

Together at last

Supporting refugee families who reunite in the UK



Share this report using
#EveryRefugeeMatters



This project is part funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Making management of migration flows more efficient across the European Union.

The power
of **kindness**

Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank all the families who participated in this research and shared their experiences of being reunited in the UK. This report wouldn't have been possible without you.
- We are also indebted to the Family Reunion Integration Service team who took part in focus groups and shared their insights and expertise.
- We owe a special thanks to Anna Beesley, Stefanie Danylyk and Selame Negussie Taye for the drafting of this report, to Ellie Winn for her editing, and Ben Campbell for his work compiling and checking the statistics.
- We are grateful to everyone on the British Red Cross project group who gave their time and expertise to the project and report: Phil Arnold, Sabah Aslam, Joe Brook, Matthew Carter, Jon Featonby, Lucy Fisher, Kieron Hardie, Fraser Paterson, Claire Porter, Jenny Reed, Sohini Tanna and Kenneth Watt.
- Lastly, we would like to thank our project partners Queen Margaret University and Barnardo's for their support and commitment throughout the project, and the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund for funding the Family Reunion Integration Service.

Copyright © 2022 Any part of this publication may be cited, translated into other languages or adapted to meet the local needs without prior permission of the British Red Cross, provided that the source is clearly stated.

Design and layout:

graphics.coop

For media requests, please contact

press@redcross.org.uk

For more information on the policy recommendations and research, please contact

advocacy@redcross.org.uk

Contents

Glossary	4
Foreword	5
About the VOICES Network	6
Executive summary	7
Key findings	9
Recommendations	11
Introduction	13
Family Reunion Integration Service	16
Research aims and methods	18
Findings	21
Arriving in the UK	21
Housing	26
Work and financial income	38
Health	50
Education	56
Family dynamics	64
Improving integration for reunited families: learning from resettlement	68
Recommendations	70
References	72

Glossary

- **Applicant** the family member(s) abroad who are applying to come to the UK to reunite with a **sponsor**.
- **Benefit cap** a limit to the total amount individuals can receive in welfare benefits. The limit varies depending on factors such as type of benefit or age and exemptions apply.
- **Biometric Residence Permit** the identity card issued by the Home Office which is given to those with refugee status (and other migrants). It contains information about the holder's identity, immigration status and biometric information (photograph and fingerprints).
- **ESOL** stands for English for speakers of other languages.
- **Fair Access Protocol** exists in England and Wales and ensures that vulnerable children struggling to access education are supported to get a school place as quickly as possible.
- **Family Reunion Integration Service (FRIS)** the British Red Cross service supporting reunited refugee families navigate their first three months in the UK.
- **Family Reunion Support Project (FRSP)** the British Red Cross service which provides information and legal advice to refugees who want to apply for refugee family reunion visas.
- **Family Reunion Travel Assistance (FRTA)** the British Red Cross service which supports eligible families with travel costs.
- **Habitual Residence Test** the two-part test which benefit applicants must pass to be eligible for certain benefits. Individuals must prove they have a 'settled intention' to stay in the UK.
- **Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer (LAASLO)** the LAASLO's role is to support those recently granted refugee status to transition from asylum support during the 28 day move on period.
- **National Insurance Number (NINO)** a unique number issued to individuals for social security, tax and national insurance contribution purposes.
- **No recourse to public funds (NRPF)** a condition attached to some people who are subject to immigration controls, who have limited or no leave to enter or remain in the UK. The condition prohibits access to some benefits such as Universal Credit and Child Benefit.
- **Refugee** a person who has proven that they would be at risk if returned to their home country and has had their claim for asylum accepted by the UK government.
- **Refugee family reunion** a key safe route for those with refugee status or humanitarian protection to bring immediate family members to the UK.
- **Refugee resettlement** a key safe route for refugees to come to the UK. The UK has a number of resettlement schemes supporting vulnerable refugees and works closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to facilitate their safe transfer to the UK.
- **Sponsor** the individual in the UK who has been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection and whose family (**applicants**) are applying to join them in the UK.

Foreword

We live in a world where life can take us on an incredible journey.

When refugees flee from danger, persecution or torture, they leave behind family and the place they call home, not knowing if they will return, what will happen to their family or when they will next see them again.

Not all refugees will be able to reunite with their family again. For many it is not an option. And some may choose not to. For those who do want to reunite, even once they have found safety family reunion doesn't happen automatically. The rules of family reunion have to be applied and the restricted definition of "family" under family reunion comes into play.

When families can reunite, it should be a moment of joy and the start of a new chapter. But for many it's a time of new challenges and hardship. This report looks at what happens to families after they are reunited in the UK.

I have lived experience of integrating into a new community and understand first-hand what life is like for a family reunited, who have lived apart from each other for a while. When you leave a place you call home, you choose your own path without knowing the outcome of your choice. It's sometimes a journey of no return.

During a refugee family reunion journey, there is so much we come across and it has become increasingly difficult to know the end or final destination to this journey. Yes, it is a journey of people reinventing themselves in a new land, in a new environment, in a new place, in a new society and settling in a new community.

Initially, we only saw the bright and beautiful side of life, like every other family moving to the UK to reunite with loved ones, and did not want anything to stop us.

My family had a soft landing and an easier start in the UK because I had the British Red Cross watching my back and holding my hand all the way through. For me, hope came alive with the embrace of the Red Cross. The children's schools were applied for, Universal Credit was sorted, and food vouchers were provided while we waited for a first payment. They contacted the local authority to let them know about us and ask for support with accessing housing.

Even with the support of the Red Cross, there were challenges and hiccups along the way. Several times the Red Cross staff needed to contact the authority or relevant agencies, advocating on our behalf to get results.

My family and I were fortunate to have the support of the Red Cross when we were reunited to help us in those first few weeks. But what about other families who don't have the help of the Red Cross or other organisations?

Some arriving family members are practically blank when they come into the UK. No one tells them how to get a hospital appointment, register with a GP, apply for a place in school, get financial support, apply for a fund or even something as simple as where they can go for help to get access to basic services.

For most of us coming to the UK, we come with potential, qualifications, experience. We always have high hopes and so much expectation of a life of stability and comfort, a new and beautiful beginning, a time to start again to rebuild lost dreams and aspirations, or most of the time just an ordinary hope to use our skills and experience to contribute to our new community. But, in reality, it doesn't turn out the same.

Moving and settling into any new community or environment comes with acceptance. This resonates with how people treat us when we move into a new community and how we as a family accept our new community as a place of home. To take the example of education, the government does not provide support to help struggling children access education immediately. Schooling made a big difference in the lives of my children (even though this didn't happen immediately, they had to wait for months before getting an offer). To be able to go out to school, interact with other children, make friends and socialise was a point of actualisation for them.

I sometimes wonder if I have ever integrated completely. Yes, I may have shelter over me and my family, and the children are excelling in school. I have made friends and have a good neighbourhood, access to healthcare, and have gained employment, but what of my intrapersonal integration?

Have I ever forgotten where I came from or, should I ask, do we totally accept our new place of refuge as “Home”? We always remember our country of origin as home and always wish we can one day go back, that feeling of ownership is still loyal to our original homeland. But refugees have two homes, and it is beautiful to feel at home in the UK. To truly feel at home here, however, we need support with our integration.

As this report shows, there are some simple changes that could make big differences for reunited families. In particular, not waiting until family members have arrived before securing suitable housing and not stopping Universal Credit payments while processing joint applications

would have a positive impact on reunited families’ first few months in the UK. It would mean fewer delays for things like school or GP registration, and allow families to feel more secure more quickly in their new home.

Reunited families, like mine, need support to settle and start to build a life in the UK. Read this report, and you will understand more about the struggles families are facing right now, but also about the changes that would ease those first weeks and months and help reunited families to start to make the UK their home.

**Loice Ngozi Benjamin-Anyawueze,
Ambassador for the VOICES Network**

About the VOICES Network



The VOICES Network brings together people with experience of the issues that affect refugees and people seeking asylum. Launched in 2018, it brings together ambassadors in Birmingham, Derby, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester, London, Sheffield, the South-East of England and across Wales. The VOICES Network is supported by the British Red Cross.

With training and support, VOICES ambassadors work together to speak out about issues that affect refugees and people seeking asylum. Sharing their own experiences, they advocate to change policy, use the media to change points of view and support the British Red Cross and others to improve services through expert feedback.

Listen to the ‘We are VOICES’ podcast [here](#).



Executive summary

The moment that a family, torn apart by war, violence or persecution, is able to reunite is one of joy and relief. After what may have been several years of being separated by continents and oceans, parents are able to hug their children again and look into the eyes of their partner. It should signal the end of what can be great unhappiness and the start of something new, as the family rebuilds its life in the UK.

But for many refugee families it is a moment that signals the start of a new struggle as they try to overcome a multitude of barriers to make sure they have the basic things they need, including suitable accommodation and an income, as well as any children being able to quickly restart their schooling.

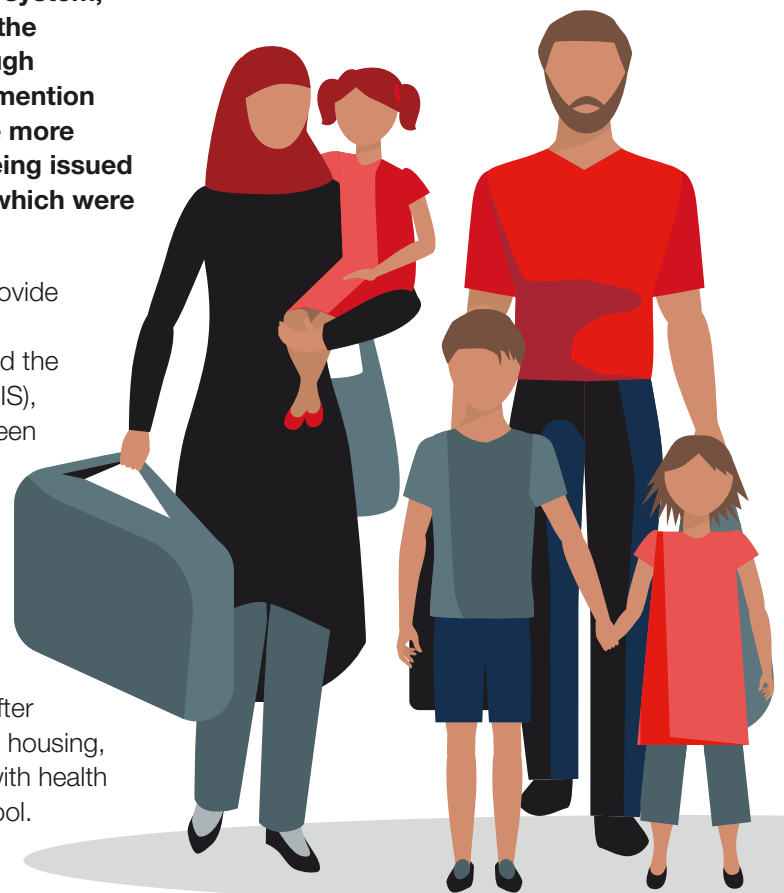
Families have to do this without any formal support, all the while navigating complex systems that too often don't reflect the reality of life for a reunited refugee family. Despite being a key safe route for people to reach the UK there has been very little, if any, government focus on the outcomes for reunited refugee families.

While the New Plan for Immigration, which sets out the UK government's proposed reforms of the refugee and asylum system, includes commitments to support the integration of people arriving through resettlement schemes there is no mention of reunited families. This is despite more than 30,000 family reunion visas being issued in the last five years, nine in 10 of which were granted to women and children.

To address these challenges and to provide much needed assistance for reuniting families, the British Red Cross launched the Family Reunion Integration Service (FRIS), in partnership with Barnardo's and Queen Margaret University, in January 2019. Funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), FRIS has worked with families across nine different regions and all four countries of the UK. It has provided support to over 1,000 families during the first three months after being reunited, helping them to secure housing, navigate the welfare system, register with health services and get any children into school.

This report sets out the British Red Cross's findings from three years of FRIS, drawing on data and testimony from the 1,173 families who have been supported. It highlights the experiences of reuniting families and identifies the key challenges they face, as well as the key measures that would improve their prospects for successfully integrating in their new home.

We found that for many families one of their first experiences after reuniting is to present as homeless to their local council and then spend several weeks, if not months, in unsuitable emergency accommodation. This was a result of many local authorities not being willing to try to source housing before the family was reunited, even when they knew weeks in advance that family members were arriving.



Families also frequently faced a “destitution gap” when reunited. Having been unable to work during the asylum process, most of the refugee sponsors already in the UK were in receipt of Universal Credit and had entered into debt during the family reunion process to meet travel and other costs. Once they were joined by their family, they found that their Universal Credit payments were then stopped for an average of nine weeks while their case was updated or a joint claim processed. This left families without any income and dependent on financial support from charities.

Families also struggled to register at their local GP surgery and to successfully get their children into school, usually due to a lack of information in suitable languages or frontline staff having a lack of understanding about the rights and entitlements of reunited refugees.

None of the challenges reunited refugee families face highlighted in this report are deliberate. Instead, they are unintended consequences of policies and practices that

have not been designed with them in mind. Through building relationships with local authorities, jobcentres and GP surgeries, our FRIS teams have been able to show that many of these challenges can be overcome.

Key to achieving this is for statutory agencies to work together and start their processes as soon as they are told that a family will be arriving, in the same way they do when supporting refugees arriving through one of the UK’s resettlement programmes. When this happened, the challenges families faced once they had been reunited were significantly reduced.

