

# Migrant and refugee organisations in the UK as spaces of care

POLICY BRIEF | JUNE 2024

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**Migrant and refugee organisations play crucial roles in fostering spaces of care for refugee and other migrant families in the UK. Refugees and other migrants often initially seek support from migrant and refugee organisations with accessing statutory and formal services. They are met with, and develop empathic, supportive relationships with staff, volunteers and peers. Yet migrant and refugee organisations in the UK face considerable challenges including: limited funding, understaffing, insufficient resources to train volunteers, dwindling funding streams and differential entitlements for different groups of refugees and other migrants within the wider hostile environment, and the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. More long-term funding, and support for staff and volunteers, is crucial to enable the development of empathic relationships of trust within diverse organisational settings and sustain much needed safe spaces of care for refugee and migrant families within the community.**

## Introduction

This Policy Brief discusses the role of the third sector in relation to migration in receiving countries, the growth of migrant and refugee organisations in the UK, and how these organisations may create spaces of care. It then presents four case studies of migrant and refugee organisations based on partnership working and qualitative interviews conducted in the North and in the South East of England as part of the research project, *Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe*.

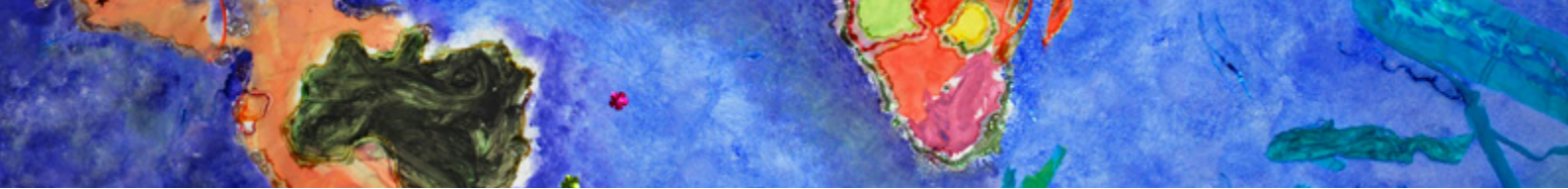
This Policy Brief seeks to provide insight into how migrant and refugee organisations create spaces of care that meet the complex needs of refugee and other migrant families. The analysis demonstrates the need for a holistic approach to tackle complex needs, more funding and support for staff and volunteers to develop supportive, empathic relationships of trust and a diversity of responses and organisational settings in which to create safe spaces of care.

## The role of refugee and migrant third sector organisations

In many European countries, including the UK, third sector organisations have come to play a key role in the lives of migrants. Since the 1980s, governmental attempts to curb public expenditure and reduce state engagement in the provision of social services created social protection gaps for both locals and newcomers in Western societies. These have been increasingly filled by third sector organisations providing social services or improving the ways these are delivered. There are nonetheless differences in the scale and public funding arrangements of third sector organisations across countries. In countries with a liberal welfare model, such as the UK, the state tends to play a residual role in social assistance, and third sector organisations fill gaps in social protection<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, in countries with social democratic welfare models, such as Sweden, the state plays a strong role in social protection, relying less on third sector organisations<sup>2</sup>. Migrant and refugee organisations are broadly defined

1 Martinelli F. (2017). Social services, welfare states and places: an overview. In F. Martinelli, A. Anttonen, and M. Mätzke (Eds.), *Social services disrupted: Changes, challenges and policy implications for Europe in times of austerity* (pp. 11-48). Elgar.

2 Baglioni, S., Calò, F., and Numerato, D. (2022). The role of civil society in the labour market integration of migrants in Europe: An introduction. *VOLUNTAS*, 33(5), 851-861. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00530-2>.



as third sector organisations that seek to respond to the needs of refugees and other migrants and their children<sup>3</sup>. They can be led by local community members, newcomers, and members of minority ethnic communities. They can be formal (such as registered charities) or informal (such as unregistered charities or grassroots networks). Regardless of structure and level of professionalism, migrant and refugee organisations typically aim to improve the welfare of migrants, refugees, or minority ethnic communities more broadly.

The UK migrant and refugee third sector includes a wide range of organisations working at local, regional and national levels, including registered charities, formally constituted not-for-profit organisations, voluntary and community-based organisations, projects, and initiatives and international organisations. Since not all third sector organisations working with migrants and refugees are formal, it is difficult to assess the size of the UK migrant and refugee third sector. In 2022 data suggest there were:

- 1,463 registered charities recorded as doing at least some work on UK refugee and migration issues. While their remit was typically wider, they did deliver some activity on refugee and migration issues in the UK.
- 708 registered charities specifically focused on refugee and migration issues, most of which are located in England and Wales and are small, with an annual budget of £100,000 or less<sup>3</sup>.

Survey data suggest that these organisations predominantly focus on service delivery (such as welfare advice, social/welcoming events, emergency support, integration support, immigration/asylum advice and casework)<sup>3</sup>. They also engage in advocacy activities to influence policy, practice or public opinion (such as public campaigns, local or national political engagement, media/communications work, community organising, strategic litigation and work to engage the wider public through the arts, music and cultural activities). However, these organisations tend to have a low number of fulltime staff members (typically, ranging from 1-5) and often rely on the support of volunteers.

