

# 1.

# Introduction

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“I think an immense amount of social cohesion can happen with environmental work. I defy anyone to stand out in the rain all day and come to the end of the day judging people for being white, Muslim, whatever. You remove huge barriers by just getting on and doing.”

Tom Flood, Chief Executive, BTCV



Staff and volunteers,  
Volunteer Centre  
Westminster

“People go to refugee organisation because they are welcoming, understanding. They’re tolerant, not ignorant of who you are and they understand the refugee background.”

Zhila, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

### 1.1 What is this report about?

This report presents case studies of ten organisations outside the refugee sector that are involving refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. The organisations are very varied. They include, for instance, a hospital in Cardiff, a CAB in Glasgow and Oxfam shops in London and Leeds. What they have in common is that they have all had at least three refugees and asylum seekers volunteer with them, often for a period of several months.

Refugees and people seeking asylum often volunteer within their own communities, or with refugee organisations they know and trust. Their involvement brings many benefits – to the organisations they join, to the volunteers, and to the communities and clients they help.

But fewer refugees and people seeking asylum take part in more ‘mainstream’ volunteering initiatives.

For this reason, we decided to visit organisations outside the refugee sector where people seeking asylum and refugees are volunteering. We talked to staff, managers and volunteers.

We found that nearly always an outside organisation helped to bring the volunteering about, so as far as possible we also visited these ‘intermediary’ agencies.

You will find a list of the ten organisations and the intermediary agencies that were visited on [page 4](#).

We set out to learn about what was going on: why were refugees and people seeking asylum getting involved? What were they doing? What were the benefits? What were the barriers, challenges and solutions? What were the lessons that would help other organisations become more inclusive of refugees and people seeking asylum?

This book is a report of the ten case studies, with an account of the main findings and the ways forward that emerged from these.

## 1.2 Who is it for?

We hope this report will be useful to any one wanting to encourage the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers.

This could include:

- any volunteering organisation outside the refugee sector, wanting to involve refugees and people seeking asylum
- volunteer support agencies that help place volunteers with volunteering organisations
- refugee agencies that help place volunteers with non-refugee volunteering organisations
- adult education colleges, work placement organisations and others

We hope it will inspire and encourage a wide range of organisations to build diversity in volunteering.

## 1.3 Who wrote the report and how?

This report has been produced by the Volunteering and Asylum Project (see [the box below](#)), with funding from the Home Office. The project was led by Ruth Wilson, with co-researcher Hannah Lewis.

The research was carried out in 2005, starting with background reading and three focus groups (in London, Birmingham and Glasgow) to discuss the project and to identify possible case studies.

“The media is particularly bad – we listen to it telling us they come here for the benefits. But I’ve learnt the opposite, and I’ve learnt that through contact. They have suffered terribly and they want to contribute. They don’t want to live on benefits. Their main aim is to improve their English and work in the NHS.”

Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services,  
Mental Health, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

Visits to the case study organisations took place between July and November 2005.

Our aim has been to create a resource that is based on careful research, but that is accessible and useful to practitioners and policy makers, and that therefore is part handbook, part report.

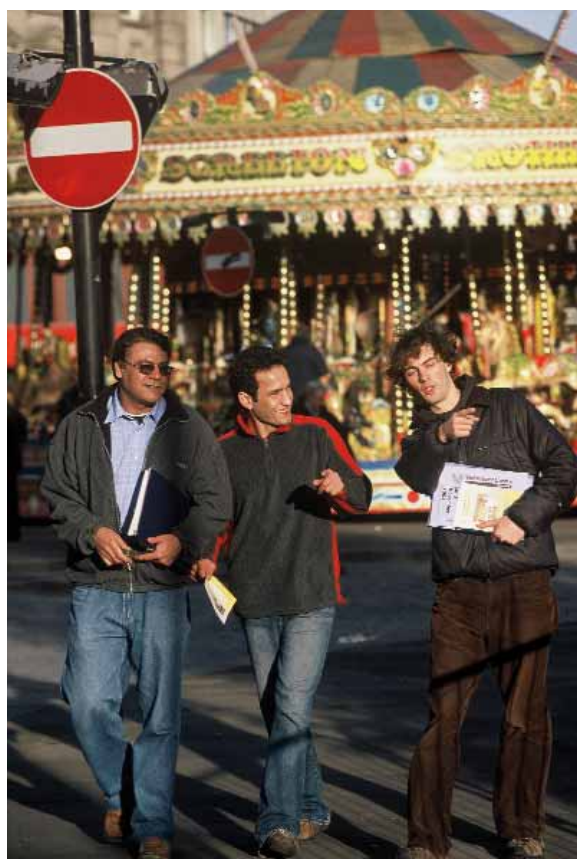
For a more detailed account of our methodology, see [Appendix 5, page 91](#).