As the UK government moves forward with its New Plan for Immigration, it is vital that improving the experiences of refugee families reunited in the UK and their prospects for successful integration are included. The recommendations we make in this report, based on the best practice that was developed through the FRIS programme, would go a long way to achieving that.

Key recommendations

- 1.** Reuniting refugee families should be supported to integrate as soon as possible when they arrive, with processes starting prior to their journey to the UK.
- 2.** Reunited refugee families should be able to access suitable accommodation as quickly as possible and should not have to present as homeless to a local authority on the day of arrival in the UK.
- 3.** Reunited refugee families should be able to secure an income as quickly as possible, and welfare system processes should ensure that families do not face a destitution gap.
- 4.** Reunited refugee families should be able to navigate the health system to access any support they require.
- 5.** Children reunited with their family members in the UK should start school as quickly as possible to minimise gaps in their education and to form new friendships.



Key Findings

The data and insights collected through FRIS's support for reunited families highlighted a number of factors that significantly hindered the successful integration of the families and put them at risk of destitution. These are mostly a result of statutory processes not starting until the family had arrived in the UK, a lack of accessible information being provided to families, and statutory systems not being flexible to respond to the particular circumstances reunited families face.

On arrival

- **There was a lack of pre-arrival support and information, which often meant that families did not know what to expect when they arrived in the UK.** The reality could be very different to their expectations and often caused difficulties between the sponsor and arriving family. It often also worsened their mental health.
- **As a result of statutory processes only starting when the family is reunited in the UK, many reunited refugee families faced destitution when the arriving family joined the sponsor in the UK.**
- **Reunited refugee families experienced common barriers to accessing key services.** These included language (51 per cent of refugee sponsors and 94 per cent of their arriving spouses speak basic or no English¹), digital literacy and access to technologies and data (only 39 per cent of arriving spouses had smart phones when they first met with the Red Cross²).

Housing

- **On arrival, the majority of reunited families struggled to access suitable accommodation.** Only 23 per cent of the families FRIS supported were able to move into their sponsor's pre-existing accommodation on arrival. However, most local authorities take a reactive approach and will not explore housing options prior to the family members arriving in the UK. This leaves families living in emergency accommodation for longer than is necessary, which has a negative impact on the family's ability to successfully integrate.

- **In cases where local authorities started their housing duties prior to family members arriving, the time spent in unsuitable housing was significantly reduced.** Where this happened, families were moved to self-contained temporary housing within an average of 13 days, compared to 38 days in other cases.
- **When reunited families did not have children, they rarely met the priority need requirements in England and were often forced to sofa-surf and faced risks of becoming street homeless.**

Work and financial income

- **Ten per cent of refugee sponsors supported by FRIS were in paid employment when their family arrived.** The vast majority were in receipt of Universal Credit when they were joined by their family members.
- **Where a sponsor was in receipt of Universal Credit when their family arrived, their claim was cancelled, and any payments stopped.** This was to process the updated joint claim made with their spouse/partner, leaving the family facing a "destitution gap".
- **On average families had been in the UK for 61 days – nearly nine weeks – before they received their first Universal Credit payment.** This included an average of 16 days between arrival and a joint claim being submitted, followed by a further 45 days for the claim to be processed and payments made.
- **Families needed support to apply for and interact with Universal Credit** due to the complex and complicated process, language, digital and data barriers.
- **On average it took almost 12 weeks after arrival to receive Child Benefit.** The need to send original identity documents meant that, on average, families supported by FRIS applied 37 days (just over five weeks) after arriving in the UK. The delay was due to needing their documents to register with other services including schools and GP registration.
- **Arriving spouses (of which 84 per cent were women) were financially dependent on their refugee sponsor.** This was exacerbated by the way benefits were paid as well as the process of applying for support.

¹ Based on data recorded for 1,148 sponsors and 177 arriving spouses.

² This information was recorded from April 2021 to November 2021, this figure is based on 181 arriving spouses who gave this information.

Health

- **On average it took 31 days after families arrived in the UK to register with a GP.** Many GP surgeries requested identity documents for registration which caused barriers for some families who did not yet have proof of address or their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP). Additionally, families faced language barriers when registering with a GP as interpreting facilities were not available during registration or at reception.
- **There was a lack of interpreters for GP appointments. Half of the families interviewed said they used their partner as an interpreter** – in most cases this was the husband interpreting for their wife. Reliance on family members for support and interpreting meant a lack of privacy which can affect people's willingness to disclose health concerns, including mental health needs.
- **Families faced long waiting times for access to mental health support after arrival.** Given that the majority of people arriving on a family reunion visa are coming from dangerous situations, including living in conflict zones or in refugee camps, and may qualify as a refugee in their own right, there was also a high level of need for mental health support.

Education

- **Children supported by FRIS generally started school between two weeks and four and a half months after arriving in the UK.** Across all nine FRIS regions, it took on average 66 days from arriving in the UK for children to start school.
- **Families often needed support to navigate the school admissions process as it is complex, and applications tended to be in English only.**
- **Delays in children getting into school not only negatively impacted their integration but also their parents' integration.** For example, parents were unable to attend ESOL classes due to childcare.

Learning from resettlement

The other key safe route for refugees to reach the UK – refugee resettlement – provides some examples of how families can be better supported before and on arrival. These include:

- **providing refugees with basic information** about health, housing, education, benefits and their rights and entitlements before they arrive in the UK.
- **local authorities sourcing accommodation** up to eight weeks prior to refugees being resettled to the UK.
- **support workers, commissioned by local authorities and funded by the UK government,** providing support to help families register with GPs and schools, refer people to specialist services, and attend Jobcentre Plus appointments.



Recommendations



1. Reuniting refugee families should be supported to integrate as soon as possible when they arrive, with processes starting prior to their journey to the UK.

The Home Office should:

- when issuing grant letters to successful applicants for refugee family reunion, include information on the steps the family should take next, including support with finding suitable housing, the welfare system, and registering children with schools.
- expand plans to enhance support for refugee integration within the New Plan for Immigration to specifically include reuniting refugee families. This includes ensuring practical and emotional support provided through schemes such as the Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund is available to support reunited families.
- work with other government departments and local authorities to ensure that the barriers to integration for reuniting families are removed and to increase awareness of refugee family reunion.
- the refugee integration loan criteria should be expanded to include costs associated with refugee family reunion.

The Scottish Government should:

- as the New Scots integration strategy is updated, include integration support for reuniting refugee families and ensure that funding is provided to support relevant commitments.

The Welsh Government should:

- as part of its commitment for Wales to be a National of Sanctuary, provide integration support for reuniting refugee families and ensure that funding is provided to support relevant commitments.

The Northern Ireland Executive should:

- include integration support for reuniting refugee families in the upcoming refugee integration strategy and ensure that funding is provided to support relevant commitments.

2. Reunited refugee families should be able to access suitable accommodation as quickly as possible and should not have to present as homeless to a local authority on the day of arrival in the UK. Where families are accommodated in emergency accommodation, this period should be kept to a minimum.

Local authorities should:

- act on notifications that families will be reuniting in their areas, whether this is from the sponsor or a support organisation, to secure suitable accommodation before the family arrives in the UK. This includes completing a homelessness assessment and explaining housing options to the family.
- ensure that reuniting families are provided with information about their housing options and the homelessness process in a language they understand.
- ensure that families accommodated by them can contact their housing officer. This includes making sure families have the correct contact information and have access to an interpreter if required.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should:

- amend the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* to state that an individual who is likely to become homeless within 56 days as a result of relatives arriving on a refugee family reunion visa is to be considered as 'threatened with homelessness', and that housing authorities should take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness as a result.

The Housing and Social Justice Directorate should:

- amend the *Homelessness: Code of Guidance* to state that an individual who is likely to become homeless within 56 days as a result of relatives arriving on a refugee family reunion visa is to be considered as 'threatened with homelessness', and that housing authorities should take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness as a result.

The Welsh Government should:

- amend the *Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness* to state that an individual who is likely to become homeless within 56 days as a result of relatives arriving on a refugee family reunion visa is to be considered as 'threatened with homelessness', and that housing authorities should take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness as a result.

The Northern Ireland Executive and the Scottish Government should:

- amend policy and practice to ensure the housing needs of reunited refugee families are met by applying best practice in securing suitable accommodation for reunited refugee families prior to their travel to the UK.

3. Reunited refugee families should be able to secure an income as quickly as possible, and welfare system processes should ensure that families do not face a destitution gap.

The Department for Work and Pensions should:

- allow a sponsor's Universal Credit claim, along with any relevant payments, to continue while a new joint claim is processed following the arrival of their family members.
- add people arriving on a refugee family reunion visa to the groups exempt from needing to meet the Habitual Residence Test by amending the Universal Credit Regulations 2013.
- ensure reunited families are offered, where necessary, advance payments while a new joint claim for Universal Credit is being processed.
- increase the accessibility of the Universal Credit process by ensuring that the online journal is available in the claimant's own language and offering translation/interpreters for face-to-face Jobcentre appointments and when people contact the Universal Credit Helpline.
- ensure Universal Credit case managers and work coaches are aware of the rights and entitlements of reunited refugee families and are able to provide additional support as needed. This includes offering split payments where a joint claim is made.
- allow applications for Universal Credit to be processed using verified copies of ID documents to allow families to retain their documentation.
- accept evidence that children aged 16 and above are on a waiting list for a school for the purposes of applications for Universal Credit.

The Treasury should:

- add people arriving on a refugee family reunion visa to the groups exempt from the 3-month residence requirement for the purposes of entitlement to Child Benefit by amending the Child Benefit (General) Regulations 2006.
- allow applications for Child Benefit to be processed using verified copies of ID documents to allow families to retain their documentation.
- accept evidence that children aged 16 and above are on a waiting list for a school for the purposes of applications for Child Benefit.

4. Reunited refugee families should be able to navigate the health system to access any support they require.

NHS England, NHS Wales, NHS Scotland and the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland should:

- provide translated guidance for refugee families on how to access the health and care system, including how to register with a GP, book appointments and their entitlements for care.
- support healthcare providers to ensure interpreters are available for all appointments, including by providing relevant funding and training for front line staff on how to work with interpreters.
- issue clear guidance for GP surgeries that reunited families are not required to provide ID and/or proof of address in order to register.

The Home Office should:

- prioritise the provision of mental health support and services as part of the integration support for reunited families and refugees.

5. Children being reunited with their family members in the UK should start school as quickly as possible to minimise gaps in their education and to form new friendships.

Local authorities should:

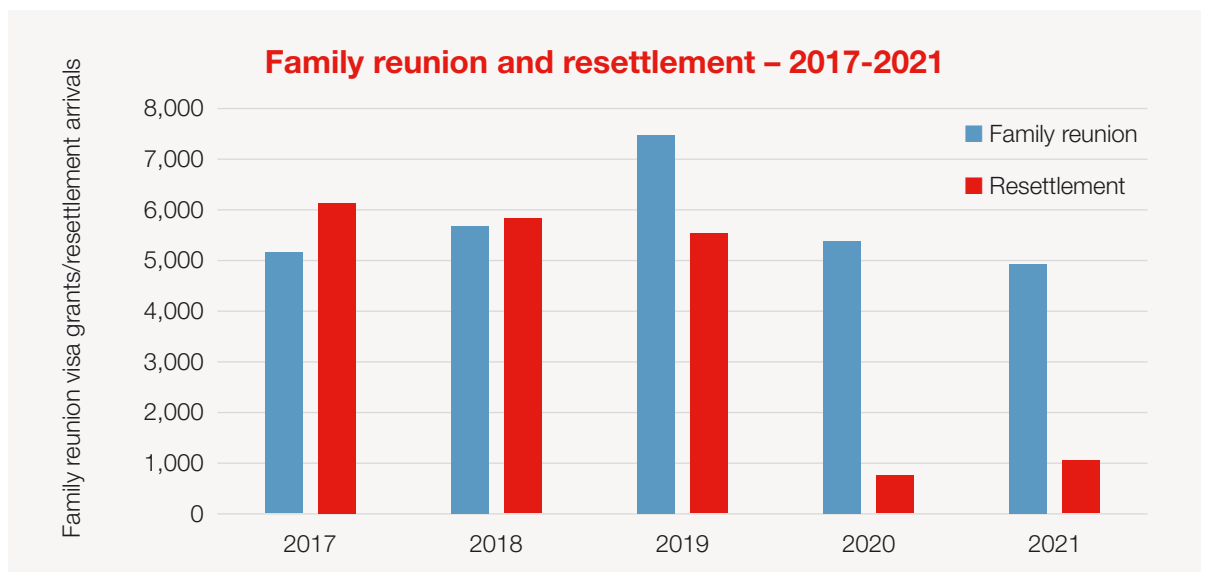
- ensure housing and education teams are working together, including by notifying each other when one first becomes aware that a refugee family will be arriving in the area.
- provide translated information explaining the school admissions process.
- ensure reunited refugee families are offered the option of a referral to the local Fair Access Protocol.
- provide evidence when a child aged 16 or older is out of school and on a waiting list to act as proof of eligibility for Child Benefit and Universal Credit.

Introduction

For families who have been separated by war, persecution or violence, refugee family reunion provides a vital route to be together again. Once an individual has been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK, they are able to apply for their immediate family to join them on a refugee family reunion visa.

