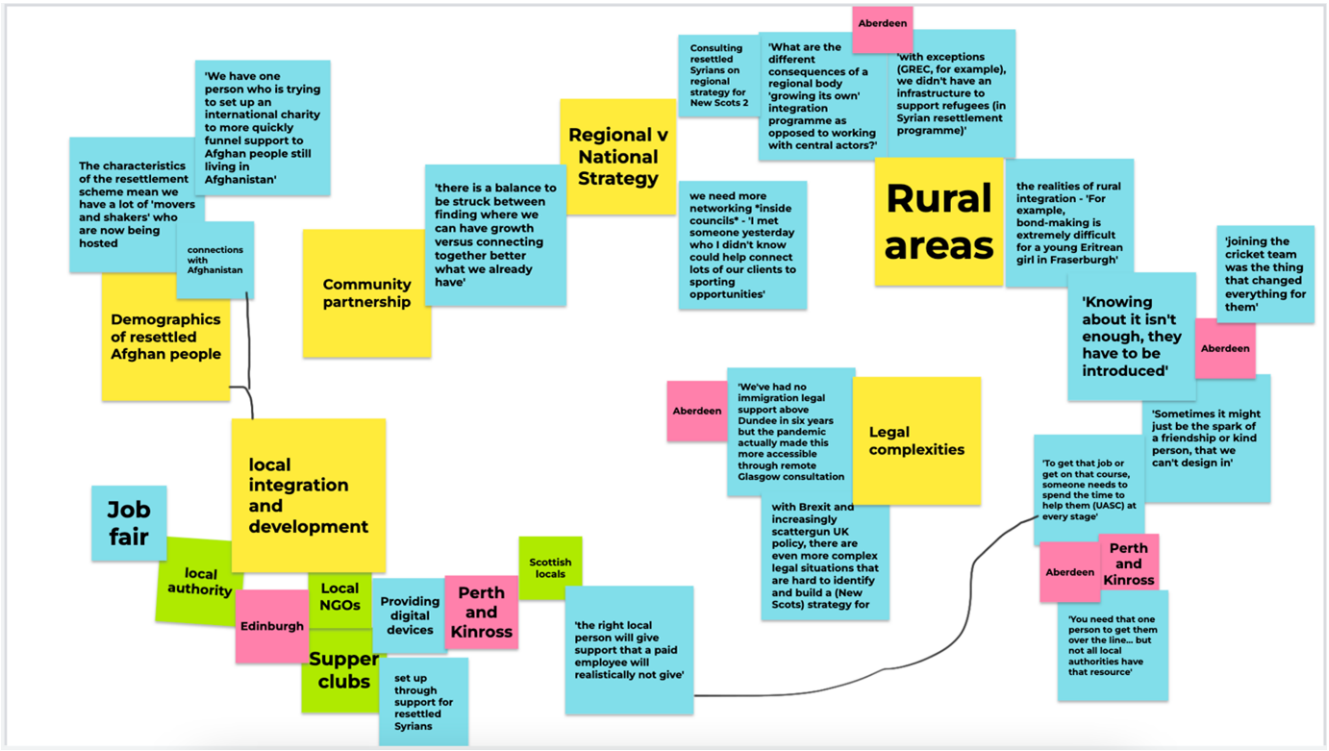

Figure 8: Workshop 4 with LA representatives (feedback grouped by theme)

Discussion of social connections in our LA workshop - which featured actors from areas, again, with little previous resettlement experience - focused interestingly on the need for a tailored and well-funded regional integration strategy while also highlighting the limitations of such a strategy facilitating effective social connections building alone. Personal bonds formed between refugee people and local residents - characterised by mutual trust - were described as crucial in facilitating integration and giving a sense of belonging to resettled or relocated people.

Project partner shared learning workshop

In the final workshop that took place with project partners, previous maps and the LA representative feedback were presented for feedback with the same aims of gaining yet further representative data of social connections built by Afghan people in different LAs in Scotland. Project partner staff present in this workshop were either working in integration casework delivery or management (SRC) or working in the management of education courses for refugee people (Bridges and WEA). The workshop took place as part of a wider learning event managed by a larger team of researchers at Queen Margaret University. The workshop featured only a proportion of

partner staff present on the day. However, for this report, we also analyse data from other discussions that took place on the day (with consent given by those in discussions) – including a discussion taken place around a panel that featured external representatives from academia, COSLA and an Aberdeen-based community organisation.

Project partners in our workshop validated the impact that refugee people's hotel accommodation had on limiting the formation of important social connections with local organisations and individuals from other backgrounds in their new communities. Insight was also brought by participants in this final workshop on the influence of UK-wide communication networks of Afghan people in different regions and at different stages of their lives in the country. For example, one participant described such networks as holding bearing on the desire of many people to move from areas with little previous history of hosting Afghan communities to cities such as London. Manchester or even Glasgow.

Cross-workshop social connections insights

In our interviews and shared learning workshops, participants routinely described the centrality of LA or Home Office officials in their lives. These represented important connections that were accessible, and thus encouraged participants to cite them several times as a potential point of support for several different issues. This was especially prominent in relation to potential housing or safety and security issues. We can probably link these connections to their accessibility inside hotels where resettled Afghans are living. A similar influence was also attributed to Scottish Refugee Council caseworkers.

> ***"We are in contact with Scottish Refugee Council. They are great. They are very supportive. Each of us has their own caseworker in Refugee Council. But the thing, you know, they don't have authority for everything. It doesn't mean they don't want to help, but they don't have the control over everything. I think we need kind of adjustment from in the higher level"*** (Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

In one of our beneficiary workshops, one of our Edinburgh-based Afghan participants mentioned that hotel staff were also a trusted point of support with issues of safety and security, sharing how help was given to his son after an injury. However, in our project partner workshop, a refugee caseworker warned that too much responsibility is currently falling to hotel staff who are often not trained to help facilitate effective building of social connections between refugee people, organisations and communities.