### The Volunteering and Asylum Project

The Volunteering and Asylum Project works to promote good practice in volunteering, and to encourage volunteering initiatives that involve refugees, asylum seekers and others.

In 2003 we produced a handbook, ‘the a–z of volunteering and asylum’, published by Volunteering England (see [Appendix 6, page 93](#)). Since then, we have organised a series of training days and seminars across the UK. In Yorkshire, we have run a short training and support programme for refugee community organisations, looking at volunteer management.

The Volunteering and Asylum Project is run by tandem communications and research with an advisory group bringing together a number of organisations (see [Appendix 4](#) for advisory group members).



A member of staff and volunteers, Volunteer Centre Sheffield.

## 1.4 The volunteers

The following refugee and asylum seeking volunteers were interviewed:

	No.	%
Women	21	64
Men	12	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>

Immigration status	No.
Asylum seeker	13
Exceptional Leave to Remain	3
Indefinite Leave to Remain	15
Refused	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

Age	No.
18	2
20-29	7
30-39	11
40-49	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

“Firstly it makes everyone aware these people are not scroungers. They are young people with plans – they have futures. It is good for the other volunteers and the guests as they might live in a protected world away from this kind of contact. It is also good for the young refugees as it makes them realise that although their problems are enormous, other young people have problems too.”

Catherine Herriott, Welfare Officer, West Thames College

Countries of origin	No.
Afghanistan	1
Angola	1
Burundi	1
Colombia	1
Dem. Rep. of Congo	2
Eritrea	2
Ethiopia	3
Iran	4
Kosova	4
Kurdistan (Iraq)	1
Pakistan	1
Russia	1
Somalia	6
Sri Lanka	1
Ukraine	1
Zimbabwe	3
<b>16 countries</b>	<b>33</b>

Experience in country of origin	No.
Accountant	1
Business advisor	1
Car sprayer	1
Chef	1
Civil engineer	1
Dental nurse	1
Engineer	2
Farmer and community worker	1
Police Head of Finance	1
Hotel receptionist	1
Housewife	1
Emergencies medical assistant	1
Journalist	1
Lawyer	1
Manager, private sector	1
Nurse and hospital administrator	1
Retail and sales	3
Secretary	1
Secretary and musician	1
Student	3
Teacher	3

Year of arrival in UK	No.
1991 – 1999	8
2000	3
2001	8
2002	7
2003	4
2004	2
Not known	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

## 1.5 How this report is organised

This report is set out so that readers can dip in and out of the sections that interest them or they find useful. You are also welcome, of course, to read it from cover to cover.

**Summary** sets out our main findings and 12 recommendations.

**Section 1** provides background to the report: our aims and methods (the methodology is also summarised in [Appendix 5, page 91](#), and a fuller account is available at [www.tandem-uk.com](http://www.tandem-uk.com)).

**Section 2** is a summary of some relevant policies and legislation.

**Section 3** brings together the main findings based on an assessment of all the case studies. It groups common themes and concerns, and highlights examples of good or interesting practice.

**Section 4** contains the ten case studies. Most include short profiles of intermediary organisations which have helped facilitate volunteering by refugees and people seeking asylum, and nearly all have one testimony from a volunteer. Key contacts or useful resources are listed at the end of each case study.