Refugee sponsors may have been in the UK for years before their family are able to join them, and much of this time will have been spent in the

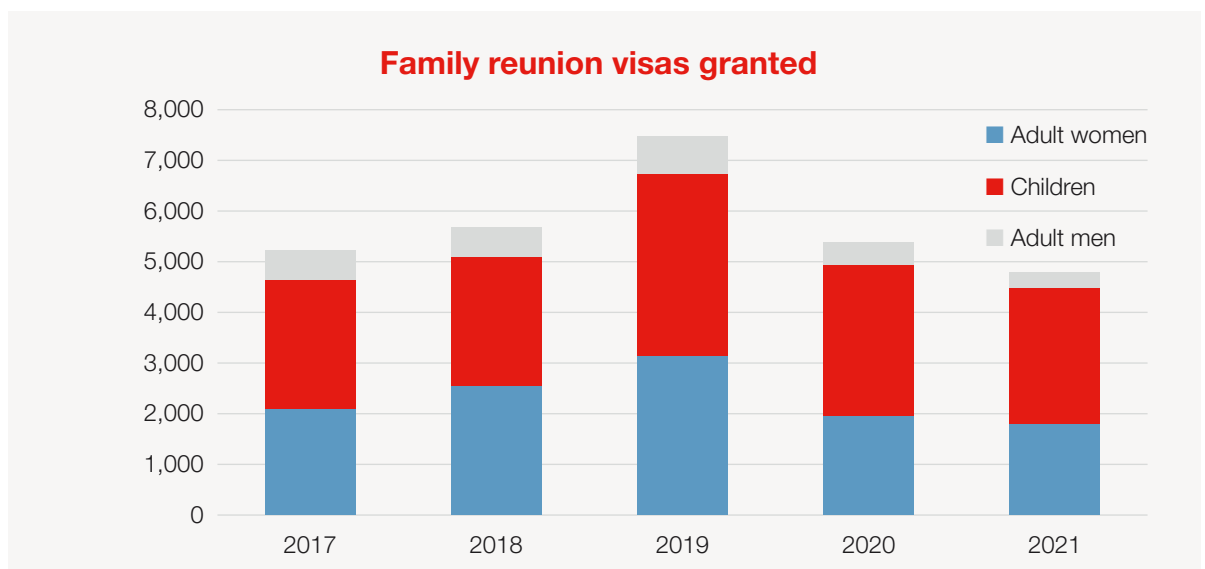
asylum process. While waiting for a decision on their asylum application, people are not allowed to work and have no recourse to public funds. This means that a significant part of the refugee sponsor's integration journey cannot start until they get refugee status. Previous reportsⁱ have found that being separated from family hinders the process of rebuilding a life and integrating into UK society. Many people cannot begin to start thinking about building a life in the UK until they know their family is safe and they can reunite with them.



Family reunion is the most commonly accessed safe route for refugee families to come to the UK compared to other safe routes such as resettlement.ⁱⁱ

It is important to note that these family members are often in danger, they may be living in conflict

zones, displaced or refugee camps. **Since 2010, 90 per cent of family members granted family reunion visas are adult women or children, who often face additional risks such as sexual violence or high child mortality.**ⁱⁱⁱ



The family reunion process

Refugee family reunion rules in the UK

The eligibility criteria for refugee families seeking to reunite in the UK are set out in Part 11 of the Immigration Rules.

A person with refugee status in the UK may be reunited with:

1. Married or civil partners
2. Same-sex partners or unmarried partners
3. Children (aged 17 years and younger at the time of application)

The relationship between the sponsor in the UK and the partner abroad must begin prior to the sponsor's flight from their country of "former habitual residence" and the relationship must still be subsisting. They must also show they have the intention to live together permanently.

Child applicants must be the biological, or formally adopted, child of a parent who currently holds status within the UK and must be under 18 years old. The child must have been conceived, or adopted, prior to the sponsor fleeing. They must be dependent on their family, not married and not be in a family unit independent of the sponsor.

The family reunion process is complex. Under standard family reunion rules (Part 11 of the Immigration Rules) there are strict eligibility criteria those applying must meet which can preclude close family members being reunited. One stark example of this is the preclusion of a child who has been granted refugee status in the UK being able to reunite with their parents. The standard rules also mean that if a child is over 18, they do not satisfy the eligibility criteria for family reunion and is unable to reunite with their parent(s) in the UK.

The family reunion process can also be very lengthy due to the various stages of the application process, such as waiting for TB test results and accessing the Visa Application Centre (VAC). Once the family has attended their appointment at the VAC, it can take up to 12 weeks to process the decision.^{iv} This can have a serious impact on the family, who have often already been separated for an extended period.³

Additionally, while the application for family reunion is free, families often need legal advice which has not been covered by legal aid in England and Wales since the introduction of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.^v

This, added to numerous other costs such as paying for DNA tests and travel, means that family reunion is an expensive process which can put many sponsors into debt before the family arrives.

Previous research by the British Red Cross has shown that the family reunion process itself can be extremely dangerous.^{vi} Applying for a family reunion visa often requires families to make several expensive and dangerous journeys, sometimes across borders, to submit evidence for an application at a VAC. There is no guarantee that the application will be successful, or that they will even be able to get back to the place they came from.

If the application is accepted, family reunion visas are then issued with a limited validity period for the family to travel and arrive in the UK. Previously visas were issued with 30 days validity, meaning families had just 30 days to organise travel and arrive in the UK before the visa expiry date. During the Covid-19 pandemic the Home Office made the welcome change to increase the validity of family reunion visas from 30 days to 90 days, to give families more time to arrange travel and PCR tests during the uncertainty of the pandemic.

³ See appendix for separation figures, available at [redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/supporting-refugee-families-who-reunite-in-the-uk](https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/supporting-refugee-families-who-reunite-in-the-uk)

Family members coming to the UK with a family reunion visa have 'leave in line' with their refugee sponsor. This means they mostly have the same rights and entitlements as them.^{vii} However, they do not have refugee status themselves. Their leave and entitlements are dependent on their relationship with their sponsor, and if that relationship breaks down their leave and connected support entitlements can be removed.

Reuniting with family in the UK

Crucially, families arriving on family reunion visas and going through the family reunion process are a *reunited* refugee family. They have suffered a period of separation which can affect their relationships with each other. Studies have shown that the longer a family is separated the harder it is to regain positive family dynamics.^{viii} Re-establishing these relationships can be made more difficult by power imbalances between the sponsor and applicant, as the applicant's leave is dependent on their continued relationship with their sponsor and the applicant often looks to the sponsor for information and support.

Families also have specific needs connected to being a reunited *refugee* family. Refugees have been granted asylum because of a well-founded fear of persecution that led them to flee their

country of origin. This means that the sponsor of a reunited refugee family may have experienced trauma and may struggle to cope when their family arrives. Similarly, the arriving family may have spent months or even years in dangerous and unsuitable living conditions before being reunited.

Those reunited through refugee family reunion are also a *family*, made up of different individuals, with their own needs and their own aspirations. Despite this context and the difficulties that families face on reuniting, there is no formal statutory support to help reunited refugee families navigate life in the UK.

Reform of the refugee and asylum system

In Spring 2021, the Home Office published the New Plan for Immigration.^{ix} This contained broad proposals for reform of the UK's asylum system and wider approach to refugees. A number of these proposals will be implemented through the Nationality and Borders Bill.

In Chapter 2 of the New Plan for Immigration, the Home Office states that its aim is to "*ensure effective support so that refugees can integrate and become self-sufficient once they make the UK their home.*" However, there is no mention of reunited refugee families receiving this support.



Family Reunion Integration Service

The Family Reunion Integration Service (FRIS) was set up in response to the lack of support for refugee families reunited in the UK. FRIS was a partnership between the British Red Cross, Barnardo's and Queen Margaret University (QMU). The Red Cross and Barnardo's are involved in the day-to-day delivery of the project, providing casework support to families, while QMU provides a research component which focuses on social connections. It is the first UK-wide project to support reunited refugee families to integrate into their new communities and rebuild their lives. FRIS was funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and administered by the AMIF UK Responsible Authority (UKRA).

FRIS started providing support from January 2019 and will run to March 2022. This report is based on data gathered from January 2019 until 1 November 2021.⁴ In this period, integration support was provided to 1,173 families (3,994 individuals). Across the UK during this period⁵, 17,759 individuals were granted family reunion visas.^x

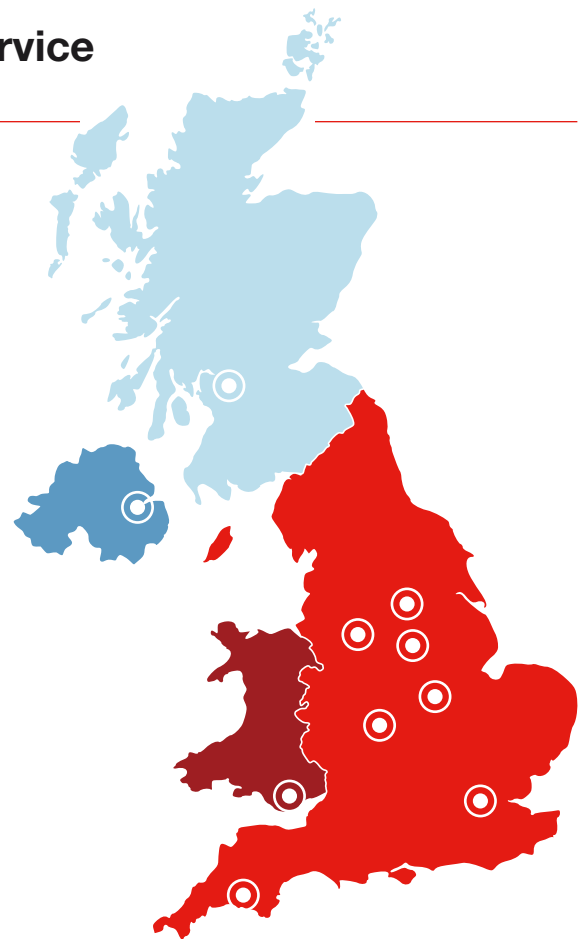
Background

FRIS was designed using Ager and Strang's *Indicators of Integration* in addition to knowledge gained from the delivery of previous Red Cross projects and research, most notably *Third Country National Family Integration Service*, which provided support to families arriving on family reunion visas in Scotland.^{xi} This knowledge was built upon by expert partners Barnardo's and QMU in order to design and create the FRIS model.

The Home Office's *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019*^{xii} builds on Ager and Strang's model. It defines integration as 'multi-dimensional', 'multi-directional', 'context specific' and dependent on everyone taking their share of responsibility.^{xiii} It sets out 14 domains that are of central importance to integration. FRIS used these domains to inform both the core casework and the integration activities offered to families.

Design

FRIS was delivered across six regions in England and in all four of the countries of the UK: Scotland (Glasgow), Northern Ireland (Belfast), Wales (Cardiff) and in England, East Midlands (Leicester),



West Midlands (Birmingham), Yorkshire (Leeds and Sheffield) and South East (Plymouth) with North West (Manchester) and London added in April 2021.⁶ The FRIS teams worked with families in various local authorities within these areas.

Acknowledging the new and significant challenges for families when reuniting, FRIS aimed to support the integration of the whole family. With this in mind, each of the initial seven areas focuses on one of the three integration lenses: *rebuilding family bonds*; *building community bonds*; *bridges with host community*. When deciding which area would focus on which lens, FRIS partners considered different factors such as the number of families arriving in the area. A key integration factor for areas with fewer arrivals, for example, could be the link between the family and the host community and so such areas focused on *bridges with host community*.

The aim of these integration lenses was to offer additional social activities based around strengthening a particular type of social connection. Where a caseworker felt a family would benefit from the activities, the family were encouraged to participate. However, it was the family's choice as to whether they took part.

⁴ Where conclusions are based on different periods of data, due to varying collection methods, this is specified.

⁵ Based on available data from January 2019 until end of September 2021.

⁶ FRIS expanded to Manchester and London because of a project underspend due to Covid-19. Manchester and London provide core casework only.

Areas by integration lens and social activity

CORE CASEWORK

All areas

Rebuilding family bonds Glasgow • Birmingham	Building community bonds Cardiff • Leeds • Sheffield	Bridges with host community Belfast • Leicester • Plymouth
Peer support hub	Peer buddies	Host buddies
Psychosocial support	Peer education	Language holidays
Family group work		Funding community activities
Barnardo's child focussed casework		

Each FRIS partner had a specific role to play. The Red Cross and Barnardo's provided casework support as well as delivering social activities under specific integration lens(es).

British Red Cross provided newly reunited refugee families with individual and family casework support for up to three months as well as integration activities under all three lenses. This core casework (delivered in all FRIS areas) ensured families' basic needs were met, such as access to housing, welfare benefits, healthcare and education.

Barnardo's worked with families involved in the 'rebuilding family bonds' integration lens (Glasgow and Birmingham). This involved an initial assessment conducted jointly with the Red Cross to assess the needs of the child and family and follow up casework, as well as family groupwork for families with complex needs.

Queen Margaret University conducted research which supported FRIS practice while gaining an in-depth understanding of how reunited refugee family members develop social connections. Their findings can be found in their research report, *Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families*.^{xiv}

In addition to frontline support for reunited refugee families, FRIS had a strong focus on learning and capacity building and aimed to provide robust evidence to shape national discourse around integration over the coming years. Practice and Development Officers (PDOs) were embedded within the project to support with this learning.

FRIS and Red Cross family reunion support

Family reunion is one of the core elements of the Red Cross' Refugee Support service. In some areas in England, the Red Cross can assist refugees with family reunion visa applications through the Family Reunion Support Project (FRSP). The Red Cross can also support with the costs of travel through the Family Reunion Travel Assistance (FRTA) service.

Further information on the design of FRIS can be found in the appendix.