Other statutory services such as the Police and the Job Centre were given a more mixed verdict by Afghan beneficiaries in relation to their utility as social connections. In our first Afghan beneficiary workshop, participants expressed their trust in police, and recounted a visit from Police to their hotel to deliver a community safety information session. In our second workshop, however, Afghan participants seemed reluctant to go to Police directly with issues of safety and security – preferring, instead, to consult their LA or Home Office caseworker. These participants cited a false promise made by a visiting community safety officer to host an information session on laws and civic expectations, as well as a disillusionment with slow processes and bureaucracy in Scottish society.

> ***"So I think, from my own experience, usually they hear people – there's no problem. But what I found out, the problem in Scotland – I mean, the process is really, really slow"***
> (Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

In our local organisation workshop, participants supported the idea that Police had been making a concerted effort to establish positive connections with refugee people in their areas.

> ***"...at various points during COVID and the lockdown, the police really reached out to try and communicate the messages about what wasn't allowed and what was allowed in a light-hearted manner. They didn't come in very hard. I think that was a recognition of who they were dealing with. Social isolation did not come easily to our Syrian community. So I certainly noticed that the police were, I thought, very fair and very reasonable in how they approached getting the message across"***
> (local organisation representative)

There was an understanding among local organisation workshop participants, though, that the Job Centre served as a less universally positive social connection for refugee people in different areas of Scotland.

> ***"I think people recognise pretty quickly that that is not really a supportive environment about helping you find a job. It's more a punitive environment about trying to get out of paying you your benefit. ...It's tending to push people to take lower-paid work with less prospects, probably"***
> (local organisation workshop participant)

This view was echoed by our project partner workshop participants involved in supporting refugee people across Scotland. Our Afghan beneficiary participants also spoke more of local employability organisations or Skills Development Scotland when considering employability supporters, rather than the Job Centre.

Our workshops appear to indicate a gap in social connections built between resettled Afghan people living in hotels and community organisations and other locals around them.

> ***"We would love to [meet more local Scottish people], but at the moment we are unemployed and most of the Scottish people – local people – they have some job commitment. So probably not. They are working five days a week – six days a week – and they got one day which is kind of always specified to families. So I don't think somebody is free"***
> (Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

Social connections between resettled Afghan people living in hotels appear significant, as is perhaps to be expected given the unique accommodation situation and the reality of integrating into a new country with a family – the latter of which was the case for most that we interviewed.

> ***"...Afghans who recently came from Afghanistan, of course they went through lots of frustrations and hard time and hardship...I want to share my experience, and we came across and we faced a lot of these type of Afghans who have the depressions and stress. They don't know what to do. They're all suddenly – family suddenly in the middle of nowhere. So we always having like our own Afghan gathering"***
> (Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

However, there was a desire to establish connections to Afghan people outside one's hotel for psychological support as well as networking for other reasons.

> ***"...if the council can provide a place for them as like a meeting point for all those Afghans who recently arrived here, to brief them up...or contact the office if there is any problems. Most of the Afghans might not like contact you about this, but they are willing and they are maybe happy to contact your own Afghans and be able to speak in their own language and to share the problems...If we have that sort of place, then it would be much easier for us as well to share their problems with the LA or with especially the relevant departments"***
> (Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

Unfortunately, in our study we were not able to recruit female participants who had resettled in Scotland from Afghanistan. In our partner project workshop, one caseworker working with resettled Afghan people shared their understanding that it was only likely to be the husband in a family that spoke English, and this led to unique integration challenges for women. Indeed, many of our interview participants described that they were seriously worried about their wife's mental health in the hotels. We discuss this further in Section 5.7 below.

5.2 Journey and arrival to Scotland

Our interim report of preliminary findings for this study (Vidal and Palombo 2022) describes some of the difficulties participants faced during their respective journeys and arrivals to Scotland. All three of the interview participants were working or had worked in the past for the British Forces and had also been subject to torture when the Taliban began occupation of Afghanistan.

After some delays with travel documentation, all were able to make the journey to Scotland with their immediate families. Asadi arrived elsewhere in the UK and had to take a long bus journey with his wife and children to Fife. Asadi explained how they initially weren't aware they were headed to Scotland. This was not so much of an issue; however they had limited time to prepare and did not have access to British currency to buy food or water. They were not offered any food or drink on the bus which was particularly stressful for them given they were travelling with small children.

> ***"We didn't know that we were going to have to move to Scotland ... We are told that we are going to go and [the bus driver] said that we are going we have a long journey to Scotland. We told him okay, no problem but can we get any food or some water? We had some money with us like dollars and euros, but when we were going to the shops they were saying no, only pounds. And then we had to tell the driver to please, please buy us some water because the children are crying for the water"***
> (Asadi)

Aarash and Khaled had a more straightforward arrival, both going straight to Edinburgh. Khaled described the process of arrival which he felt was well organised.

> ***"...there were people [when we arrived] – the council itself who were responsible for the integration or the orientation – and they helped all of us out initially from housing us in the hotel and then talking us through about what is going to happen in the next few months or few days...There was a welcoming team set up and some funds to buy clothes, and kids were given some toys and stuff like that. So yes, that bit of it was pretty organised"***
> (Khaled)

Aarash and Khaled had a more straightforward arrival, both going straight to Edinburgh. Khaled described the process of arrival which he felt was well organised.

5.3 Accommodation

All participants from the Afghan beneficiary cohort expressed challenges with their housing situation. The quality of people's accommodation, the suitability of their location and whether they were based in places that offered enough to meet their needs and those of their families preoccupied many participants.

Many commented that they felt there was no end in sight to hotel accommodation with limited to no communication about when or how they would be able to move to permanent housing. Khaled was taking the accommodation situation in stride. He has travelled extensively throughout his life and was accustomed to adapting to different and sometimes harsher circumstances. Though he understood why some may be struggling.