**Appendices** include acknowledgements, useful resources and a summary of the methodology.

Throughout, we have made extensive use of quotes to illustrate the experience and insights of volunteers, staff and management. Occasionally, mostly in the case of people who did not have English as a first language, these have been abridged to ensure clarity of meaning. The research is an account of what was going on in Autumn 2005: we have not been able to track developments for individuals and organisations between then and the time of publication.

## 1.6 Five key categories

The following categories are used throughout the report, to group the main findings, and to structure each of the case studies:

**Getting started** explores how and why organisations begin to engage refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers, and why individuals begin to consider volunteering.

**Recruitment** covers the process of getting on board: applications, interviews, induction.

**Volunteering** looks at what helps refugees and people seeking asylum continue to volunteer somewhere – what issues arise, and what solutions are found.

**Leaving volunteering** explores why people leave a volunteering placement and what happens at this stage.

**Follow on** includes the longer-term commitment of organisations to include refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers, and other developments that result from the experience of involving them.

This structure is based on a model developed by Katherine Gaskin and set out in 'A choice blend: what volunteers want from organisation and management' (Gaskin, 2003).

Gaskin's model starts with the non-volunteer and progresses to the long-term volunteer. Four stages are identified: the doubter (who is outside volunteering); the starter (who has made an enquiry or application); the doer (who has begun volunteering) and the stayer (who persists as a long-term volunteer).

As Gaskin explains, the aim of the volunteering world and the volunteering infrastructure is to aid each transition in the most positive way possible, to transform the doubter into a starter into a doer into a stayer.

We adapted this framework to enable us to look at organisations as well as volunteers. We added the term 'leaver' because we wanted to understand what happened when refugees and people seeking asylum finished volunteering somewhere, and we also added a 'follow on' category, to include longer-term organisational issues arising from the initial experience of involving refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers.



“Its been productive for the organisation and beneficial to the volunteers. A lot of work has got done. We think it broadens everyone’s horizons, having volunteers here from outside the Irish community, from other countries. And for people trying to get some insight into cultural issues in England, volunteering with us has lots to offer.”

John Bailey, Manager, Irish Community Care

### 1.7 Social capital: bridging, bonding and linking

The Office for National Statistics defines social capital as ‘the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks’ ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)). While definitions of social capital vary, the main aspects are citizenship, neighbourliness, trust and shared values, community involvement, volunteering, social networks and civic participation.

Three forms of social capital have been identified (Ruston, 2003):

- Bonding social capital: this describes the links within communities or groups, such as those within refugee communities.
- Bridging social capital: the links between different communities or groups – for instance, when networks are extended through a refugee volunteering in a non-refugee organisation, or a refugee community group forms a partnership with another organisation.
- Linking social capital: the links between people with different levels of power (this might also take place when a refugee or someone seeking asylum volunteers outside their community).

Bonding social capital is said to be important for helping people to cope and ‘get by’. Bridging

and linking are seen as particularly useful for ‘getting ahead’.

The government has endorsed all these forms of social capital in its refugee integration strategy (Home Office, 2005), where it sees both the existence of strong refugee community organisations and involvement in the host society as indicators of integration.

We believe that all are potentially of value to refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. There are criticisms of the social capital model – particularly in relation to the risk that the notion of social capital may oversimplify complex relations, and that it may encourage viewing relationships in terms of economic value. For more on these critiques, see Griffiths et al (2005).

This report focuses on ‘bridging’ social capital: the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers outside the refugee sector.

#### Useful publications

A number of publications have helped us with this report – they are listed in [Appendix 7](#). As this is an emerging area of work, the number focussing on volunteering by refugees and asylum seekers is limited but have been particularly useful. They include: Amara et al (undated); Dooner (2005); Stopforth (2001); Wilson (2003) and Working Lives Research Institute (2005). The Institute for Volunteering Research report, ‘Volunteering for All’ (undated) was also helpful.



Volunteer, Maryhill Citizens Advice Bureau, Glasgow.