BRITISH RED CROSS

Family reunion support in numbers

Family Reunion Support Project:

over **290** visas granted

Family Reunion Travel Assistance:

over **4,900** family members brought to the UK

Family Reunion Integration Service:

3,994 individuals supported

Data collected from January 2019 to November 2021

Research aims and methods

This report is based on learning from the Family Reunion Integration Service (FRIS). It sits alongside FRIS partner QMU’s research report *Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families*. QMU’s report investigates how, where and what type of social connections are made by families and family members. The social connections of reunited refugee families are inextricably linked to the way in which they access key services – the focus of this report. As integration is a complex, non-linear journey these reports inform each other.

Aims

FRIS PDOs monitored and evaluated the project through a range of quantitative and qualitative data (outlined below) collected through both service level data and through primary research conducted with families and staff. This research aimed to:

- raise awareness of the complexities of family reunion
- investigate the barriers that reuniting refugee families face in accessing basic needs
- explore what support reuniting families need
- identify the benefits of an integration package for families reuniting through family reunion

Overview of families

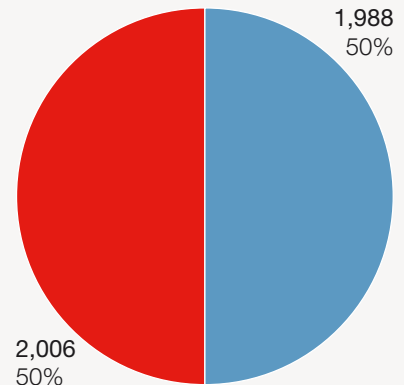
FRIS provided support to a diverse range of refugee families from a variety of different backgrounds. A full overview of demographics of the 1,173 families supported between January 2019 and November 2021 can be found in the appendix.



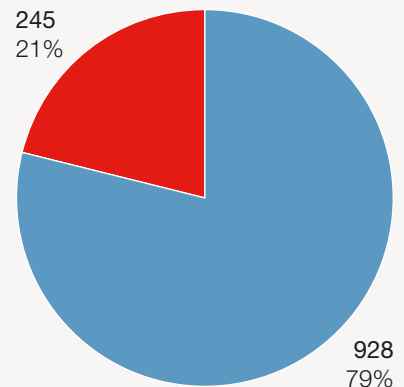
Gender of families

■ Male ■ Female

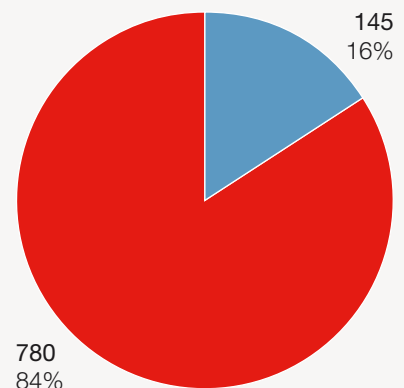
Gender of arriving family members



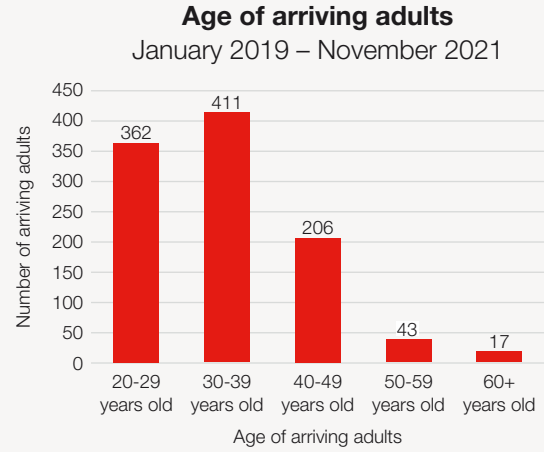
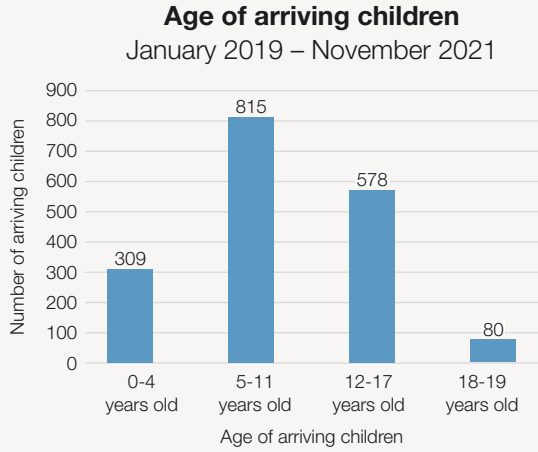
Gender of sponsors



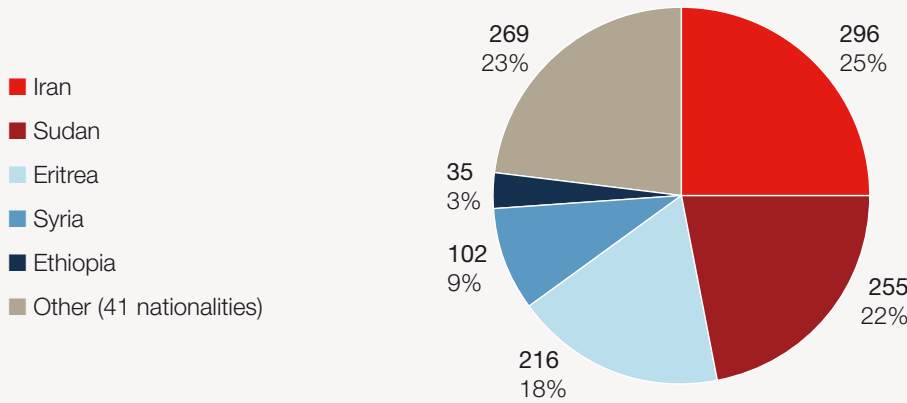
Gender of arriving spouses



Age of arriving family members

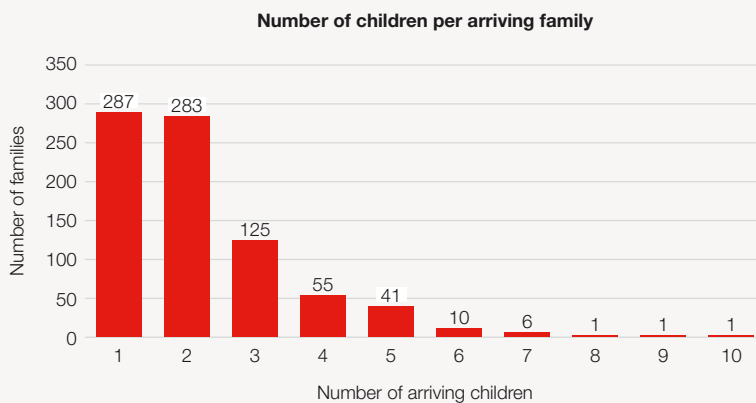


Country of origin of arriving families



FRIS supported families from 46 countries, with Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, Syria and Ethiopia being the five most common countries of origin.

Family size



Sixty-nine per cent of families FRIS supported arrived with children, and 25 per cent were couple only families.⁷

Out of the families who arrived with children, 30 per cent arrived with three or more children.

⁷ The remaining families were made up of those arriving with “leave outside the rules”, such as adult siblings joining family members in the UK.

Data and evidence collection

Comprehensive data from January 2019 until 1 November 2021 has been collected and analysed using mixed methods. This comprised of:

Quantitative

- Demographic and biographic data, and assessment of vulnerability.
- Interactions between FRIS caseworkers and families, including type and regularity of support.
- Timescales to access key services.

Qualitative data

- Forty-four in-depth interviews, with families from all of the initial seven FRIS regions who have received FRIS support, around one of four specific domains – housing, healthcare, welfare support or children’s education.
- Eighteen interviews with refugee sponsors regarding their experience of getting refugee status and family reunion. These interviews were part of the work submitted to the Home Office consultation on the New Plan for Immigration.
- Fourteen in-depth interviews with FRIS staff (caseworkers, project workers, service managers) around experiences of supporting families to access support within a specific domain.
- Seven focus groups with caseworkers regarding families’ access to a specific domain.
- Online surveys with frontline staff regarding families’ access to a specific domain.
- Thirty online Community of Practices and Casework Communities with FRIS staff. Some of these were based around a particular topic whereas others were an open forum to share learning.

Challenges of remote interviews

Focus groups and interviews with staff were held on Zoom while interviews with reunited families were conducted over the telephone. There are some challenges with conducting research remotely. It is harder to build trust and rapport over the telephone, which can be made more difficult when working through interpreters. Families may have been more inclined to say what they believed was the expected response. They may also have not wanted to appear like they were complaining, especially as the interviewer was from the Red Cross.

To try to address these challenges, families were contacted to explain the interview and sent an information sheet and consent form to look at ahead of the interview. Families were informed about the purpose of the interview and assured that information would be anonymised and kept securely, that participation was voluntary and crucially would not affect service provision.

Families were contacted at a later date to conduct the interview, first ensuring that they understood the information sheet and consent form. Interviews were conducted in the family’s own language with an interpreter unless the family had a good level of English. Informed consent was taken verbally at the beginning of each interview.



Findings



Arriving in the UK

Key Findings

- **There was a lack of pre-arrival support and information, which often meant that families did not know what to expect when they arrived in the UK.** The reality could be very different to their expectations and often caused difficulties between the sponsor and arriving family. It often also worsened their mental health.
- **As a result of statutory processes only starting when the family is reunited in the UK, many reunited refugee families faced destitution when the arriving family joined the sponsor in the UK.** Thirty-seven per cent of families disclosed that they were in debt due to the process of family reunion, which increased destitution.⁸
- **Reunited refugee families experienced common barriers to accessing key services.** These included language (51 per cent of refugee sponsors and 94 per cent of their arriving spouses speak basic or no English⁹), digital literacy and access to technologies and data (only 39 per cent of arriving spouses had smart phones when they first met with the Red Cross¹⁰).

“The going round and round, from place to place, hasn’t started here. [It began] from where we started... We went to so many different places... They have gone through a lot before they get here, [but] the process hasn’t stopped here... We have been going from place to place.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham



⁸ This information was collected from May to November 2021 and refers to 234 families supported by FRIS.

⁹ Based on data recorded from 1,148 sponsors and 177 arriving sponsors.

¹⁰ This information was recorded from April 2021, this figure is based on 181 arriving spouses who gave this information.

While family reunion is a joyful and happy occasion, it can also be overwhelming and both physically and emotionally exhausting. The immediate period after reuniting has been described as a ‘transition crisis point’ for reunited families.^{xv} The start of their new life together in the UK is busy and chaotic. Over the coming weeks, families must begin navigating services such as housing, welfare benefits, GP registration, and school admission procedures.

“When [families] arrive, there is so much information coming all at the same time even if the arriving spouse is very proactive. It’s new language, new place, you have to go there, you run from appointment to another. You also need time to just understand all this information and then also being reunited with your partner, your children. There are so many things, so much information happening in the beginning that for the families, for the arriving families they also need time to say ‘okay now I feel a bit safe, okay what about me now? What about our family?’”

Caseworker, Birmingham

Lack of pre-arrival information and support

In relation to resettlement, UNHCR says that *“pre-departure experiences and processes are vital to successful post arrival settlement and integration”*^{xvi} These processes involve those arriving being prepared for what to expect when they get to the UK, as well as information being gathered so that local authorities and other partners can ensure the right support is in place on arrival.

However, there is no formal statutory provision of information or support provided to those granted refugee family reunion visas for families ahead of their arrival in the UK. The only time pre-arrival information or support was provided was when families were being supported through the process by organisations such as the British Red Cross.

As a result, families’ expectations for their life in the UK are often very different to the reality. Many families don’t understand their legal entitlements or how to navigate the various different systems they will need to in order to secure an income, access housing, register with a GP and find school places. For example, arriving family members who were then supported through the FRIS project did not always know what their UK immigration status was or understand that it was tied to that of their refugee sponsor.

“We didn’t know where we have to call, to whom we have to call... we have to ask my only source at that time was my husband’s friend and he was like us before coming here, he had the experience.”

Spouse, female, Birmingham



“It is at the first appointment [with the Red Cross] that spouses are informed what their status means. I had many spouses who thought that they were a refugee now. They were a bit shocked to hear you will need to seek legal immigration advice if you separate from your partner.”

Caseworker, Sheffield

Pre-arrival information and support for the sponsor can be extremely beneficial and their expectations can be managed through activities such as the peer support hub offered in some FRIS regions. This can also help to manage the arriving family's expectations.

“It's been helpful when we have done pre-arrival support with the sponsor to share this information, manage expectations, to explain what the first steps will be... I can feel the difference when I do the first appointment after [the family arrive] when the sponsor already has the information prior to arrival... at that time they just want their family to arrive and are focusing on other things, at least [the information] has been said and it's somewhere.”

Caseworker, Birmingham

However, information does not always filter through to arriving families meaning that arriving spouses' expectations of life in the UK can be very different from the reality. Families are often coming to the UK from very difficult situations in their home country, in the hope that they will find safety and security here. When the reality is different, it can have a serious negative effect on their mental health. Ensuring that there is pre-arrival support and information for the arriving family can help to mitigate this.

“In Iran we had a good life and not difficulties with accommodation, cleaning and tidying, everything... we came here due to difficulties to live in Iran due to political matter, we not come here [UK] for money. When [my] wife arrived to UK she was very shocked, she not believe when she moves to UK she will live in a dirty house, with bed bugs in the mattress.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth

“It's having unrealistic expectations, coming from really difficult, distressing, traumatising situations into something they think is going to be a lot easier.”