The UK third sector as a whole is considered to be 'failing' in terms of reflecting 'the racial diversity of the individuals, communities and geographic it serves'<sup>4</sup>. However, migrant and refugee organisations in the UK have been striving to achieve the meaningful involvement of people with lived experience of the migration system to inform and shape their priorities, service design, and implementation. Ways in which such involvement is fostered includes encouraging volunteering among migrants and refugees, including migrants and refugees in the organisations' board of trustees and management structures, as well as through hiring refugees and other migrants<sup>5 6</sup>.

Furthermore, some organisations that seek to respond to the needs of refugees and other migrants and their children (both formal and informal) are founded and led by refugees and other migrants themselves or minority ethnic people. These may employ refugee, migrant, or minority ethnic staff members and rely on volunteers from the communities whose needs they address. The trend whereby migrants and people from minority ethnic backgrounds set up and lead third sector organisations to meet needs in their communities dates back to the 1950s. At this time, people from ex-British colonies began migrating to the UK in larger numbers and found that their needs were poorly represented and catered for by mainstream service providers<sup>7</sup>. Such grassroots responses were also a response to racism and the racial discrimination minority ethnic people faced<sup>8</sup>.



3 Grove-White, R. and Kaye, M. (2023). *People, power and priorities: Insights into the UK refugee and migration sector*. Migration Exchange. [online] Available at: [https://barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/People-power-and-priorities\\_REPORT\\_MEX\\_July2023.pdf](https://barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/People-power-and-priorities_REPORT_MEX_July2023.pdf) (Accessed 17 March 2024).

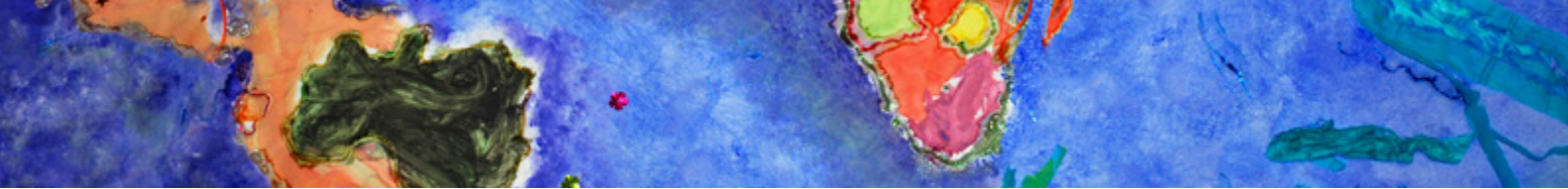
4 ACEVO. (2018). *Racial diversity in the charity sector*, p.2. [online] Available at: <https://www.acevo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Racial-diversity-in-the-charity-sector.pdf> (Accessed 17 March 2024).

5 Grove-White and Kaye (2023).

6 Turcatti, D. (2021). Migrant-led organisations as caring communities: Towards a re-appreciation of the reciprocal dimension of care. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 5(4), 651–667. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239788221X16226509568576>.

7 Voice4Change. (2015). *Bridging the gap in funding for the BAME voluntary and community sector*. Baring Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Funding-for-BAME-VCOs-Report-July-2015-V4CE-II.pdf> (Accessed 17 March 2024).

8 Craig, G. (2011). Forward to the past: can the UK black and minority ethnic third sector survive?, *Voluntary Sector Review*, 2 (3), 367–89.



## Migrant and refugee organisations as spaces of care

Migrant and refugee organisations provide invaluable support to address the intersecting inequalities facing refugees and other migrants in the UK. Research suggests more understanding is needed about the relational dynamics at work within spaces of care, as it is through such relationships that therapeutic effects emerge<sup>9 10 11</sup>.

Our partnership working and analysis of qualitative interviews with transnational families from refugee and other migrant backgrounds and with staff members and other practitioners in the North and South East of England suggests that migrant and refugee organisations foster spaces of care in a range of ways, which we explore in the case studies below.

Some organisations, such as Reading Community Learning Centre, seek to provide women-only safe spaces for vulnerable women from Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee communities; staff members provide informal training opportunities, outreach and signposting to other services, drawing on their own migrant backgrounds and

shared lived experiences to support women and their families. Others, such as Migrant Support, Manchester, are grassroots migrant-led organisations that were established by migrants from a range of backgrounds to provide mutual peer support, advice and a range of opportunities and services. Refugee Support Group specifically focuses on providing support for refugees and asylum-seekers, while St. Vincent's provides a mainstream community setting that meets the diverse needs of migrant and refugee families as well as other members of the local community.

Regardless of the origins, management structures and specific target groups, however, many organisations create spaces of care through listening to refugees and other migrants, supporting their children and other family members, and developing empathic, supportive relationships among staff, volunteers and peers. As discussed below and evidenced in the photographs of family workshop activities, such relationships and encounters in community centre settings may be experienced as therapeutic, caring and supportive of the wellbeing of refugees and other migrants, in contrast to the wider hostile environment and inequalities they face.