> ***"Well, I've not personally come across a situation where I've been frustrated regarding an issue and that issue wasn't being resolved, but I'm sure there are other people here in the hotel who feel that the food is bad and [that] nobody is listening to them"***
> (Khaled)

The rest of the participants however likened staying in hotel accommodation to being in prison or jail. This was particularly true for those who had been in the hotel longer than others.

> ***"In the hotel we are staying, most of them who have been for a long time here, they call them Fife Jail. They call them jail"***
> (Asadi)

The quality of food, as Khaled mentions above was a common complaint, but also the lack of freedom to take ownership of their living space was a discernible stressor for people.

> ***"...and suddenly we all squeeze in one small hotel room ... Of course it's tough, you know. In general, as I mentioned...we're just finding the experience and living in the hotel when it's for a long time, it's not easy experience. When you are at your home you are in charge of everything, but not in hotel, it's like a guest. Okay, you've been offered this food and you have to take it, you don't have much freedom. And of course, it's a long period, and with the family I think it's not an easy experience"***
> (Arash)

From our Afghan beneficiary workshops, one of the central themes was the negative impact on employability and English language development due to prolonged stays in temporary accommodation. In our workshops, all participants voiced their desire to move into permanent accommodation to move on with their lives properly. We detail this more in sections below.

In our workshops with local organisations, LA representatives and project partners, we were able to delve into the wider impact of hotel accommodation, especially in areas with previously little resettlement experience. Despite highlighting positive social connections being built outside hotels with other Afghans, one LA representative commented on the potential impact of securing permanent housing in remote areas of Scotland.

> ***"...they've been in touch with other Afghan groups, particularly in bigger cities. We found that in the Northeast, anyway, where there's been one family in particular is in touch with other Afghans in London and they're constantly communicating and setting up kind of networks, almost. But also, that's been an issue in hotels, I think, as well, where Afghans have been speaking to each other a lot and talking to each other about where they want to be in the UK. And it's not usually in the northeast of Scotland, so it can kind of slow things down a bit, and getting housed and things"***
> (LA workshop participant)

This view was echoed in our project partner workshop by a national caseworker who had been supporting resettled Afghan people nationally.

In our social connections section before this, we discussed the difficulty of building social connections for Afghan and other refugee people in Scotland due to hotel accommodation. This emerged as a central theme in our local organisation, LA and partner project workshops. Furthermore, it was highlighted how issues of isolation and lack of access to infrastructure were even more acute for asylum-seeking people living in enforced abject poverty.

> ***"Just simply that we have some young people, young asylum seekers, they're in very rural Northeast. They don't have extended community, they're very isolated, they don't have a network of other young people and don't have wider communities. They're very, very disconnected compared to maybe people that have come through managed resettlement routes"***
> (LA workshop participant)

The impact on physical and mental health associated with hotel accommodation are multifaceted, as the November 2022 Asylum Inquiry Report showed. This evidence is validated by our conversations with resettled Afghans and the people

supporting them. One of our project partner representatives gave their own indication of the often-unseen significant impacts of this enforced lifestyle.

> ***"In winter, and for those arriving in the winter, it's especially difficult because it gets dark so early in the day – it really inhibits many opportunities."***
> (Project partner representative)

Another statement from that project partner workshop detailed how too much responsibility is currently falling to hotel staff who are often not trained to help facilitate effective social connections building between refugee people, organisations and communities.

In our regional infrastructure section below, we analyse data that highlights in more detail the challenges of refugee people living in diverse accommodation in areas with previously little resettlement or asylum dispersal experience, and the additional influence that geographical remoteness has in this.

5.4 Job seeking

In this section we focus on challenges associated with employment. All participants from the Afghan beneficiary cohort expressed great frustration at their inability to move forward with their lives. As explained in the preceding section, the temporality of accommodation is a major stressor for many. Additionally, lack of employment opportunities is causing anxiety, stress and feelings of powerlessness. We understand that the opportunity to work is known to be crucial to resettling for refugee people (Bloch 2008; Strang et al. 2016; Gericke et al. 2018). Work brings the benefits of economic independence and rekindles self-respect. Participants report their desire to contribute to society and their discomfort at being dependent on state benefits. Asadi, who speaks English fluently but has been unsuccessful securing employment despite actively searching, emphasised how much he wants to work and the frustration he feels for not being able to find a job.

> ***"I don't want myself to be a lazy man and then just eat and sleep there. I'm totally against that. And also Jobcentre is telling us, "Have you been searching for a job?" I've told them give me the job, even if that's a cleaning job, I will do it, I don't mind doing any job, you know, it's for my children, for myself. I don't want to be an extra pressure or burden on the government. I do want to work, you know?"***
> (Asadi)

For the majority of the participants, job seeking challenges are directly related to English language proficiency. Arash explained that he was missing out on job opportunities due to his limited English.

"But [we cannot find work] until we know the language, until we can communicate and in general learn language. I know some people are working as interpreter with the forces, of course they have the language ability to do that. For myself as well, I applied for different industry, for the supermarket, delivery, for Amazon because I've got the license as well. But again, because of the language, again, their criteria, so I was refused, I wasn't offered any jobs. So in general, the language at the moment is a barrier"
(Arash)

Moreover, for many, to re-establish a previous career is key to re-connecting with their own sense of identity. Aarash lamented that despite having a master's degree and applying to several entry level or unskilled labour jobs, he hadn't even been invited to interview and was aware that his limited English language ability was a hindrance.

"I had master you know, over there. I was working on in the office, I've applied for a job unsuccessfully. [If only] they can make the criteria of admission easier. So people like me or my wife or others, can have the opportunity so they can integrate quicker"
(Aarash)

During the first Afghan beneficiary workshop, much of the conversation similarly focused around language barriers to employment. Participants agreed that despite feeling eligible for several work opportunities, many could not pass the interview stage due to lack of English language proficiency.