Psychosocial practitioner



Delays with Biometric Residence Permits

Biometric Residence Permits (BRP) provide identification, immigration status, and should have a National Insurance Number (NINO) printed on them.¹¹ Arriving family members must pick up their BRP from their local Post Office within 10 days of their arrival.¹² Families receive a letter, in English, telling them where to collect their BRPs. Families supported through FRIS, often needed this letter to be explained with an interpreter at their first appointment with the Red Cross.

BRPs are crucial for families, but there are often delays in families receiving them – some families supported by FRIS waited nearly five months. Some of the reasons for delays included errors such as spelling mistakes in names, Post Offices incorrectly returning BRPs if not collected within the timeframe and delays in the Home Office's online processes. Families often found it difficult to get information from the Home Office about delays, leading to some families approaching their MP for help.

BRPs should not be required to access key services, as other forms of identity can often be used. This includes using the refugee family reunion visa sticker (known as a vignette) that is in a family member's passport.^{xvii} However, families supported by FRIS were usually asked for their BRPs in order to register with GPs, pass the Habitual Residence Test for Universal Credit and pass the 'right to rent' test needed for long-term housing. This was due to key services not understanding the family reunion visa and its entitlements.

This lack of understanding by service providers, coupled with delays in obtaining a BRP, significantly impacts a family's integration. If key services refuse to accept applications without the BRP, it can have an effect to other important tasks such as opening a bank account (needed for Universal Credit payments).

Arriving into homelessness

The sponsor's pre-arrival housing and the family's composition determines what will happen on the day of arrival and their subsequent housing journey.

The majority of reunited families are not able to move into the sponsor's existing accommodation, so must immediately access their local authority's homelessness service or find other housing. Over half of arriving families FRIS supported were able to access local authority housing on the day of arrival. Thirty-two per cent of families were provided emergency housing, and 31 per cent were provided temporary housing.¹³ However, due to the reactive approach taken by many local authorities, this can involve waiting for hours to find out where they would sleep that night. This is explored later in this report.

A further eight per cent of families spent their first night in informal housing arrangements such as sofa surfing with friends. Four per cent of families experienced street homelessness on their first night back together, the majority of which were spouse-only couples. In addition, two per cent of spouses were unable to live with the sponsor on arrival.

Only 23 per cent of the families FRIS supported were able to move into their sponsor's pre-existing accommodation on arrival. Importantly, this does not mean that the accommodation was suitable for the arriving family. For example, in situations where an unaccompanied minor arrived to join the parent(s) and sibling(s) the housing was likely to become overcrowded as there weren't enough bedrooms.



¹¹ Not all BRPs arrive with a NINO printed on the card, despite the UK government's commitment to providing NINOs on BRPs for people arriving on family reunion visas.

¹² The deadline to collect BRPs from the Post Office increased from 10 to 90 days during the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹³ Further information can be found in the appendix.

Arriving into destitution and debt

Many reunited refugee families face destitution on arrival in the UK, which can have a negative impact on their integration.

Refugees can apply for an interest free refugee integration loan to help them pay for things which the Home Office deems “essential” to their integration, such as a rent deposit or household items. As refugees, sponsors can apply for this loan, however, it cannot be used to pay for travel costs of arriving family members.^{xviii}

Due to the associated costs of family reunion, many families supported by the FRIS project were in debt when their family arrived. Thirty-seven per cent of families disclosed that they were in debt due to the process of family reunion.¹⁴ Although 63 per cent of the families asked did not disclose that they were in debt, it is important to note that shame and stigma surrounding debt may dissuade families from disclosing such information to caseworkers during the first appointment.

Only 10 per cent of the sponsors FRIS supported were in paid employment. Of this two per cent were in full-time work; seven per cent in part-time work; and one per cent were self-employed.

This means that they are rarely able to support their family financially or to take advantage of the numerous other benefits employment brings such as social connections and improved wellbeing.

This also means that many sponsors struggle to pay for their families’ flights without external support. The table below shows how families paid for their flights¹⁵:

	Number of families	Percentage
Debt	61	26%
British Red Cross travel assistance	116	49%
Savings	18	8%
Did not disclose (or question blank)	39	17%
Total	234	

Twenty-six per cent of families FRIS supported disclosed that they paid for their flights using money obtained via debt.

Families also got into further debt once in the UK, for example from borrowing money from friends and relatives or claiming Universal Credit advanced payments.¹⁶ As discussed later in this report, the wait for Universal Credit, and/or delays receiving elements of the payment, exacerbates this. Families wait on average 61 days to receive Universal Credit.

Debt and destitution have wide ranging implications both practically, in terms of feeding and clothing a family, and emotionally, in terms of stress and worry, all of which can have a significant impact on a family’s integration. Debt can have a serious impact on mental health and family relationships.^{xix} It can be a significant stressor for couples heightening the risk of domestic violence and family breakdowns.

Seventy per cent of the families who bought flights with money via debt were worried about this debt while 25 per cent of families overall reported being worried about debt. Again, shame surrounding debt means it is likely that this proportion is higher.

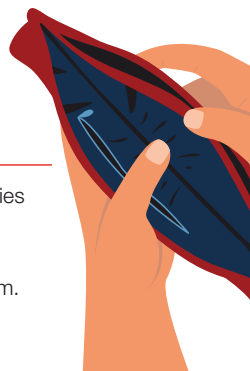
“Obviously if you haven’t got any money you can’t do anything... if you can’t afford a bus ticket to go to English class, you’re not going to go to English class... it’s just honestly so bleak... it’s just really horrible. People aren’t even able to create a nice home environment because they can’t afford a table and chairs... so how are you meant to have the energy to go to ‘an introduction to new refugees’ at the local women’s centre.”

Caseworker, Leeds

¹⁴ Data referring to 234 families supported by FRIS. 61 families attributed this debt to flight costs, while 26 families stated other reasons.

¹⁵ This information started to be collected in May 2021 and therefore refers to 234 families supported by FRIS.

¹⁶ This information is supported by conversations with a Financial Inclusion Officer at Nottingham Refugee Forum.



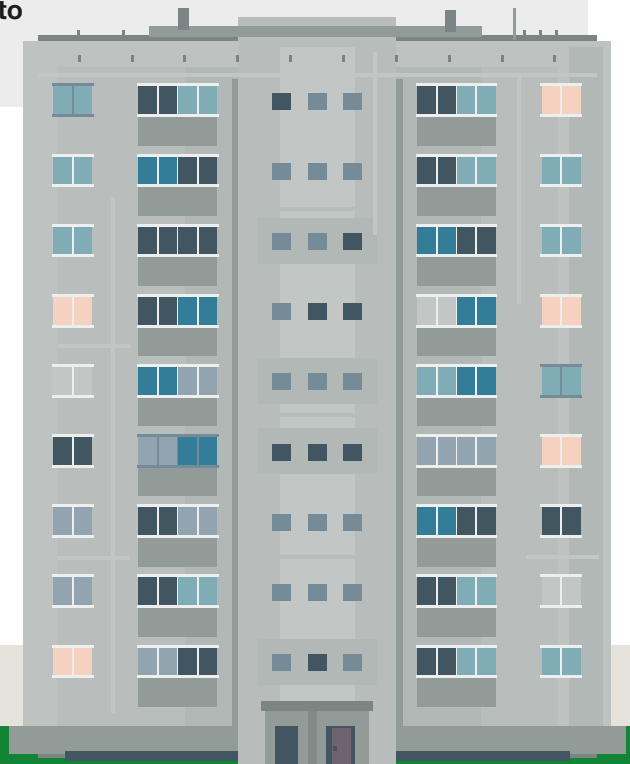
Housing



Key findings

- **On arrival, the majority of reunited families struggled to access suitable accommodation.** Only 23 per cent of the families supported by FRIS were able to move into their sponsor's pre-existing accommodation on arrival. However, most local authorities take a reactive approach and will not explore housing options prior to the family members arriving in the UK. This leaves families living in emergency accommodation for longer than is necessary, which has a negative impact on the family's ability to successfully integrate.
- **In cases where local authorities started their housing duties prior to family members arriving, the time spent in unsuitable housing was significantly reduced.** Where this happened, families were moved to self-contained temporary housing within an average of 13 days, compared to 38 days in other cases.
- **When reunited families did not have children, they rarely met the priority need requirements in England and were often forced to sofa-surf and faced risks of becoming street homeless.** Priority need recognises families with particular vulnerabilities including dependent children or pregnancy and can affect the family's access to housing support from local authorities.
- **Local authority housing teams often have limited or no knowledge of how family reunion works or the rights and entitlements of reunited families,** which has a negative impact on reunited family's access to housing support and suitable housing.
- **The majority of families remained in emergency housing for long periods of time - 95 per cent of families that accessed emergency housing remained in this housing from two weeks to six months.**
- On average across all FRIS regions it took **25 days from arrival to be moved into temporary accommodation** and most families remained in temporary accommodation for at least six months.
- Across the UK, just **13 per cent of families provided with temporary accommodation moved into long-term housing within 120 days.**

The Home Office *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019* recognises that access to housing is “critical to the integration process” and structures much of an individual's experience of integration.^{xx} It highlights how housing conditions impact on other areas of life such as a sense of “security and stability, opportunities for social connections and access to healthcare, education and employment”.^{xxi}



Types of housing

For the purposes of this report, the below housing terms are used to differentiate different types of accommodation and defined as follows:

- **Emergency housing:** accommodation that is not self-contained and has shared facilities or lack of facilities (such as bathroom, kitchen or living room). For example, hotels and hostels, B&Bs or other types of shared housing.
- **Temporary housing:** accommodation that is self-contained and does not share bathroom, kitchen or living room facilities. For example, exclusive use of a flat or house. This type of housing differs depending on region. For example, in Plymouth, shared houses in multiple occupation are sometimes used as temporary housing, while the Northern Ireland Health Executive (NIHE) uses single lets from private landlords.¹⁷ In Scotland 'Temporary Furnished Flats' are provided by Glasgow City Council.
- **Long-term housing:** social or private housing with a tenancy agreement of at least six months. This does not include housing with a license agreement, regardless of the length of the licence agreement.

Only 23 per cent of the families FRIS supported were able to move into their sponsor's pre-existing accommodation on arrival. Most sponsors' existing accommodation was unsuitable for their arriving families as it was usually single sex shared accommodation or one-bedroom accommodation for a single person. Due to financial constraints, including limited income and/or being able to claim Housing Benefit for a single person only, sponsors were usually unable to afford to rent a larger property before the arrival of their family.

As a result of being unable to secure suitable housing for the whole family prior to arrival, most reunited families arrive into homelessness, and sponsors who have unsuitable, shared accommodation become homeless themselves.^{xxii}

One of the first crucial steps families need to take is to secure suitable accommodation, and for many this will involve applying for support from their local authority.



Barriers to accessing housing support from local authorities

Lack of pre-arrival arrangements

Across the UK, local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) have certain duties to prevent homelessness where people are threatened with homelessness within a specified time.¹⁸ As the vast majority of reunited families will be at risk of homelessness on arrival, most sponsors approach the local authority for housing support as soon as their family members obtain family reunion visas. Similarly, FRIS teams alerted the relevant local authority to the family's upcoming arrival when they were supporting families who had travel arrangements in place and a date of arrival to the UK.

However, sponsors and FRIS teams found that many local authorities only considered their homelessness prevention duties to take effect once the family had arrived in the UK. Most families were advised by local authorities to present as homeless on the day of arrival and the majority of local authorities were not willing to reserve or allocate emergency housing until the family were present in the area.

¹⁷ In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive supply of self-contained accommodation is sourced from private landlords called "Single Lets". This report includes "Single Let" in the definition of temporary housing because the accommodation performs the same function; providing stable housing for the family to live in until they can move into long-term accommodation.

¹⁸ Fifty-six days in England, Scotland and Wales; 28 days in Northern Ireland.

“I told the council when my family got the visas and I told them when I got flight confirmation from Red Cross... I checked with the council again, but they said they don’t care, they said they are outside, we care about when they are inside the UK.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff



Most sponsors interviewed about housing said that they were not given adequate support and advice on housing prior to their family’s arrival despite the clear requirements set out in homelessness legislation around taking a preventative approach.

“Before the family come to UK I told the council my family is coming, they told me when family arrives to come here and will give you accommodation... it was very stressful, I was very worried about what was going to happen when my family arrived to the UK.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth

This meant that one of the first things families needed to do on arriving in the UK was to present as homeless at their local authority. Not only did this put families through an extremely stressful experience but also put pressure on local authority homelessness teams to source and provide accommodation on the same day.

BEST PRACTICE: Pre-arrival housing protocols (Scotland & Northern Ireland)



When the FRIS project began, Glasgow was the only region where a pre-arrival housing protocol for reunited families was accepted and acted upon. The housing protocol is a local referral procedure and data sharing agreement between FRIS and the local authority. The protocol aims to ensure the local authority is able to take steps to source accommodation for refugee families prior to their arrival.

The protocol involves the Red Cross giving advance notice of family arrivals to Glasgow City Council. Temporary housing is sometimes secured prior to the family’s arrival. A temporary furnished flat is set up for the family pre-arrival and new arrivals can travel straight from the airport to join the sponsor in this accommodation.

This was facilitated through the establishment of a housing referral protocol between Scottish Refugee Council and Glasgow City Council for those arriving through family reunion. A similar pathway has been agreed between the NIHE and the Red Cross where sponsors are provided appointments with housing officers to discuss their options before their family arrives.

Protocols have also been set up with various authorities in England. The housing protocols are different in each location as they depend on the local housing contexts and supply. However, they generally ensure that families do not arrive into homelessness.