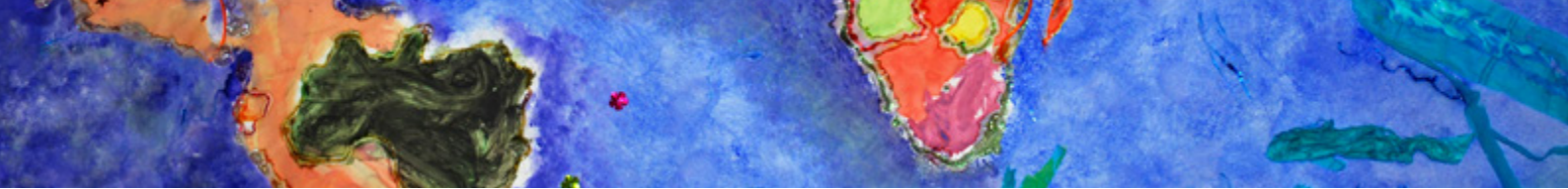


*Photo of a pizza making activity conducted with local families and children in the St Vincent's café during a family workshop in Leeds (October 2023) for the Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe research project*

9 Conradson, D. (2005). Landscape, care and the relational self: Therapeutic encounters in rural England. *Health & Place*, 11(4), pp.337-348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2005.02.004>.

10 Sampson, R., and Gifford, S. (2010). Place-making, settlement and well-being: The therapeutic landscapes of recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds. *Health & Place*, 16(1), pp.116-131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2009.09.004>.

11 Biglin, J. (2021). Photovoice accounts of third places: Refugee and asylum seeker populations' experiences of therapeutic space. *Health & Place*, 71, pp.1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102663>.



## READING COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE, READING

Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC) supports marginalised Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women reach their full potential by providing formal and non-formal classes, guidance and group activities. This community-based non-profit organisation in Central Reading has served refugee and migrant women for over 20 years. In the words of one staff member, *"The purpose of RCLC is to empower and assist refugee and migrant women by providing a place for education as well as a safe space in which women discuss equal rights, and a life without violence and prejudice"*.

RCLC provides support through outreach programmes, training courses, seminars, one-on-one counselling and assistance, crèche services, and social events which aim to foster self-assurance, develop skills, and eliminate social isolation in a safe environment.

RCLC's women-centred approach allows staff to work with each woman to identify specific challenges and barriers to achieving their potential. Staff and volunteers provide additional holistic support to the learners including mental health and other health issues, housing, benefits, employment, relational problems such as domestic violence, the school system, or immigration.

Staff members foster a space of care by creating a women-only safe space. Small class sizes and having no eligibility criteria, mean that classes are accessible to all, regardless of length of time in the UK or legal status. Providing a free creche on site for learners also addresses barriers to learning for mothers with young children. Staff members interviewed for the *Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe* research project emphasised their empathy with the women they support, due to shared experiences as mothers and carers of family members, both in the UK and transnationally, and lived experiences as members of migrant and minority ethnic communities:

*"There is a connection because we are all women here. So, most of the women who come here have got same responsibilities. [...] So, I do have sort of empathy, I know how these people feel and I know how frustrating it can be if you... if you want to learn and you, for example, don't have childcare, we offer childcare here"*.

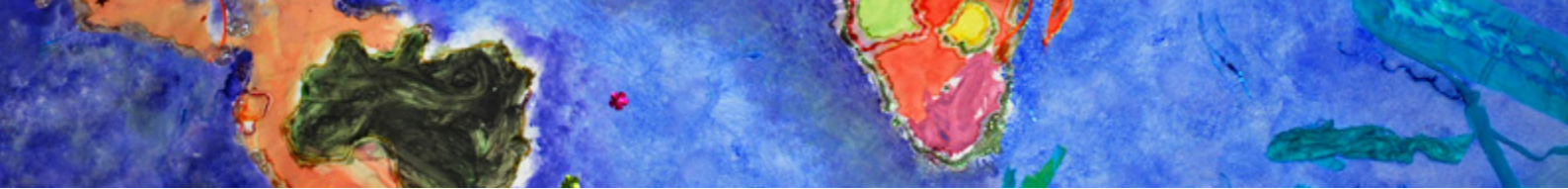
RCLC also created a multilingual space of care through shared lived experience. Learners speak 30 different languages, reflecting the diversity of migration backgrounds of the women accessing classes who come from 36 countries of origin. All the women working at the centre are from minority ethnicities and most of the staff members and volunteers speak additional languages to English and many had been learners themselves at the centre. As a staff member explained, this means that:

*"...everyone can reflect and understand, so they have empathy, but they also have languages. So, I think every single person who works here has at least two to three languages they can speak in addition to English, which means within the centre itself, there's always somebody they can speak to or relate to. We also have translation volunteers, so they're not based here but we can call upon them to come in"*.

Creating a safe space was also important for staff members, as well as for learners, with training provided for all staff members on mental health first aid and emotional boundaries, as well as safeguarding and ensuring confidentiality for learners:

*"it's not just about safe space for the women who visit but safe space for the staff as well, because they have to take a lot on if they hear all these stories and they have to support them. So, the staff are supported and then the learners are supported"*.