"...the hard part is ... English ... So we don't take it that the interview will be a problem for us ... so far, as we know, the people around us have been a community here, or the newly-arrived ... most of them, they have like about ten years' [work experience]. But the barriers – only language is the barrier..."
(Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

In our workshops with local organisations, LAs and project partners, we heard of the positive role of LA resettlement teams in providing useful employability support and connections. However, there were also several pieces of feedback that described how this varied greatly from LA to LA.

"So in terms of LA resettlement teams helping people with work, so like in the city – not really. I don't think they provided any help with work up to this point, but they have tried to pull together disparate teams that were working on employability into like one thing now that they've rebranded as ABZ WORKS. But that's relatively recent and actually... so far is that if your English isn't at a relatively high level, there's no help available for you there, realistically"
(local organisation workshop participant)

There were also examples of poor support administered by service providers to refugee people looking to start a business.

"I know a few people who've gone to Business Gateway and, again, I think they're getting, I would say, generic advice. Whereas they actually need a bit more background advice as well. I think there needs to be more understanding of the fact that setting up a business in Syria is very different from setting up a business in Scotland"
(local organisation workshop participant)

This gap in provision was also cited by one of our Afghan beneficiary workshop participants, and a similar plea for support was made by another in that same workshop who was interested in using their experience in the humanitarian sector to set up a charity. Indeed, this entrepreneurial spirit was referenced by one LA resettlement team member who linked it to the unique demographic of those being resettled.

"... another Afghan family in Peterhead who's really, really keen to set up a charity. And the charity is one that's going to be helping people back home. So like an international aid charity. But keen to do it just right now and immediately help, without building up first with other Afghans. Everybody wants to help right now, because it's a dire situation. But yeah, I think that desire to help and I think also the demographic, a little bit, of people that have come through the ARAP scheme and things. Where they've been movers and shakers, perhaps back in Afghanistan, and have got those connections and they've got the understanding of infrastructure and things like that. They're kind of ahead in that way, but they have the disadvantage of not knowing the system here"
(LA workshop participant)

A resettlement team member in another LA gave an example of a successful entrepreneurial business venture, highlighting how tailored support could work.

> ***"we had actually run food hygiene courses in Arabic for Syrian clients a couple of years ago, and then off the back that, we had the supper clubs. But I know that they're doing Persian supper clubs, so I'm sure they'd be open to other cultures, other nationalities, other foods. And that's been really successful and actually... one of the supper clubs has now travelled to, I think, the Isle of Mull over the last couple of summers and [has] been invited to run the supper clubs there...We set up the initial contacts, I guess, but it's been really successful and led to friendships and, like I say, lots more connections and opportunities"***
> (LA workshop participant)

These aspirations and achievements force us to consider how people's accommodation and local network of support may be hindering their development and integration. From our workshops, it was clear that strong bonds with locals were key to many positive stories of development in employment and education. One LA workshop participant explained why they were expanding infrastructure to accommodate this.

> ***"We recreated a New Scots employability worker post – we're just in the process of recruiting a second post now. The reasoning and thinking behind that was a wee bit about, even with all of these different inputs, even with all of the different actors who are there, we really got down to the nitty-gritty as to why people didn't – and particularly our Syrian clients, rather than Afghan or other nationality clients. But why they didn't always just get over the finishing line with work. Some clients could have the Job Centre, Skills Development Scotland employability workers. They could have been put through the employability pipeline and had another five or six people working with them, but actually still not be in employment"***
> (LA workshop participant)

The same participant detailed further about how close bonds were integral to employment journeys.

> ***"you need that one person with the focus and the advocacy to get the person over the line. And the reality of that's not very sexy, it's not very interesting. The reality of that is just being with them and helping them with the practicality of that, either in-person or online, or however you do it. And that just takes a lot of time and a lot of attention and a lot of hard work. And it's a resource that most LAs don't have, but I think it's a really crucial one"***
> (LA workshop participant)

These views were echoed by one of our project partner workshop participants, who stressed how local employability courses performed a role that larger service providers could not. These points lead us to consider even further the crucial role wider social connections and a localised integration approach play an individual's employment and integration journey.

5.5 English language learning

A common observation amongst the interview participants was the relative lack of organised English language learning opportunities[1]. For example, Khaled, a proficient English speaker, expressed concern that other Afghan arrivals with more limited English knowledge are getting left behind without compulsory English classes. He is aware of ESOL classes run by the Council or other organisations but feels they could be better organised.

> ***"...the one thing that they could have done slightly better was to make the learning English compulsory [...] it would have forced [new Afghan arrivals] to learn the language and they would be able to socialise more, and they wouldn't be so dependent on the Edinburgh Council to help them out with everything [...] Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of individuals or organisations that are doing integration English with people who come in here, but they are mostly unorganised..."***
> (Khaled)

Khaled's reflection points to several benefits of ESOL opportunities. In addition to helping people with the practicalities of finding work and fostering independence, English language classes also offer opportunities for people to socialise, building their social networks.

From the perspective of Afghan participants in our workshops, there were not just gaps in ESOL provision in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Fife, but gaps in opportunities to develop English through work or other routine activity – environments which some participants felt were crucial to be able to fully acclimatise to the language.

[2] It should be noted that participants spoke positively about the English language learning opportunities offered by the research partner organisations, however some challenges to accessing the courses were documented.

"...Kind of engage, but not communicating with somebody. That one is not going to help us. We need to be in the field or an employment that engage with the local people, just to help us to communicate or learn English"
(Afghan beneficiary workshop participant)

Yet, as we highlighted in the previous section on job seeking, English remains a barrier to access these opportunities. Furthermore, as we also discussed previously and as we will cover further in a proceeding section, infrastructural issues and knowledge gaps in public, private and third sectors mean that employment assistance is not accessible enough.