Lack of knowledge about family reunion

FRIS teams often found that local authority housing teams had very limited or no understanding of the family reunion process or the rights of reunited family members in the UK. Under the refugee family reunion rules sponsors are not required to provide maintenance such as accommodation and financial support for their family members. However, this is not stipulated clearly on family reunion documentation and can be difficult to explain to local authority housing teams. This has resulted in families and FRIS caseworkers experiencing adversarial communication with some local authority homelessness teams.

“Sponsors have been told things like ‘why are you bringing your family when you don’t have anywhere for them to stay?’”

Caseworker, Sheffield

This was particularly problematic for those waiting for their BRPs. Family members’ immigration statuses were often questioned as local authority staff were unfamiliar with the family reunion visa and associated documentation such as travel documents instead of passports. Local authority staff would often only accept their status once their BRPs were shown.

Additionally, some housing officers advised families with children aged 18 years or older, in overcrowded accommodation, to apply for separate housing. However, the child’s permission to come to the UK via family reunion is on the basis that they are dependent on and part of the sponsor’s family.^{xxiii} The Home Office’s family reunion guidance states that families must “intend to live together in the UK.”^{xxiv} If a child leaves the family home permanently there is a risk that the child’s Leave to Remain (LTR) will be withdrawn or a future application for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILTR) will be refused.^{xxv}

Difficulties finding accommodation on the day of arrival

Though 74 per cent of the eligible families that were supported through FRIS accessed emergency housing on the day of arrival or the day after, local authorities often struggled to find available accommodation on the day, so families often had to wait for hours to find out where they were going to sleep that night. For families who did not arrive during the local authority housing team’s opening hours, ringing the emergency out of hours homelessness line could mean they would be waiting outside, at night for several hours.

“We arrived around 10am or 11am but when we got the accommodation it was evening time. So during this time we did not know what to do and you know because of the Covid-19... you must be isolated for 14 days, so we were in the car until we got the accommodation.”

Spouse, female, Birmingham

“On that day [my wife] is very tired, angry. Even we can’t get the food. [The council] give us number, they told me just I have to wait from the morning until the middle of the night. Then I contacted my friend, he came with a car and he took us to his house. They told me I had to come the next day... I was waiting from morning until 4 o’clock, from 9am in morning until 4 o’clock. They said now we don’t have anything we can’t do anything now – you have to come to us tomorrow.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Wales

Homelessness eligibility assessments

In England, a key factor in whether a family will be successful in securing accommodation through a local authority will be whether they are in “priority need”, as defined under the Housing Act 1996. Being in priority need creates duties for local authorities to provide accommodation, as long as other conditions are also met.

Those who are automatically accepted as priority need include pregnant women and dependent children, while people who are classified as vulnerable due to reasons such as ill health may also be accepted. For reunited families, this means that if children have arrived to join their relative in the UK, the family should be considered to be in priority need. Where someone is joining their spouse or partner, with no children, they are far less likely to qualify. Legislation in Northern Ireland and Wales mirrors these provisions however the priority need requirement has been phased out in Scotland.

The homelessness assessment in England, Wales and Northern Ireland asks applicants to prove

they are in priority need, have a local connection to the area and that they are not intentionally homeless.^{xxvi} Some families who satisfied the priority need requirements struggled to access housing as they were unable to provide evidence of eligibility. For example, one arriving spouse who was eight months pregnant was unable to provide confirmation of the pregnancy such as a letter from a medical professional.^{xxvii} This left the family having to ‘sofa surf’ with friends for five days before accessing hostel accommodation.

In England, spouse-only couples without priority need tend to stay with friends or acquaintances until they can access longer-term housing. Leeds City Council is an exception to this as they help refugee sponsors anticipating the arrival of their spouse to find private accommodation pre-arrival. In some regions, housing associations are available to spouse-only couples, such as Second City Housing in Birmingham and Places for People in Sheffield. However, there are often limited spaces, long waiting times and fixed term contracts for this type of accommodation.

BEST PRACTICE: Providing homeless spouse-only families with housing (Scotland)



In Scotland, the Homelessness Act 2003 introduced a phasing out of the distinction between priority and non-priority applications, ensuring that everyone assessed as being unintentionally homeless was entitled to temporary accommodation. The priority need test for homeless households was also abolished.

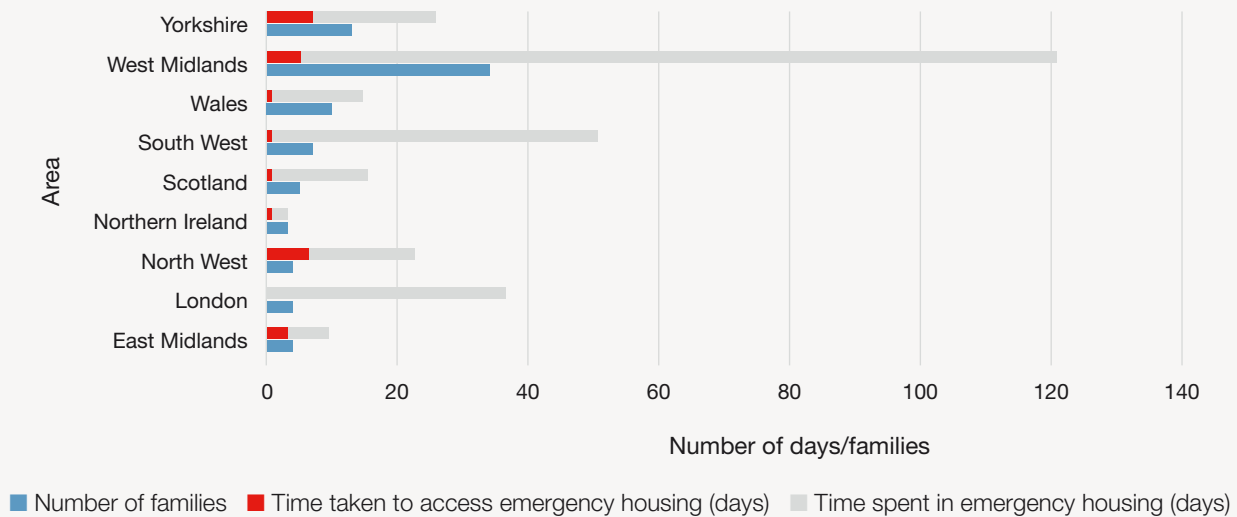
Time spent in different forms of housing

Families supported by FRIS spent different amounts of time in emergency, temporary and long-term accommodation. The length of time spent in these forms of accommodation was affected by different factors but largely depended on the approach taken by their local authority.

The time that families spent in emergency accommodation varied depending on region – 95 per cent of families remained in emergency housing from two weeks up to six months.



Time spent accessing and living in emergency housing by area (days)



The families supported by FRIS teams accessed temporary accommodation through various different routes. Some families were first housed in emergency housing before moving into temporary accommodation, while 45 per cent accessed self-contained temporary housing either on or the day after arrival.

A quarter of the families supported by FRIS who moved into temporary housing did so within 30 to 59 days of arriving in the UK. Where local authorities were given advance notice of a family's arrival and acted on this to make arrangements for the family's arrival, it took an average of 13 days for the family to secure temporary accommodation, compared to the average 38 days where advance notice was either not provided or no action was taken where it was.

Many reunited refugee families did not access longer term housing during the period they were supported by FRIS. Only 13 per cent of the families in temporary accommodation progressed into long-term housing. These delays in accessing long-term housing were related to a number of factors including a lack of knowledge about local authorities' housing processes, and the family's options for seeking longer-term housing, which were compounded by language and digital barriers. One family in Wales had been living in a hostel for three months and had not received any basic information or advice about how to access long-term housing.

Housing problems experienced by reunited refugee families

Reunited refugee families faced multiple problems connected to their accommodation that had an impact on their ability to integrate and start a life in their new communities in the UK. Of the families interviewed that moved into housing provided by a local authority, 90 per cent described problems with their accommodation.

Communication with housing officers

One problem affecting reunited refugee families was the ability to communicate with their local authority housing officer. Families struggled to find out the name and contact details of their housing officer, even with Red Cross support, which meant they had to use the general contact details for the housing team and often did not get responses to their attempts to contact the general housing team. Even when families did have direct contact details of their housing officer, they still found their housing officer could be unresponsive.

Housing officers often communicated in English without interpreters or translations of written communications. This resulted in families relying on Red Cross caseworkers and interpreters to help them understand what they were being told.

Accommodation conditions

FRIS teams found that the condition of temporary accommodation provided to families was often inadequate. Many of the families reported that the accommodation wasn't furnished properly (particularly in England and Wales) and they weren't able to buy basic items due to their limited income.

“It was empty without nothing with even no spoons no cups for water... they give us one room and a small kitchen there is nothing... no furniture, no plates, knives, forks nothing furniture inside the hostel just I have to buy all the furniture.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Wales

There were also more serious environmental health issues such as mould or bed bugs. These issues could have a serious effect on those with existing health conditions, but families could only be provided alternative accommodation with proof of a medical condition. This can be difficult for arriving family members who have not yet registered with a GP and been given medical evidence that is recognised in the UK.

“It was very dirty and lots of mouse living there – everywhere is unclean and untidy and very dirty. Kitchen and bathroom very, very unclean, not healthy at all. The bathroom had lots of bugs... After one and half month we found body/skin had bites... when we wake up in the morning body all red with bites and we did not know, we thought it was flies. But we asked other people and they said you have bed bugs.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth

“At the moment we live underground, it is very mouldy, very damp, both me and my husband started to have a breathing problem, asthma, we need a spray or inhaler and he struggles with walking as well and we have to use 22 stairs to be able to go in and out. It's causing a lot of hassle and because of my pregnancy I cannot take medication and its had a bad effect on me... this property is for one person and the landlord said because we are going to be three very soon we have to leave.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Leicester

Further issues reported to FRIS teams included the fact that those temporarily housed in Homes with Multiple Occupancy (HMO) had shared kitchen and bathroom facilities, and families with children were often unable to cook nutritious healthy meals. Other families reported feeling uncomfortable eating in the kitchen so took food to their bedroom.

“When family are given a visa to enter the UK as they are a family with kids and kids are moving to a different climate, location, culture, it would have been ideal if they had been received in a place with a kitchen.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham



CASE STUDY: Overcrowded family in hotel (Birmingham)

A wife and two children (four-year-old girl and six-year-old boy) arrived in the UK to be reunited with the sponsor after four years of separation. They were provided one hotel room by the local authority.

All family members spent most of the time inside the hotel room, there was no space for the family to sit at a table or socialise. The couple did not have privacy and the children had nowhere to play. They were not allowed to go outside of the hotel to explore due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The family of four lived together in one hotel room for 153 days before being provided with a two-bedroom temporary flat. This impacted the well-being of the whole family. The parents could not cook nutritious meals for the children, and they did not have the space to play or do schoolwork. The lack of privacy for the sponsor and spouse caused an additional strain on their relationship, after a long period of separation.

Overcrowding

More than half of the families interviewed about housing were overcrowded in hotel and hostel accommodation with family members living, eating and sleeping in one room. These families spent between four days to five months in overcrowded living conditions.

Overcrowding and lack of privacy can also be an issue when families are waiting for long term housing. Delays accessing housing can leave families having to use the sponsor's previous unsuitable accommodation, often resulting in overcrowding.

Overcrowding impacts the whole family. One sponsor interviewed explained that the lack of privacy had a negative impact on their child developing social connections with peers and therefore on her integration.

“She don’t speak with her friends about Glasgow or about how she finds it here... because I am there she is not free to speak because we have small flat. I think my daughter is not free.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Glasgow



CASE STUDY: Overcrowded family in long-term housing

The sponsor was living in a two-bedroom housing association flat with her three-year-old daughter. They were joined by the sponsor's husband and five children. The council had previously told the sponsor they had to wait for the family to arrive before being allocated housing, meaning they had to move into the sponsor's flat.

The sponsor, her husband and three-year-old slept in the double bedroom. 13-year-old and 9-year-old sisters slept in the single bedroom. An 18-year-old daughter had to sleep in the living room with her twin brother and 14-year-old brother.

When the sponsor again approached the council, she was told that the family must remain where they are and wait for an overcrowding assessment.

Safety and security in accommodation

Shared accommodation meant that families were often required to live with people that they did not know and who did not necessarily speak their language, meaning that some families found it difficult to trust those they lived with.

“I could not communicate with other people we were sharing with at all... I didn’t know them so [I] couldn’t trust them, it was not easy at all.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth

Previous research on reunited families found that emergency and temporary accommodation can be a site where people experience high levels of racist abuse or other anti-social behaviour.^{xxviii} A third of the families interviewed for this report about housing had witnessed similar behaviour.

“There were guys drinking alcohol, taking drugs. [My family] felt unsafe, so I locked them in the room and I slept in the corridor outside. I did not sleep, it was not appropriate.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham

Generally, families considered temporary accommodation an improvement on living in emergency accommodation. However, some temporary housing was unsuitable, especially for families with children. One family who had an autistic child were housed in accommodation that was not safe for their child. The window handles in this accommodation were low down and easily accessible to a small child and the windows could not be locked.

“The property is not safe and I do not feel safe due to roundabout, near a highway, no streetlights... the windows are not secure, I told them I have autistic kid, he escaped twice and we found him after two to three hours, we had to call the police.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff

A family’s sense of safety and security can also be impacted by their location, especially if they are housed far from community organisations and charities and the sponsor’s existing social networks. As local authorities can house a homeless family in different locations and on a no choice basis, this is a common occurrence.

“When the council gives people housing, leave them in the same area and housing until the people get to know the area because once I was settled in one place they moved me. I was moved around and I was settled again and [they] moved me again.”