The crucial long term benefits of fostering such spaces of care and supportive empathic relationships for migrant and refugee women are summed up by a learner and volunteer: *"I will greatly remember the friendly environment of the RCLC. Your classes not only increased my confidence in tackling the challenges of immigration but also introduced me to reliable friends. The RCLC felt like a family to me, providing valuable experiences that I will carry with me. I'm incredibly grateful for trusting and giving me the opportunity to volunteer at this centre. I am very happy and lucky that my first experience in a new country was with kind, reliable and supportive people like you. Your love and trust gave me strength and self-confidence."*



## ST. VINCENT'S CENTRE, LEEDS

St. Vincent's Centre, Leeds responds to the needs that people in the local community identify as most important. It tailors its approach to address the ways in which those people have said they want to access learning, help and support. There is small staff team supported by a team of trained volunteers providing holistic support and development opportunities, advice services, education and building capacity in the community. To create a welcoming and caring space, they present the Centre as "a safe community hub" and emphasise their non-judgemental and inclusive approach. Their services are free and open to everyone, their moto being that "they help everyone, regardless of status"<sup>12</sup>. They offer regulated high quality free immigration advice, debt advice, emergency food and essential items and wider support.

The Centre builds trusting relationships by offering holistic practical help that often entails navigating the complex reality of knowing about statutory support and accessing it, or other practical matters that are important to families from all backgrounds. Some examples of this are access to benefits, adult learning, registering children for school or nursery places, access to health services, understanding what documents are required to open a bank account, or how to access opportunities to volunteer. There are free

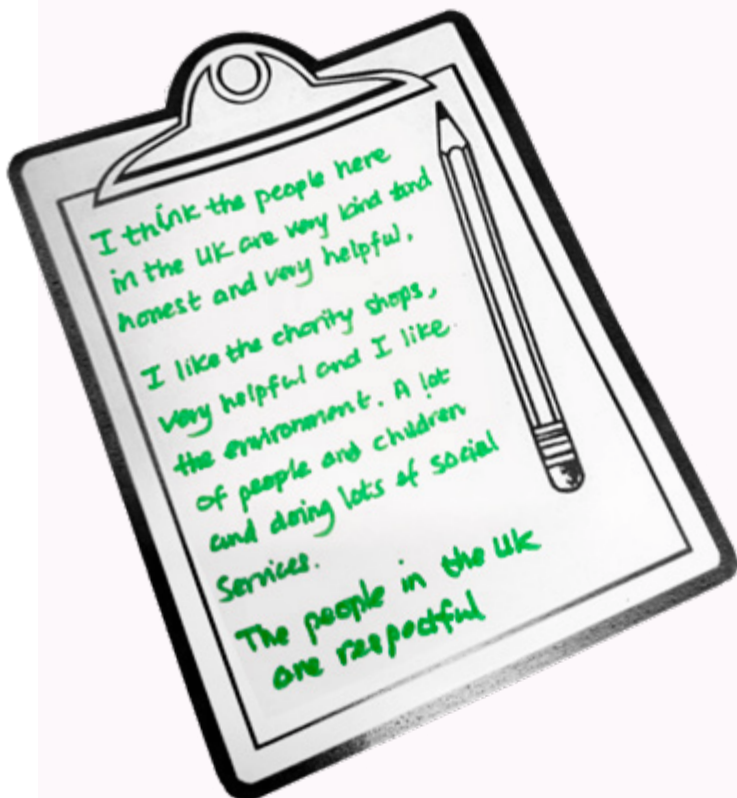
classes covering topics that may be relevant for daily life for adult learners, currently including: ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), using computers and other IT equipment, help into work, reading support, cooking and basic maths.

A staff member explained St. Vincent's approach to support: *"...some of the things are very practical but kind of really looking at what do people need in their everyday lives, but then also more widely [...] dealing with issues of connecting to the community, connecting to other people and the social isolation, as well bringing people together and all of us learning from each other is kind of key to everything that we try to organise"*.

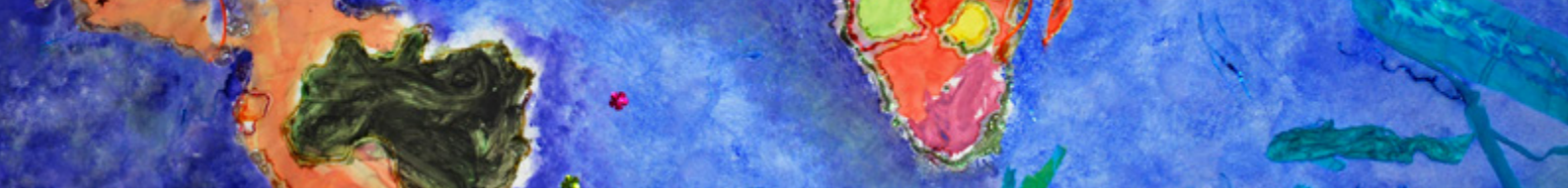
To enable people to develop supportive networks, in addition to classes and opportunities to volunteer, there are also social groups and activities such as drama, afternoon social club and creative crafts sessions. These activities take place in and around their centre, bringing individuals and families from different backgrounds together to share experiences and build friendships. The centre also hosts a charity shop and an affordable café, open to everyone and with toys available for children to play, thus providing a physical safe space where people can be, interact or access support. This space is also used for ad-hoc events and activities which bring local families from diverse backgrounds together.