"I think a lot of the jobs that might be available require a lot of things like, already having transport, already having those kind of connections, which obviously, if you're new to the city, then you're not likely to have. And when we first looked to engage people there, they'd come back and say, 'Well no, because we don't have any language support available. We don't have interpreters, access to translation,' and things like that. And the reasoning was, the expectation is, you're looking for work, then you're going to require a certain standard of English. But I think that is maybe not the real-world situation that most people are dealing with"
(local organisation workshop participant)

It was the view of the same local organisation representative that ESOL provision quality was also an issue, as well as quantity - with better standards demanded from across providers when it comes to consulting learners and ensuring tuition is more broadly tailored to suit different levels of skill. The same representative gave an example of a language cafe their organisation was running to demonstrate the strength and flexibility of this peer learning model, as well as the social connections that stemmed from it.

"We have a language café project, which has been really successful, and one of the things that I think works really well about that is that it's people from all different communities within the city – predominantly people who have come here from somewhere else. Although, everybody's from different places and they speak different first languages, they've got to speak English to get along at this

thing. And everybody's got this shared experience of coming here as being somewhat new here, and that seems to create quite a powerful community as well"
(local organisation workshop participant)

These examples again demonstrate the importance of creating infrastructure within communities, utilising and nurturing groups with intercultural awareness, that allow for bonds and bridges to be built between individuals from different backgrounds.

One final observation worth discussing here is on the gendered and familial dynamic of English language development among resettled Afghan people. In our project partner workshop, one caseworker who worked with resettled Afghan people believed patriarchs of the family were likely to willingly or unwillingly perform roles as gatekeepers of knowledge about integration into their new communities. This was linked to the fact that the ARAP scheme resettled many people with experience working for or with the British Government - most of whom from these cohorts, one might predict given cultural norms in Afghanistan, were men. When considering the accounts we heard of psychological struggles of women and families settling here, we must also consider what role lack of access to language development and tailored community infrastructure plays in this. As Khaled pertinently observes, "of course the men always find a way, even if they don't speak the language they'll always find the way. It's more the women that are at a loss here" (Khaled).

5.6 Life 'in limbo'

In addition to reports of feeling as though they were unable to 'move forward', some participants reported feeling 'stuck', 'in limbo' and 'moving backwards'.

"Life for us technically hasn't started. Integration becomes really difficult when you're living with 100 Afghan families. And the only contact that you have with the Scottish or the English people is when you go out and buy something so the communication is only like how much and then when you pay and you come back. So you don't learn anything. You don't speak anything. You're not exchanging culture just yet because you're [still in] transition"
(Khaled)

There was a strong understanding of the weathering influence that waiting had on people's lives in the resettlement and asylum system when we spoke to refugee caseworkers and other service delivery representatives in our partner project workshops. For one caseworker, they felt that they were 'part of the problem' when

referring people on to services that they knew were mired in administrative issues and lengthy delivery times. These issues, although particularly acute for resettled and asylum-seeking people, can be viewed as endemic in wider society – as was discussed by participants across our workshops in the context of historic cuts to public spending.

One LA representative, however, did share one anecdote which demonstrated the value of cross-sector operational working groups in tackling structural administrative issues.

> ***"...there is an operational group in the city with different organisations such as Migrant Help and [service provider]. And we had one case that actually had to be escalated and one person from [service provider] has active communication with the person. So they can just address to the particularities of the case. So having these operational groups also is really helpful in that sense"***
> (local organisation workshop participant)

The same representative also discussed an ongoing project to train a 'community connector' that shared a similar cultural or linguistic background to larger refugee cohorts in their area, who understood cultural and legal challenges and would act as a conduit between refugee people and health services, specifically. This type of solution could be considered as a potential solution in more remote resettlement areas with less tailored infrastructure and support streams for refugee people.

5.7 Mental health

A number of studies (Hameed et al 2018, Carswell et al. 2009, Vidal et al. 2021) of refugee and post-migration mental health have indicated that many refugee arrivals witnessed or experienced a high number of traumatic events, including torture and loss of loved ones. The impact of these experiences can be compounded on resettlement. Likewise, the conditions to daily life previously described in this report place additional mental and emotional stressors on families and individuals. During the interviews, we had several discussions about the impact of uncertainties about residency and ability to positively settle in the new country, difficulties accessing health and social care and benefits, difficulties finding employment, separation from extended families, and loss of culture and social support including isolation and access to familiar foods.

While the Afghan beneficiaries we spoke to did not outright discuss their own mental health status, they did express concern about the women in their families. We were conscious of these being second hand accounts and would have liked to

discuss these issues in more detail with female participants, however as discussed elsewhere, we experienced limitations in access to female participants. The stories are nonetheless important to share as they reflect the mental health impacts of stressors specific to this cohort.

Asadi, for example, discussed his worries about his wife who has been experiencing poor mental health since prior to arrival. This has been exacerbated by daily life struggles, including the pressure of keeping up with caring responsibilities which has been hard on both of them. He explained that his children were placed in a school a significant distance away by public transport and he has been struggling to find work that would accommodate hours around school drop-offs and pick-ups.

> ***"And at the condition my wife is in, she can't do that, I can't allow her to do that. I have to go myself every day at 8:30 to take my children to school and then bring them back at 3:00. Between this time, if I can get work, I want to do work [...] They go to a school which is too far from the hotel... there is another school available there near to the hotel ... which my wife would manage to [help with the drop-offs and pick-ups] [...] my wife won't be able to do [the longer school run] because of her mental sickness. I really like to work, you know, because I've been working all my life."***
> (Asadi)

He is unaware of the process to request a closer school but also worries that issues such as these are making it more difficult for his wife to feel better. Arash similarly explained that his wife has been feeling anxious and socially isolated. Arash described the lack of freedom his children and his wife are both experiencing while living in the hotel. His wife is conscious about her style of traditional dress and worries about the possibilities of experiencing discrimination or hate crime due to her appearance. He explained that his wife limits her visits outside due to these concerns and worries about the impact this may have on her mental health.