Spouse, female, Belfast

FRIS partner QMU found that feeling safe and being close to amenities were important conditions for making positive social connections in an area.^{xxix}

Finding a suitable long-term home

Families who did access longer-term housing still faced some challenges, often connected to the suitability of the accommodation they were living in such as ongoing problems with overcrowding.



Families described being confused about local authority housing processes including which housing band – which determines the priority given to their application – they had been allocated to, the size of the properties they could bid for, and how to go about bidding on properties. The registration and bidding process can take a long time and can be difficult to understand. Housing officers did not always have interpreters when needed. In addition, the application for longer-term accommodation asks for supporting documents such as National Insurance Numbers.¹⁹ This often causes lengthy delays, as reunited families are often still in the process of applying for the relevant documents.

Access to suitable housing can also be delayed as reunited refugee families can be large. Twenty-one per cent of the families FRIS supported have three or more children. Families needing four or more bedrooms face longer waits to find housing, even if problems such as overcrowding are recognised.

“I told my housing [officer] my flat I have two bedrooms and two boys already. I talked with my housing [officer] to tell them my daughter is coming but they tell me just wait until

daughter arrives in UK and come back again. They told me I am not priority. I told them maybe I need three bedrooms, but they told me you need four bedrooms. They said also four bedrooms is very difficult to find. I told them maybe a three bedroom is okay for me, I don’t have a partner. I don’t need four bedrooms if the three bedrooms is there. I do not know how long I can wait for four bedrooms.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Glasgow

Families also struggled to access housing in the private sector. With the exceptions of local authorities in Leeds, Glasgow and the NIHE in Belfast, local authorities in the areas where FRIS teams operated did not give comprehensive advice and support to find private rented accommodation. Further issues included a lack of interpreters in letting agents, lack of willingness to accept families in receipt of welfare benefits^{xxx} and inability for families to pay the required deposit upfront.

BEST PRACTICE: Overcoming barriers to private long-term housing (Leeds)



Leeds City Council proactively finds suitable private housing two weeks before the family arrives in the UK. The sponsor is supported by a Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer (LAASLO). The council has a ‘Landlord Letting Scheme’ which is a list of approved private landlords who agree to let to tenants that receive Universal Credit and are looking for housing at short notice.

The LAASLO uses an interpreter service which would not be available to private landlords and arranges viewings on suitable properties. The sponsor can sign a six-month tenancy agreement after attending the viewing, in most circumstances this occurs pre-arrival where several weeks’ notice is given. The council will pay the deposit and first month’s rent for private housing where the landlord agrees to a property inspection and to abide by the Leeds Rental Standard.

This approach protects vulnerable families from unlicensed landlords and recognises that families receiving benefits struggle to save for or get into debt to pay a deposit. Families do not have to repay the deposit or first month’s rent which removes the financial barrier to accessing private housing.

¹⁹ Including national insurance numbers (NINO), medical information for all family members and, when adding dependent children, proof of Child Benefit as evidence that children are living in the household. Parents cannot apply for Child Benefit until the children are in the UK and it can take up to 12 weeks to be awarded. While some local authorities bypass the need for Child Benefit as evidence, it is not done as a matter of course across the UK.

Often a family's ability to access suitable long-term accommodation is reliant on the sponsor's friends and links within the community, who help to pay for or find private rented accommodation. Social connections can be key in families finding private housing. A sponsor explained:

“We were lucky at that time that one of our friends, he also was going to church he introduced his landlord [to us]... he spoke English but [was] also originally from Iran... so when we met this landlord and saw this house fortunately, we got a good house with good price.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham

Impact of temporary housing on integration

Suitable housing is an incredibly important part of the integration process as it allows families to feel they have a home, a place of safety and security as they start to rebuild their lives together. For families who have experienced long periods of separation, privacy and space to rebuild family bonds is vital. Stable housing is also crucial for making social connections and building a sense of community, which was affected by moving multiple times between different forms of temporary accommodation.

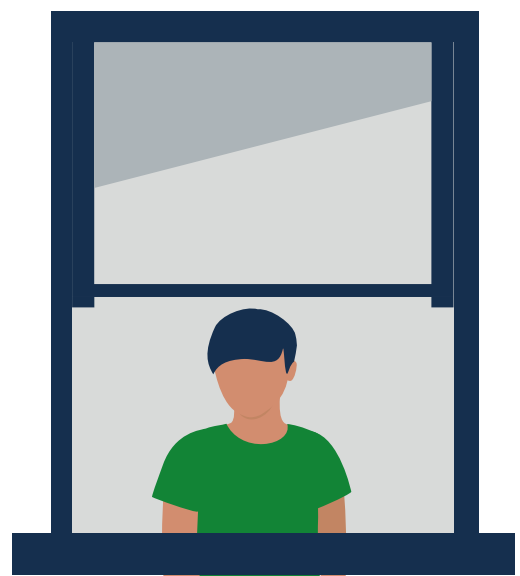
Living for prolonged periods in poor and overcrowded living conditions can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of family members as well as their sense of safety and stability. The expectations that families have about their new life in the UK can also affect their mental health, as the reality is often very different to what they expected.

“[My wife was] very shocked and surprised because she did not expect from the UK to look after us that way... she got depression and very upset for this matter... mentally it was affecting us, making us upset, not happy, worrying, we had problems with eating.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth

Impact of Covid-19 on housing

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were asked to house all people sleeping rough and to find alternative accommodation for people in hostels and night shelters. This included people who have no recourse to public funds – through the *Everyone In* strategy.^{xxxi} Scotland did not have a specific policy for accommodating people sleeping out during Covid-19, largely because it did not need one due to having no priority need requirements. This change in policy meant that spouse-only reunited families became eligible for emergency housing.





BEST PRACTICE: Response to Covid-19 (Wales)

When the *Everyone In* strategy ended, Wales continued to provide accommodation on arrival for non-priority spouse-only reunited families from Amber List countries.

Arriving families who do not have self-contained accommodation to self-isolate in are provided with emergency housing. The refugee sponsor is able to join their partner for the 10-day self-isolation period.

Government restrictions resulting from the pandemic both helped and hindered reunited refugee families' attempts to access housing. There was increased anxiety due to delays in housing being provided, and families were more isolated as they were not able to access face-to-face support. Many families waited in emergency housing for long periods because a freeze was put on the local authority housing bidding process. When the bidding process moved online as a result of the pandemic, this caused problems for families with limited digital literacy or access to technology or data.

The impact of restrictions in response to Covid-19 also negatively affected communication with housing teams, as a caseworker describes:

“I don't think any of our families have spoken to their Housing Officers directly since the pandemic, they are sent text messages or emails which the families do not understand.”

Caseworker, Birmingham

However, in some areas such as Sheffield, the pandemic resulted in improvements in housing provision for reunited refugee families. The requirement to have an address for self-isolation prompted some local authorities to take a proactive approach and seek suitable accommodation before the family arrived. Where families arrived from a Red List country and needed to quarantine in a government provided hotel for 10 days, and local authorities used this additional time to source suitable temporary accommodation.

Some families were also moved quickly out of hotel accommodation and shared housing because of social-distancing measures.

“The government said you cannot live in shared house with five families and that accommodation closed. It was a good chance to move... to our own property.”

(Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth)



Work and financial income



Key findings

- **Ten per cent of refugee sponsors supported by FRIS were in paid employment when their family arrived.** The vast majority were in receipt of Universal Credit when they were joined by their family members.
- **Where a sponsor was in receipt of Universal Credit when their family arrived, their claim was cancelled and any payments stopped.** This was to process the updated joint claim made with their spouse/partner, **leaving the family facing a “destitution gap”.**
- **On average families had been in the UK for 61 days – nearly nine weeks – before they received their first Universal Credit payment.** This included an average of 16 days between arrival and a joint claim being submitted, followed by a further 45 days for the claim to be processed and payments made.
- **Families needed support to apply for and interact with Universal Credit** due to the complex and complicated process, language, digital and data barriers. Inconsistent practices in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) increased confusion and delays surrounding benefit applications.
- **On average it took almost 12 weeks after arrival to receive Child Benefit.** The need to send original identity documents meant that on average families supported by FRIS applied 37 days (just over five weeks) after arriving in the UK. The delay was due to documents being needed to register with other services including schools and GP registration.
- **Arriving spouses (of which 84 per cent are women) were financially dependent on their refugee sponsor.** This was exacerbated by the way benefits are paid as well as the process of applying. For example, arriving spouses are not exempt from the Habitual Residence Tests (HRT) and so could not apply for Child Benefit in their own name.

Being in work is highlighted in the *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019* as a place where integration can take place and an area of attainment.^{xxxii} However most refugees and their families face a multitude of barriers to gaining employment, meaning that they experience higher levels of unemployment than the general population.^{xxxiii} Only 10 per cent of refugee sponsors supported through FRIS were in paid employment when their family arrived (two per cent full-time; seven per cent part-time; one per cent self-employed).

As a result, the majority of families were dependent on the welfare system for financial support when they were first reunited.



However, it should be emphasised that it is not a choice to be reliant on welfare benefits and families were keen to be able to support themselves. This section explores reunited refugee families' experiences of accessing welfare benefits and the barriers they encountered. It focuses on applications for Universal Credit and Child Benefit, as most²⁰ of the families supported received Universal Credit and 69 per cent arrived with children and so were eligible for Child Benefit.

“It’s not something that you chose, it’s not like it’s a choice to have that benefit but if you’re in a situation where there is nothing you can do, you have no capability, Universal Credit becomes useful because they help to make sure that you are looked after in terms of rent and necessity stuff that you might need.”

Spouse, female, Glasgow

The Home Office *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019*^{xxxiv} recognises that access to welfare benefits and advice, as well as financial security more generally, are of central importance to integration.

Applications for welfare benefits can only be made once the family had all arrived in the UK; in the same way that reuniting families experienced trying to find suitable accommodation, there is no process for process to start before then.

Additional support available for reunited families

For families in England no statutory grant is available to support reunited refugee families. The Red Cross' destitution fund can provide Cash Based Assistance (CBA) for eligible families, which they apply for once the family arrive. CBA was introduced in May 2020. It is a limited, temporary support aimed at helping people while they wait for statutory financial support. It is currently set at £20 per week, per individual up to a total of six family members.²¹ Since its introduction, 96 per cent of families supported by FRIS required CBA support, for an average of six weeks.

In Scotland, the Red Cross can apply for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) before the family arrive. This is a discretionary fund administered by local authorities providing financial support via the 'Family Reunion Crisis Grant'.^{xxxv} Families receive a non-repayable grant, equal to the amount they will receive from Universal Credit on the day they arrive and can apply up to three times. Ninety-six per cent of families supported by FRIS in Scotland accessed the SWF, with an average of two applications per family.

In Northern Ireland, the Red Cross administer The Executive Office (TEO) Crisis Fund on behalf of The Executive Office. This provides support for destitute asylum seekers (and other vulnerable migrants) who have no or limited recourse to public funds or are facing delays in accessing this support. The Crisis Fund is limited to a maximum of £500 for a maximum of 12 weeks and aims to support people while the cause of destitution is addressed. Seventy-nine per cent of FRIS families accessed the TEO Crisis Fund and on average there were three TEO applications made per family.

In Wales, families can access the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF), provided by the Welsh Government, which has two payment schemes. One supports while the family are waiting for the first benefit payment and the other helps the family live independently in their home.^{xxxvi} The DAFF is often applied for after the family arrive in the UK. This grant tends to be accessed when the family is a couple-only as families with children are better off with the Red Cross financial support.

²⁰ FRIS caseworkers supported with 1,043 Universal Credit applications.

²¹ As of August 2021.

Universal Credit and reunited refugee families

Universal Credit is a means-tested welfare benefit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland. Couples who live together must make a joint claim and receive a joint payment to be shared out at household level. Universal Credit split payments – where couples receive their entitlements individually – can be considered only in exceptional cases.^{xxxvii} It is made up of a standard allowance plus extra amounts that may apply, for example if there are children in the household (under 16 or 16- to 19-year-olds in full time education), people have a disability or health condition that prevents them from working or they need help to pay housing costs.

Most refugee sponsors supported through FRIS were in receipt of Universal Credit prior to their family arriving. For sponsors who are joined by their spouse/partner, they must then make a joint Universal Credit claim – this has the impact of stopping the sponsor's own claim and any payments they would be due. If the sponsor is only joined in the UK by children or other dependents the existing claim should be amended to include them.

Universal Credit is assessed and, generally, paid one month in arrears. In Scotland, claimants can choose to be paid twice a month and for housing costs to be paid directly to the landlord.^{xxxviii} In Northern Ireland, Universal Credit is paid twice a month and housing costs are paid directly to the landlord as standard.^{xxxix} When making a new claim, a seven-day processing time is added on to the four-week assessment period resulting in a built in five-week wait for families' first payments. For newly arrived reunited refugee families, this delay to the assessment system for Universal Credit often leaves them without any financial support.

Complexity of applying for Universal Credit

Across all nine regions where FRIS was operational, reunited refugee families needed extensive assistance to apply for and manage their Universal Credit claims due to the complexity of the online process, digital exclusion, language barriers and a lack of understanding of the welfare system.

The complexity was added to by the inconsistencies in the way individual claims were handled, such as differences in the number of identity documents requested from claimants and claimants' children. FRIS teams found that experiences of reunited families depended on the specific Jobcentre they were attending.

“I think there is a difference between Jobcentres... it depends on who they meet on the day, how new they are, how well trained [on family reunion] they are, and who's around them at that time to get advice from.”