Through all the advice, support and practical activities, the Centre aims to help people recognise and further develop their skills, find hope and confidence to move forward with their unique situation, take actions together to improve situations and connect with others in the community who they may not normally meet. They are also a special project of a national organisation (the St. Vincent de Paul Society) that further supports the efforts across England and Wales through a network of local support centres and groups of volunteers working towards wider social justice changes.

*Photo of a participant's reflections on St. Vincent's community centre during a family feedback workshop in Leeds (October, 2024) for the Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe research project*



<sup>12</sup> St Vincent's Centre, Leeds. (2023). *St Vincent's Centre, Leeds: A safe hub dedicated to changing lives through advice, support, education and community*. [online] Available at: <https://svp.org.uk/stvincentsleeds> (Accessed 30 April 2024).



### **REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP, READING, BERKSHIRE**

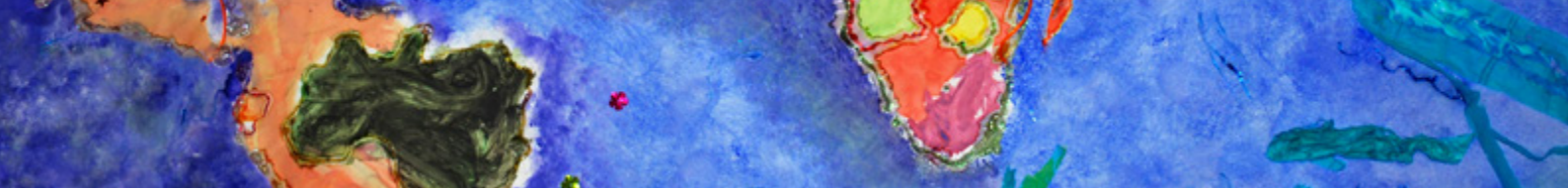
The Refugee Support Group (RSG) is a Reading-based charity that aims to make Berkshire a supportive and inclusive society which embraces refugees and asylum-seekers with humanity, respect and dignity. RSG was established in 1994 as an entirely volunteer-run organisation. Over the years its circumstances and employee numbers have fluctuated with the team now numbering over twenty paid staff and over forty volunteers. The huge importance of involving those with lived experience in the direction and management of the charity has always been recognized: 25% of the staff and trustees have lived experience and 50% are from Black and minority ethnic and refugee communities. This fosters close links with the various refugee communities in Berkshire which have been so key to the *Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe* research project.

The core service of RSG has always been immigration and welfare advice provided by a team of trained caseworkers. Currently, it also delivers on behalf of Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Council, the various government resettlement schemes and signposts to other relevant organisations. Safe spaces of care are created by providing informal drop-ins every week where clients can socialise, celebrate festivals, benefit from

information sessions and both learn and practise English. RSG helped Reading become a City of Sanctuary and continues to host its programmes while various sport, art and drama initiatives in partnership with other organisations are routinely pursued. The Homework Club twins local schools and sanctuary seeking children and their families.

The mental health and wellbeing of both clients and RSG staff is of prime consideration: issues which came to the forefront in the interviews conducted as part of the *Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe* research. RSG is increasing its signposting to wellbeing organisations and statutory mental health support and regularly hosts Together, a mental health programme, in partnership with Berkshire West NHS Trust. The support and advice offered is always holistic, recognizing how the issues people they support face, whether immigration, health or education related are intertwined.

The space of care and support that RSG provides through the drop-in and other activities and case worker support are captured in this feedback from clients: *"Since ages I needed someone to cry and today that happened which makes me feel so much better. Thank you for listening to me and for your valuable time"; "I enjoy the group because we share ideas. Sharing experiences from one another. We get together and it's like we are one big family".*



## MIGRANT SUPPORT, MANCHESTER

Migrant Support became a charity in 2011, evolving from a community group called Migrants Supporting Migrants, which in 2007 had approximately 20 members from diverse cultural and migrant backgrounds, coming from Eastern Europe, South America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa<sup>13</sup>. Supported by Oxfam's migrant workers project as part of the UK poverty programme, the initial group aimed to help new arrivals facing barriers to integrating into the new life in the UK and empowering those communities to become self-reliant. Migrant Support, the charity, since 2011, has grown in confidence and experience, strengthened its networks and maintained the initial profound link with the community it serves, making peer support and empowerment the core of its work.

When a founding member was asked as part of the Care, Inequality and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe research project, "So, what has it meant to you, Migrant Support? What have you found here?", they replied: "You know, just community. Good friends, good time".

Throughout the years, Migrant Support has planned and delivered a range of projects with the support of several funders and trusts. All these projects offered support to vulnerable people from migrant/refugee backgrounds in different areas, but mainly education, training and wellbeing. Working with other voluntary organisations, Migrant Support has also raised awareness about migration issues and barriers to, as well as the benefits of, social cohesion.

Through volunteering and peer support, Migrant Support encourages people from migrant backgrounds to create a loop of support from migrants to migrants using existing skills such as languages and cultural knowledge, thus building capacity and self-reliance. This helps create a friendly, secure, and caring atmosphere where trust and confidence organically grow. Activity-focused groups are part of the projects they deliver and many become supportive networks. In addition, many of those who benefited from support in the past, have continued their connection by volunteering, supporting events or becoming trustees.