> ***"...my wife cannot dress freely ... maybe because of the cover, she doesn't feel comfortable enough as the way we usually dress at home outside if with the friends. So she doesn't feel comfortable. She's somewhere in her own isolation"***
> (Arash)

Studies elsewhere have shown media representations have a marked impact on how people are perceived by the public and vice versa (Vidal and Nisbet 2022). This has been evident in our interviews and workshops. The point of addressing media focus was brought up in our project partner learning event by a local organisation representative panellist, who spoke of the need to counter negative and

dehumanising stereotypes. This point felt more significant given accounts of one partner project caseworkers about an assault that took place on two Afghan refugee women in a Scottish LA not far from the hotel in which they were staying. As we covered in the preceding section on Social Connections, some resettled Afghan people may not feel comfortable yet seeking help from Police in the case of such an incident.

In addition to community safety initiatives, we also looked to understand from local organisations, LAs and project partners what psychological support was available to refugee people in different areas. We heard positive trauma-informed and multiculturally sensitive practice being carried out by health service visitors and charities such as Home Start and Saheliya in Fife and Edinburgh, respectively. There were also accounts of a tailored one-to-one counselling service for refugee people introduced by Grampian Regional Equality Council in the northeast of Scotland. Granted, that project's limited timespan forces us to address the temporality of community infrastructure and reliance on thinning or disappearing access to European Union funding such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

Social connections, including those made sporadically throughout communities, were explicitly referenced by local organisation, LA and project partners as a key driver of wellbeing and a sense of belonging among refugee people in different areas of Scotland.

> ***"... for a couple of young boys, being involved in a local cricket team has been the thing that changed everything. Probably if they hadn't been involved... there's quite a lot of disappearing in flight and taking off and going elsewhere. But actually, that bit of joy that went along with it, and also the adult male relationships that were there. And them seeing these guys as just potentially young boys, it could help them win a game for a change. It was pretty much a game-changer for everybody involved"***
> (LA workshop participant)

In this example, a local resettlement team had supported resettled refugee boys, and indeed other locals who made up the cricket team, to access these vital social connections. There were also examples of other refugee people, usually with greater command of English and digital literacy, accessing opportunities more independently.

"... ones that have a higher level of English, they just engage with applications as Eventbrite or Meetup. And those are like local interest groups and they just go and just meet new people and they've just got super-involved activities"
(local organisation workshop participant)

Whether supported greatly or not by community members or by practitioners, suitable social spaces are a necessity to ensure social connections can be built for the benefit of people's social wellbeing and mental health.

"Actually, our older men, what they have identified is a real need for a place for older men to meet... We don't have that kind of facility. So the older men will meet down by the river or around the war memorial, and it just strikes me that they are all missing out on a very social and important element of mental health... It's definitely identified as a need by the community"
(local organisation workshop participant)

The issue of suitable social spaces becomes more pressing when considering the isolating reality of living in hotel accommodation, especially in Scottish winters – as briefly covered in the preceding Findings section on Accommodation.

When planning suitable social spaces, policymakers and community practitioners should also take into account how safe and accessible they are in the context of conversations around mental health and certain cultural issues.

"The women will get together in the houses, and I think they do obviously support each other. Although interestingly, some have occasionally said, "They might have told me something, but don't tell anyone else." So there is also that – although they are from the same country, they're not necessarily all of the same view about things, as you would expect. So there is support within the community, but I think, on certain issues, that's more difficult"
(local organisation workshop participant)

Whilst stigma around mental health mind can hinder constructive conversations among people from a variety of backgrounds, academics such as Quinn (2014) have highlighted how these issues can be particularly acute for refugee people - especially for those living through the vicious social marginalisation of the asylum

claim process. The language café previously referenced in this Findings section was posited as one possible solution to the stigma experienced by discussing certain cultural issues in specific ethnic communities, as it encouraged bonds to be built between people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

5.8 Regional knowledge and infrastructure

Before we ran the workshops, the research team was keen to understand how potential gaps in cross-sector infrastructure and refugee-informed knowledge was affecting Afghan people in LAs that had little previous resettlement experience.

The topic of gaps in infrastructure available to support refugee people in different areas of Scotland was central within our local organisation, LA and partner project workshop discussions. With a rise in refugee people being resettled and relocated throughout different Scottish LAs, via international rescue schemes and the Home Office's asylum dispersal programme, there are important questions to be asked about relevant resources and knowledge within authorities and communities. Adding to this change in resettlement and relocation patterns are the consequences of Brexit and a cost of living crisis which add further challenges to ensuring individuals in communities can integrate and thrive.

> ***"The reality – and particularly at the tail end of 2022 – our third sector is not going to grow next year, and public sector is going to dramatically reduce next year. So you mentioned about legal support. We've had no immigration support above Dundee for about six years now"***
> (LA workshop participant)

The statements shared previously in this Findings section demonstrate clearly how these gaps in infrastructure and knowledge impact on refugee people in the context of accommodation and mental health, for example. Whilst some regions may require time to adjust, it is clear from our data, alone, that adequate funding and networking is also required across Scotland.

> ***"It's really frustrating because some of it's like real basic stuff. I'm thinking about a recent example of like a city council financial inclusion team telling somebody that they weren't entitled to a thing when they clearly had indefinite leave to remain on their BRP.***
>
> ***But it also extends to the third sector – people who are working closely with these communities. Because what we found really difficult – especially as we were trying to help people***

learn more about the asylum system and what they can and can't do to help, and staying on the right side of that, making sure everyone's getting good advice – is how prohibitively expensive that sort of training is"
(local organisation workshop participant)

There was common desire, for example, among participants in our different workshops for Scottish Refugee Council's integration support and refugee casework services to be expanded across more LAs and bolster regional knowledge, rather than perpetuate a sometimes-unconstructive reliance on established refugee support networks that tend to be located in the Central Belt.

"... the Scottish Refugee Council has a person who is working in the Northeast, and it's like Dundee all the way up to Inverness or something. To me, one person can't do that quite effectively. So I think it would be great to see them have more local presence, but that kind of goes for everyone...