A YUM CHA project participant who aims to support elderly people from Hong Kong commented: "Migrant Support helps us feel part of a community," Similarly, an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learner said, "Migrant Support helped us gain confidence in communicating in English and move forward." Another participant during the pandemic said, "Thanks to Migrant Support, we were able to continue learning and kept in touch with the community – it helped us not to feel alone".

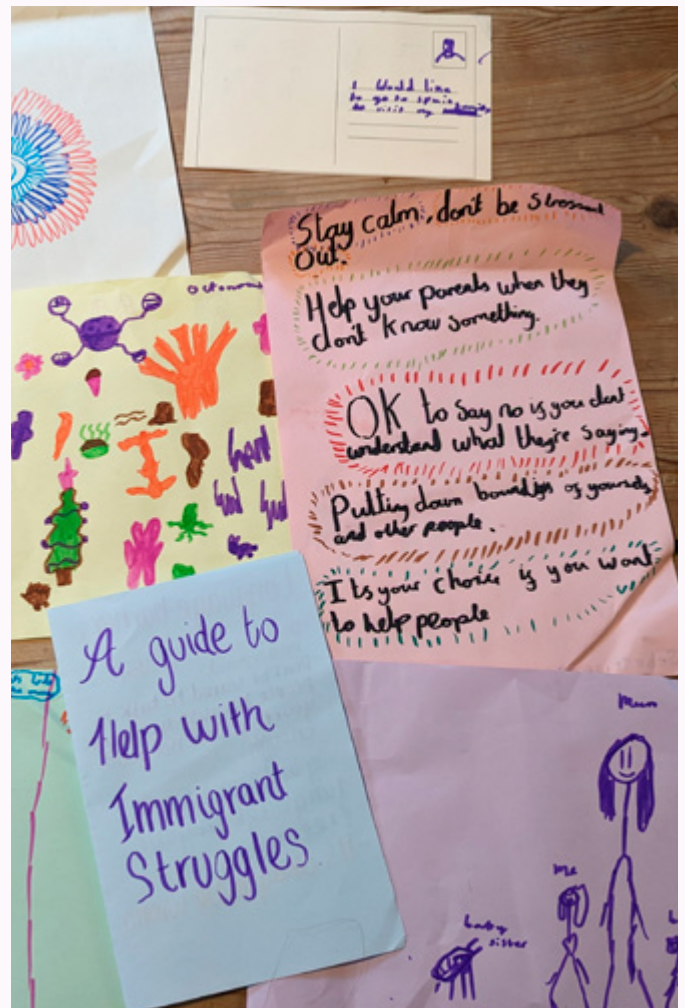
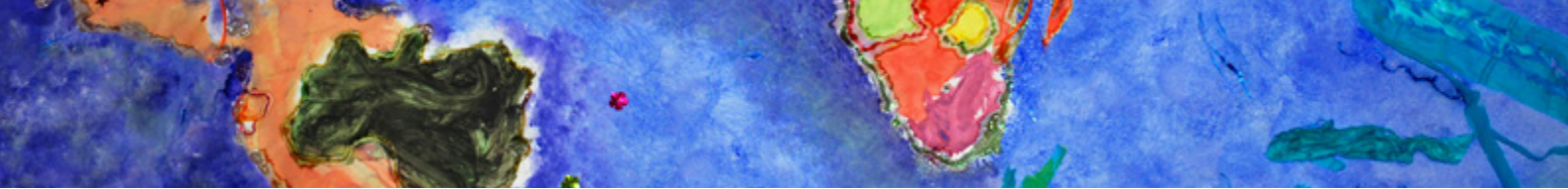


Photo of children's messages on how to care for themselves and help others in a participatory activity facilitated by member of Migrant Support during a family workshop in Manchester (January 2024) for the Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe research project

<sup>13</sup> Oxfam. (2008). "Let us tell you" Oxfam [online] Available at: <https://www.migrantsupport.org.uk/briefings-community-research-reports.html> (Accessed 17 March 2024).



## Challenges faced by migrant and refugee organisations

While migrant and refugee organisations provide much appreciated safe spaces of care where refugees and other migrants are supported across several domains of their lives, practitioners participating in the research as well as other studies have identified major challenges facing organisations. These include:

### LIMITED FUNDING AND COMPETITION, PARTICULARLY DUE TO AUSTERITY, POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RECENT FINANCIAL CRISIS, WITHIN THE WIDER HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

The limited funding available within the third sector in the context of austerity, post-COVID-19 and current financial crisis context, in addition to the wider hostile environment, creates competition among small migrant and refugee organisations who are applying for the same funding pots<sup>14 15</sup>. The pandemic saw an unanticipated increase in flexible, emergency funding to the sector in 2020. However, this funding benefitted more established and larger organisations. Now that COVID-19 emergency funding streams have ended and given current cutbacks in central government funding to local authorities, organisations are experiencing heightened financial insecurity and competition over grants is fiercer than ever<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, the hostile policy environment and negative media and public debate around asylum-seekers creates what one senior manager described as an "intimidating" fundraising environment within which to operate.

### INEQUALITIES IN FUNDING

Migrant and refugee organisations led by migrants and minority ethnic people face more obstacles to win grants, as they tend to be small and micro. Research by Voice4Change from 2015 indicated that the average funding for minority ethnic organisations is around half the average<sup>17</sup>.

### UNDERSTAFFED AND RELIANCE ON VOLUNTEERS WHO MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE EXPERIENCED, QUALIFIED OR HAVE RECEIVED TRAINING

Some interviewees indicated how the migrant and refugee organisation they worked with require typically more staff in order to provide better services to migrants and refugees. Furthermore, while being able to rely on volunteers who gift their time and resources to support migrants and refugees is of utmost importance, volunteers are not always necessarily trained in delivering support to migrants and refugees or in understanding the specific issues that certain groups of newcomers face. For example, teachers of refugees are often at the front-line of dealing with challenging behaviour or trauma in the classrooms. Refugees' home languages play an important role in all classrooms when vulnerable learners are encouraged to use a language that is familiar to them<sup>18</sup> as part of inclusive learning. Teachers need the skills to know how to do this.

### COMMITTED BUT OVERWORKED STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS CAN FACE MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Staff and volunteers work hard to look after others because there is no one else. They often forget or neglect to look after themselves and can suffer from burnout and trauma from working with those experiencing trauma and struggle to keep their mental health/work life balanced. This is often heightened for staff/volunteers who live within the community they work in as it can be difficult when outside of work/volunteering. It can be difficult to say 'no' to someone who needs help especially when it is known that they are not able to access support on their own (often due to language barriers) once people "know they know the system" they are sought out for support. Recognition of the need to care for the wellbeing of staff members led to Reading Community Learning Centre providing emotional boundaries training for all staff members. It can also be difficult for part-time staff members in the post-COVID-19 context, when work mobile phones have become increasingly provided for staff, who may find it difficult to switch off outside of working hours.

<sup>14</sup> Grove-White and Kaye. (2023).

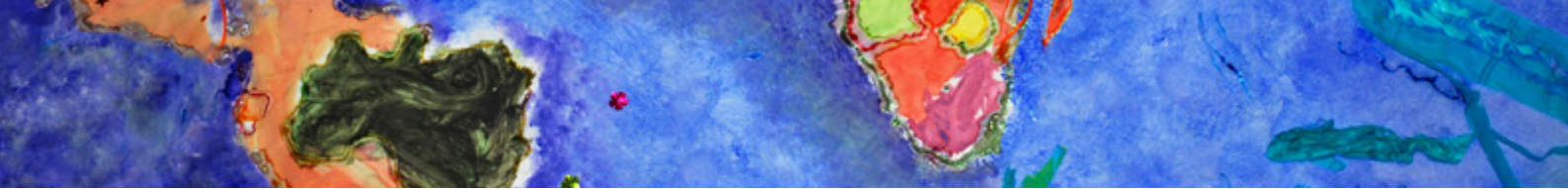
<sup>15</sup> Bassel, L., & Emejulu, A. (2017). *Minority women and austerity: Survival and resistance in France and Britain*. Bristol University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Grove-White and Kaye. (2023).

<sup>17</sup> Voices4Change. (2015).

<sup>18</sup> Capstick, T. (ed.) (2018). *Language for Resilience*, London, British Council [online] Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language\\_for\\_resilience\\_-\\_cross-disciplinary\\_perspectives\\_0.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_for_resilience_-_cross-disciplinary_perspectives_0.pdf) (Accessed 17 March 2023).





## **DIFFICULT TO CATER FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS SETTLING IN THE UK UNDER DIFFERENT VISAS SCHEMES AND WITH DIVERSE ENTITLEMENTS**

Migrant and refugee organisations provide support to a diverse group who arrive in the UK under different visas and refugee resettlement schemes and/or who seek asylum. These programmes operate by various criteria and grant newcomers different levels of support and entitlements. This creates difficulties and confusion for migrant and refugee organisation staff and volunteers who may have differing funding streams for different groups, which they need to target to meet funding requirements, while also seeking to address inequalities created by different eligibility criteria. Such differential entitlements may also foster resentment, processes of racialisation and inequalities related to particular nationalities or legal statuses among refugee and other migrant communities and majority populations.

## **LIMITED COLLABORATIONS WITHIN AND ACROSS SECTORS**

Some interviewees highlighted the need for more coalitions and collaboration between organisations within the sector, as well as between the sector and public services, to better meet the needs of refugees and other migrants. Research indicated that during COVID-19 pandemic, partnerships within the third sector and between the third and public sectors emerged to better deliver services and to support community-organising and advocacy work<sup>19</sup>. However, it is unclear how these partnerships will be sustained and how new partnerships will be established after COVID-19 and in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis.

## **CONCERNS OVER THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS**

Migrant and refugee organisations are now contending with the cost-of-living crisis which is creating an increase in demand of their services among the communities they support. Organisations have several concerns, including the worry that people may not continue to donate to their cause or participate, as volunteers and donors struggle with the impact of the crisis. Charities also expect to struggle with the increased cost of utilities and venues<sup>20</sup>.

## **LONG TERM IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC**

A positive outcome of increased online communication during the pandemic is that health information relating to COVID-19 was shared, translated and mediated across refugee networks, including third sector organisations. Refugees with social capital were able to draw on knowledge from across their networks about advice for keeping well. However, there was a great deal of misinformation about COVID-19 and isolated refugees may not always have the skills to know what is a legitimate source and how best to engage with news or information about health and wellbeing. Third sector organisations are often the first stop for many refugees who wish to check information or request third sector organisation staff translate information that they are unsure about.