There's a little bit of a tangent, but I think it's adjacent enough. But like, we've got this asylum hotel in the city now, it's run by a private company – Mears, and none of the staff are local.

I don't mean like Scottish. I mean like none of those people have lived in Aberdeen. There's no experience of, like, the local infrastructure and it caused a lot of problems at the beginning with how they approached certain groups. I think there was a lack of infrastructure, a lack of experience, but particularly amongst frontline staff. And I'm thinking like the people who work at the Job Centre, the LA, police, NHS. Although again, in this context, I think police and NHS have a better [approach] and DWP less so. But having staff that are like clued-up on entitlement, eligibility and just like relatively basic trauma-informed practice"
(local organisation workshop participant)

We can place these infrastructure gaps issues alongside that of isolating accommodation when investigating the desire of refugee people to eventually move away from in these areas with little previous resettlement or relocation experience, and the impact this may have of encouraging integration in their communities.

"That's been an issue in hotels, I think, as well, where Afghans have been speaking to each other a lot and talking to each other about where they want to be in the UK. And it's not usually in the northeast of Scotland, so it can kind of slow things down a bit, and getting housed and things. But that's where they're building connections in the UK, it's just with other Afghans"
(LA workshop participant)

For those areas for where we heard success stories of social connections being built among refugee people and others in their communities, networking and taking advantage of pre-existing infrastructure was important.

"Organisations arranged for them to receive iPads so that they could then connect with Scottish people and learn some – just keep up their English, just by conversation. And because it's informal, you can cover all sorts of areas of interest, and that definitely has built friendships"
(LA workshop participant)

One LA representative spoke, though, of the proactive approach they took to strengthening their support of refugee people.

"I think, since we started with refugee settlement work, we've not had an infrastructure. We don't have third sector infrastructure... We have a third sector umbrella organisation, a third sector interface who have always been very supportive, but fairly small. And have never really had the capacity nor the desire to develop anything further along there.

So we've grown our own really from day one, and I think that's probably why. And it's probably relevant to more rural resettlement models, compared to city models, is that our wider resettlement team includes a New Scots employability worker, a New Scots career development worker, a New Scots housing officer, a New Scots digital inclusion worker through AMIF funding"
(LA workshop participant)

This statement highlights, again, the significant impact that AMIF funding, specifically, has had on strengthening refugee support infrastructure in different parts of Scotland – and forces us to consider the need to ringfence further funding given in its upcoming absence because of Brexit.

Despite concerns about funding from local organisations, LAs and project partners, there remained positive statements of hope

around the potential for increased cross-regional and cross-sectoral networking to improve the quality of social connections built for refugee people in different parts of Scotland.

6. Discussion

We have described the key social connections that refugee people, local organisations, and service providers identify as important to integration in LAs with little previous resettlement experience. Our data provides evidence of Afghan beneficiaries' own accounts of the profound impact of the stressors associated with interruptions to integration and the role of social connections on mental health and wellbeing.

In the case of the Afghan people we spoke to in our shared learning workshops, their influential social connections appeared intricately linked to their uniquely isolated accommodation – the hotels in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Fife in which they have been resettled by the Home Office. Caseworkers – whether Home Office, LA or Scottish Refugee Council – and hotel staff had been cited as key points of contact for many scenarios experienced or hypothetical. Given the isolation faced by people in these situations, which our findings illustrate, it is perhaps not surprising to hear that there was a desired but often unforged connection with local groups or individuals outside of hotels.

Some Afghan beneficiary workshop participants expressed trust in some other key service providers such as the Police – whom our local organisation workshop participants had also recognised as welcoming and culturally sensitive actors in their different regions. Nevertheless, there was a desire from those Afghan beneficiary workshop participants for more information on rights and customs.

The accounts of Afghan people we spoke to frequently included detail on the trauma of their experiences of war and a difficult journey to Scotland. This trauma was clearly still affecting Afghan people we spoke to as they tried to navigate their lives and integrate into a new community. Despite this, Afghan beneficiary workshop participants had been offered little in the way of tailored psychological support by key service providers. Instead, this support often came through their important bonds and support networks with other Afghan people living in the same hotel. There were also several anecdotes shared across our workshops with Afghan people, local organisations, LAs and project partners that illustrated resettled people's desire to support those left behind in Afghanistan.

Those interviewed were clearly actively seeking to move forward and mitigate the negative impacts of interruptions to their lives. However, for many, their capacity to do so was constrained by situational, structural and personal circumstances. For example, from our findings, we can link a preoccupation with an uncertain and stressful housing situation – alongside the trauma still suffered as a result of war and forced flight – with the difficulty in building English language aptitude and thus the ability to secure fulfilling work.

Accommodation, for these reasons included, is a critical factor in determining whether many Afghan people can move from a state of limbo to being able to properly 'start' their lives here in Scotland. As was evident from our interviews with Afghan people in these circumstances, living conditions were inadequate and impacting on people's mental and physical wellbeing. Complaints of forced poor nutrition, lack of privacy and feelings of confinement were shared by Afghan interviewees and workshop participants in this study. People also feel isolated in these circumstances, perhaps owing to the physical nature of separation from others living in housing and the stigma associated with this. These issues were reflective of those heard in the November 2022 report launched by Asylum Inquiry Scotland, which investigated the experiences of people seeking asylum who had been relocated to hotels in Glasgow during the pandemic. For refugee people with limited access to resources and impacted by the trauma of previous experiences - as well as, in the cases of many, living presently through a brutal asylum system – residing in a hotel compounds social issues they experience at the sharpest end of social inequality in our society.

The significant impact of struggling without fulfilling employment was clearly illustrated in our interviews with resettled Afghan people, building on a bank of research which shows how this situation influences feelings of self-worth, ability to be independent and sense of belonging (Bloch 2008; Strang et al. 2016; Gericke et al. 2018). Afghan people. Local organisations, LAs and project partners who took part in interviews or workshops all made links between English development and job prospects. Even highly qualified individuals were not being successful in securing interviews, and this was linked by them, consciously, to their lack of English language skills. In our workshops, participants from regions with little previous resettlement experience spoke of a lack of infrastructure to support refugee people into fulfilling employment. In these areas, training and resources, as well as interpreting services, were highlighted as necessary to ensure employment and other support initiatives were multiculturally sensitive.

Similar measures were deemed necessary for English language training for Afghan and other refugee people in different parts of Scotland. For Afghan and local organisation representatives, there were concerns shared about the availability and quality of ESOL provision. A positive anecdote shared by one local organisation representative included their group's running of a language café, which provided a flexible learning model as well as a space for potentially important holistic social connections to be built between people from a range of different backgrounds.

The importance of these types of social connections, that usually take place

between refugee people and people who have historically lived locally, were directly cited as critical in improving integration prospects. One powerful anecdote shared by a LA representative described how joining a cricket team led to a significant positive shift in the lives of two young refugee men in an area with little previous resettlement experience.

These findings illustrate the importance that social connections have for increasing the agency and improving the mental health of refugee people integrating alongside new communities. However, given the enduring or historic trauma experienced by people with these experiences, tailored psychological support can be considered critical. In this space, we heard of successful, funded one-to-one counselling programmes for refugee people as well as the supportive impact of informal peer networks of Afghan people staying inside hotels. Generally, however, we identified a gap in relevant services or suitable spaces for this activity to take place across a range of different LAs in Scotland. Our Afghan beneficiary workshop participants felt support should be given to provide them with a community venue to treat unique psychological issues more effectively in a culturally sensitive and trauma-informed way. However, our findings also conveyed the need for alternate forms of community conversation and psychological counselling to aid people facing stigma from fellow members of their ethnic communities.

A key focus of our findings is on the common problems refugee people have faced whilst waiting on asylum claims, housing offers and other services or support. The commonality and breadth of impact of this feeling of waiting or limbo - as discussed in the context of accommodation, job seeking, English language development and mental health – was so significant in our conversations that it emerged as a distinct theme to analyse. As our findings show, this theme can be tightly linked to the complexity of immigration and asylum policies as well as a general shrinking of investment in the public and third sector by the Scottish and UK governments.

The themes above can be analysed in one way or another alongside issues relating to the regional infrastructure that supports refugee people in this current period - when significant changes are occurring to resettlement and asylum dispersal geographies in Scotland and in the UK. Whilst shrinking public and third sector capacity is a problem for people with a wide range of backgrounds in Scotland, our findings illustrate how this is particularly acute for those with a refugee background - and especially for those staying in isolating hotel accommodation in areas with little previous resettlement or asylum dispersal experience. When analysing our findings, one can reference the regional case study of Perth and Kinross to look at how social issues for refugee people and others is already spiralling negatively

(Migration Policy Scotland 2022)[3] as well as the cases of some LAs referenced in our own findings. In these areas, alongside an increasingly stretched third and public sector infrastructure, there is a lack of experience working with vulnerable migrant people, and a gap in legal case support with increasingly complex immigration profiles. This is likely to result in rising destitution and resources redirected from tailored community development or integration projects towards emergency provisions.

These regional case studies serve an important reminder for the need for wider support for key public and community service providers, and for ringfenced funding to support specialist training and organisation around legal support, asylum rights and trauma-informed practice to support people from a refugee background. In our findings, we highlighted how one LA with little previous resettlement experience was cited for good practice as it channelled EU AMIF funding to appoint workers in specialist areas such as housing and employment. Importantly, this LA used a 'build our own' approach that recognised the need for a tailored regional integration strategy with centred on consultation with resettled individuals. With the potential loss of similar access to EU funding, for example, it falls to the Scottish and UK governments to ensure dedicated funding can be made available to LAs and community organisations so that a similarly progressive integration approach can be recreated in different regions across Scotland.

[3] Brexit has meant that critical seasonal workers in the area are now experiencing no recourse to public funds upon the expiry of their visas. At the same time, the area is welcoming people seeking asylum for the first time as well as welcoming resettled Afghan and Ukrainian people.

7. Key Recommendations

In this section we present recommendations for national, devolved and local governments as well as other national and local actors involved in supporting refugee people or holding a stake in community integration.

For all:

- Support the building of social connections for refugee people and others in their communities – for example, by facilitating inclusive access to local organisations and local activities such as language cafes and sports clubs.

Future integration services should:

- Continue to incorporate discussions of social connections into integration planning and activities.
- Continue efforts to share information between all actors at the local and national levels to develop mutually beneficial priorities.

COSLA, Local Authorities, statutory services and New Scots working groups should:

- Ensure that key service providers in areas with little previous resettlement experience have appropriately equipped interpreting services as well as training in delivering multiculturally sensitive and trauma-informed practice.
- Take part in routine cross-sector, intra-regional, cross-regional and lived-experience-informed forums and operational groups to share best practice and build critical partnerships that benefit community integration and refugee people's wellbeing in different parts of Scotland.

The Scottish Government should:

- Provide ringfenced funding to ensure Local Authorities and local organisations can access training in trauma-informed and multiculturally sensitive one-to-one and community-based practice; can run projects which facilitate integration; and can access interpreting services for clients.
- Increase legal aid funding to ensure refugee people are not unfairly denied access to support and do not have to rely on stretched third sector crisis services across the country.

The UK Government should:

- Entrust Local Authorities to engineer their own housing solutions for refugee people, rather than continue an approach lacking consultation at national and regional level.

Future research should:

- Harness the support of all actors above to facilitate a robust cross-regional study of the effectiveness of national integration policy, analysing geographical nuances and incorporating longitudinal research. Queen Margaret University will actively build upon this previous project's partnership-building to develop this research agenda.

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BRIDGES PROGRAMMES

WEA Adult Learning Within Reach

https://www.qmu.ac.uk/schools-and-divisions/ighd/

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