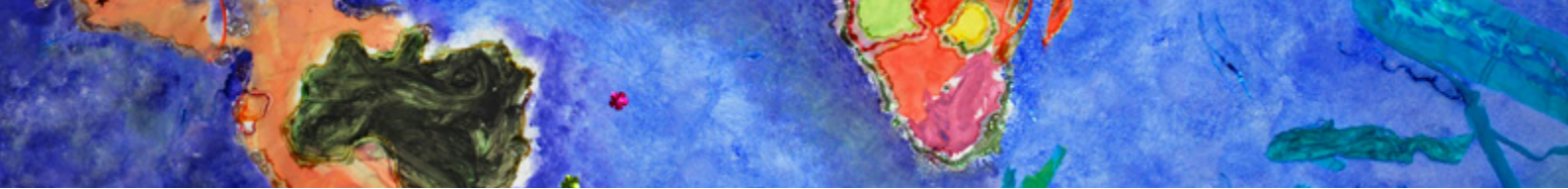
## **Concluding remarks and recommendations**

The case studies of migrant and refugee organisations participating in our research demonstrate the importance of developing relationships of trust and empathy between staff members, volunteers and refugees and other migrants they support. Many refugees and other migrants said that they developed relationships that were 'like family' within the safe spaces organisations created, which may help to reduce the sense of isolation transnational families often experience when geographically separated across borders from close family members. Such relationships can also foster a sense of belonging to the local community. The case studies also demonstrate the value of a diversity of organisational settings in which to create spaces of care for refugees and other migrants. While organisations provide highly valued holistic care and support for refugees and other migrants and their family members, they also need to care for staff members and volunteers, so that they feel supported and able to provide the complex, and often emotionally intensive, support that this work requires.

To conclude, fostering supportive, empathic relationships and providing holistic support within a diverse range of third sector organisations and community spaces may be

<sup>19</sup> Grove-White and Kaye. (2023).

<sup>20</sup> Charity Link. (2023). *The cost of living crisis and the impact on UK charities*. 11 May 2023. [online] Available at: <https://www.charitylink.net/blog/cost-of-living-crisis-impact-uk-charities> (Accessed 17 March 2023).



most beneficial in meeting migrant families' often complex support needs and addressing inequalities created by the wider hostile environment. More long-term funding and support for staff and volunteers is crucial to enable the development of supportive, empathic relationships of trust. Such efforts will help to foster and sustain safe spaces of care for refugee and migrant families within the community.

## Methodological note

This Policy Brief draws on analysis of existing studies, partnership working with the four organisations featured here and analysis of qualitative interviews with practitioners and family participants in the research project, *Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing among Transnational Families in Europe*. We are very grateful to Reading Community Learning Centre, Refugee Support Group, Migrant Support and St. Vincent's Leeds, community researchers and transnational family members participating in the project for their time and contribution to the research process.

## For more information

This Policy Brief was produced by Domiziana Turcatti (National Institute of Economic and Social Research and University of Oxford), Ruth Evans (University of Reading), Rosa Mas Giralt (University of Leeds), Tony Capstick (University of Reading), Julie Linley (St. Vincent's Centre, Leeds), Aisha Malik (Reading Community Learning Centre), Alison McQuitty (Refugee Support Group), Sandra Penalosa T.-Rice (Migrant Support), with research assistance from Jodie Ellis. It is an output of the research project, *Care, Inequality and Wellbeing in Transnational Families in Europe*: a comparative, intergenerational study in Spain, France, Sweden and UK, led by Professor Ruth Evans, University of Reading and Dr. Rosa Mas Giralt, University of Leeds, UK.

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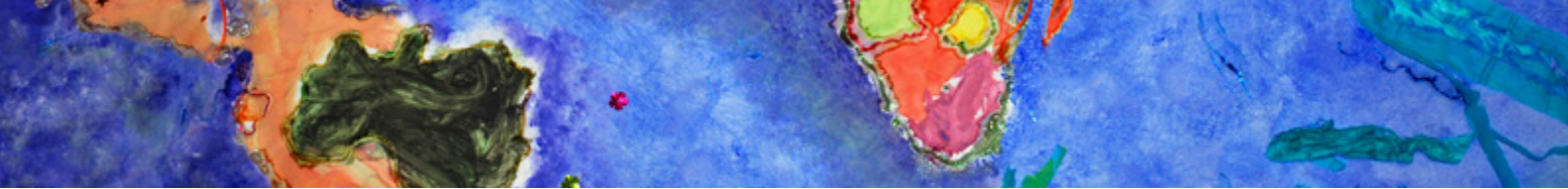
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Read more: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/transnational-families/>





Sanctuary Strikers' football team, Refugee Support Group



Hot meals provided at St. Vincent's community centre, Leeds during the COVID-19 pandemic



Holistic educational programmes for marginalised migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women at Reading Community Learning Centre



Befriending support at Refugee Support Group, Reading



Art therapy group, St. Vincent's Centre, Leeds

**Transnational Families in Europe research project: Care, Inequalities and Wellbeing**  
<https://research.reading.ac.uk/transnational-families/>

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