Caseworker, Birmingham

In addition, DWP guidance states that “complex needs may be defined as difficult personal circumstances and/or life events”^{xl} meaning identifying and managing complex needs is often at the discretion of the work coach. This meant the process of assessing vulnerable cases was inconsistent and opaque, further adding to the confusion surrounding the Universal Credit process.

Such inconsistency is a problem as while most refugee sponsors were receiving Universal Credit when their family arrived, they did not always know how to apply for a joint claim and needed comprehensive support. In some areas, such as Glasgow, this was partially mitigated as reunited refugee families in temporary housing have access to Housing Support Workers²², who can refer them to a Welfare Rights Officer for support with Universal Credit. However, some families reported that they did not know who their support worker was or have a phone number for them. Serious concerns were also observed by the FRIS teams as the DWP safeguarding process is equally opaque and families who were at risk were not always identified by DWP safeguarding teams.

²² Provided by Turning Point Scotland, Loretto Care or Wheatley Care.

“When my family arrived, we had to be isolated in the hostel and I had no idea how to join my wife to Universal Credit, to make a joint account, I had no idea, I did not know what to do... the main problem is this, it is the teaching, educating, using the site for the Universal Credit. [The DWP] expect that the person who comes to the country with no knowledge of the language could manage to do everything themselves without any training course, that’s the problem.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff

Not only is the application process difficult but many families also needed ongoing support with their claim and online work journal. Families often found navigating and maintaining the journal difficult, especially when things went wrong.

“One time I tried to sign in after more than two weeks, three weeks but I didn’t access and they want [me] to press agree word but I cannot sign into my account, I cannot press the agree square. And then they said to me if you didn’t access your account we will stop your payment and it was a big problem.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Glasgow

The lack of support also meant that some families did not understand their payments. One sponsor in Plymouth explained:

“My only worry [about Universal Credit], I don’t understand what is the Universal Credit is the same as the Jobcentre money or different... I receive £50 on Monday every week, I don’t know if it is Child Benefit”.

Refugee sponsor, male, Plymouth

It also led to some initial Universal Credit payments missing child or housing elements. This may have been a result of the complex process of applying for Universal Credit, and claimants not being prompted to verify the identity of their children.

The lack of understanding around Universal Credit was made worse when the DWP did not inform claimants about changes to their claims. For example, some families found that their Universal Credit payment was decreased once their child turned 16 (due to not being eligible for the child element without further proof of education) but that they were not made aware of this.

The barriers to accessing Universal Credit can have serious consequences for families, who are already very financially insecure, such as claims being closed or families being sanctioned.



Managing claimant commitments

Every person claiming Universal Credit must accept 'claimant commitments', that set out expectations around looking for work in order to receive payments. DWP Work Coaches have discretion to decide a claimant's conditionality and may decide it is not necessary if, for example, the claimant is understood to have 'complex needs'.^{xii}

For families supported by FRIS, there was a lot of uncertainty around claimant commitments. For example, there is no uniform approach for refugees studying English. Some Work Coaches may accept learning English as a reasonable step towards finding work whereas others may not. As a result, some family members, with relatively low levels of English, were expected to look for work and received regular phone calls from their Work Coaches asking about employment searches, often without interpreters. This meant families felt under pressure from the DWP to find work which added to the stress and challenges families experienced on reuniting.

“They ask us questions like have you guys looked for work... [they] think that you're sitting down and not doing anything. It's all based on the position of advisory they always say you can't just sit you have to push yourself, you have to find a job and we are trying to find work but it is very challenging at the moment. We don't want them to think that we're just sitting and not doing nothing, we are trying to do something within our capabilities.”

Spouse, female, Glasgow

Language and digital barriers to accessing Universal Credit

Universal Credit is applied for and maintained online, making it harder for people with limited English, limited digital literacy and limited access to the internet. Ninety-four per cent of arriving spouses and 51 per cent of refugee sponsors supported by FRIS spoke little or no English, and only 39 per cent of arriving spouses had smart phones. Although it is possible for claims to be handled by telephone and managed clerically, barriers still exist. The Red Cross, for example, is unable to support families with telephone claims as the DWP advise they must speak directly to the claimant.

All the families interviewed experienced significant language barriers when making and maintaining claims. Pre-pandemic, only some Jobcentres offered interpreters to claimants while many relied on the sponsor's English, however limited, at appointments or asked if they could bring a friend to interpret. There were also instances of initial evidence appointments being postponed due to Work Coaches not being able to find phone interpreters even for some of the most common languages spoken.

Language barriers can lead to families misinterpreting and making mistakes on their accounts, especially if they have to resort to online translation services. This can have grave consequences for families such as having their claims stopped meaning they become destitute.

“[The] online application in general at first it was very difficult for me, it was a new system, a new language, everything you know. I find it very difficult to understand and sometimes I have to use Google translator... sometimes I make a mistake because Google translator gives you different meaning and it takes you a different way.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Glasgow



“I’ve had lots of families who’ve had claims stopped and often their Work Coach writes on their journals “please can you do this because time is running out”, and then they always justify it “well we did remind them”, but they can’t read English so it’s still not fair.”

Caseworker, Leeds

Compounding the language barriers were digital barriers, lack of technology and data. Families tend to access their Universal Credit journals on their smart phones but often have limited mobile data packages and no Wi-Fi access making the process much harder. Some families relied on their children, with better English and digital literacy, for help. Many parents felt they had no other option but this can have negative consequences for the whole family.

“Children are really involved in the family finances... whether it’s because the child has better English or IT literacy so they’re actually logging in for the parent, reading statements... children are so involved in their parents’ worries about not having enough money for food which must have such an impact on children.”

Caseworker, Leeds

The barriers families face in applying for and maintaining their Universal Credit claim can disempower both sponsor and spouse as they were reliant on external support. Furthermore, issues such as having to resort to giving login details to friends left people in a compromised and vulnerable position as their personal information was being shared.

The ‘destitution gap’: the period before the first payment

For reunited refugee families relying on Universal Credit, the process of having to create a new joint claim results in a systematic period of destitution following the family’s arrival. Even where the sponsor is already in receipt of Universal Credit, the joint claim is considered as a new application because the joining spouse may have a job or assets that needs to be considered. While the joint claim is considered, any payments that the sponsor may have been receiving are stopped. However, arriving spouses on refugee family reunion are very unlikely to have a job or any assets in the UK on arrival. This meant that for families supported through FRIS, instead of being helped to access financial support, what they were receiving was stopped.

Guidelines state that it takes up to five weeks to receive the initial Universal Credit payment.^{xiii} However, for families supported through FRIS the average time taken was six and a half weeks. It is important to highlight that this is with Red Cross (or other organisational) support. Families took an average of 16 days between arriving in the UK and submitting a joint claim, often to mitigate the impact of a new joint claim stopping payments.²³ Therefore, families would go an average of nearly nine weeks without Universal Credit.

Area	Average time to get first Universal Credit payment from applying (in days)
Scotland	60
London	60
East Midlands	49
Yorkshire	48
West Midlands	45
Wales	42
North West	40
South West	31
Northern Ireland	24

²³ Applications were often delayed to ensure the sponsor’s final single person Universal Credit was paid to try to alleviate a small part of the financial destitution families experienced once the single claim was stopped.

Families undergo severe hardship while waiting for Universal Credit. Often they must rely on food banks, government grants and other emergency hardship funds where available.²⁴ Families can apply for an advance payment of Universal Credit if they can prove that they are in financial need. Advance payments can be granted if a new claim is made (for example a joint claim made with the arriving spouse) or if a change of circumstances (such as arriving children) results in the new claim being more than the existing one.

In theory, advance payments should be an option for reunited families. However, FRIS teams found that this information is not readily accessible and families are not routinely informed of these options. Additionally, advance payments are loans and must be paid back using future payments. As many families struggle to live off the money that they receive, requesting an advance is a difficult decision as it can create or increase their debt.

In Northern Ireland, families can access the Universal Credit Contingency Fund Short-Term Living Expenses Grant, a non-repayable grant available to people in the initial Universal Credit assessment period who are experiencing financial hardship.^{xviii} However, this can only be granted after a claimant has applied for an advance payment, which families are not always keen to do.

For the families supported through FRIS, having little to no income on arrival amplified the stress of the initial reunion period, which can already be very challenging. Some refugee sponsors interviewed expressed feelings of responsibility and failure that they were unable to provide for their arriving family, and these feelings were intensified when the family had children.

“It was a very, very hard time and because I’m suffering from high blood pressure, really I couldn’t control my blood pressure because of all of the pressure that was on my shoulders. The burden on my shoulder because of the situation and on the other hand just my family joined me here and really it was so, so embarrassing that I couldn’t manage to provide everything for them.”

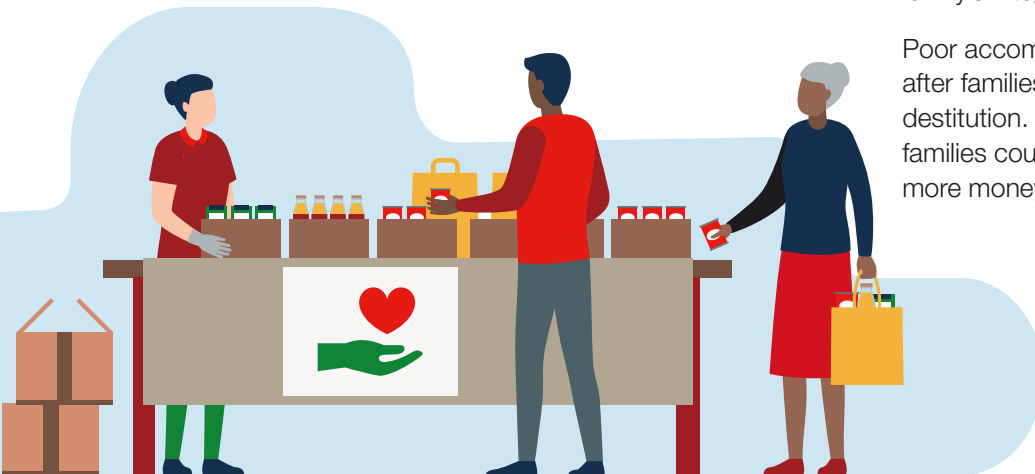
Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff

“I was so scared in the period when we stayed without money, of course I was really thinking about lack of clothing, different weather they are coming from to here, it is very cold, buying the food, it’s a lot of thinking, five weeks is a lot to provide everything.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Glasgow

In addition to struggling to get necessities such as warm clothing, this period of destitution meant that families were unable to explore the area that was their new home. The inability to begin local orientation had a negative effect on the whole family’s integration journey.

Poor accommodation also made the initial period after families reunited more expensive, increasing destitution. For instance, without a fridge or freezer families could not store food and therefore spent more money buying it as needed.



²⁴ See details in 'Arriving to the UK' section.

“We had to pay for the gas and electricity and the cost was so high because we had to pay for it on card. And all the time I was worried that I cannot pay for the card, and filling the meter and the house would be cold and my wife and child would have colds and because we haven’t got a fridge we had to buy just a little things, just the essentials that we could manage to keep at home without fridge, and really these things made me a lot under the pressure, under stress.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff

Additional delays in receiving payments

The average of 45 days (six and a half weeks) for families supported by FRIS to receive Universal Credit was often impacted by payments being delayed for various reasons. These included waiting to receive a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) with their National Insurance Number (NINO), having to apply for a NINO on arrival or failing the Habitual Residence Test (HRT).

Although a NINO is not required to make or receive Universal Credit^{xiv}, in practice the absence

of one can delay claims. Throughout the course of FRIS, arriving spouses increasingly had their NINO printed on their BRP.²⁵ However, this was not consistent which often caused issues for families. If a NINO had to be applied for it took on average 18 days more to receive Universal Credit than if it was initially printed on claimants’ BRPs.

To be eligible for Universal Credit, claimants must pass, or be exempt from, the HRT. While refugees, including sponsors for family reunion, are exempt,^{xv} this does not apply to their families arriving on family reunion visas.

The HRT is in two parts. First the claimant must prove they have the “right to reside” in the UK, which a family reunion visa proves. Secondly, the claimant must prove that they are habitually resident in the UK, which for families supported through FRIS was more difficult. There is no legal definition of habitual residence.^{xvi} It involves establishing that the person is voluntarily resident, has a “settled intention” to live in the UK, and has been in the UK for an “appreciable period of time”. However, “appreciable period of time” is not defined either.^{xvii} Decisions are therefore made on a case-by-case basis.

Arriving family members supported through FRIS who were unable to prove their habitual residence were, as a result, then refused Universal Credit. In these situations, the claimant had to request a mandatory reconsideration which required support. It can also be a lengthy process thus delaying payments further.^{xviii}

CASE STUDY: Arriving spouse failed HRT (Yorkshire)

An arriving spouse failed her HRT, as she was told the date she arrived in the UK did not match up with previous information she had given. The DWP claimed that she had said she had arrived eight days after the actual date of arrival. However, they could not provide any evidence of this when requested. It took four months, and the involvement of the DWP partnership team, to resolve the issue.

During the 136 days it took to be resolved, the family were only receiving the sponsor’s and children’s share of Universal Credit. They were missing out on around £194 a month. They were struggling financially. Their accommodation had mould that they believed was affecting their son’s asthma, however without the arriving spouse’s Universal Credit they couldn’t save up for a deposit for new accommodation.

²⁵ In August 2020 it was rare for arriving spouses to have their NINO printed on their BRP; in March 2021 52 per cent of arrivals (over 18 years old) since November 2020 had NINOs on their BRPs.

The impact of delays to payments were far reaching. For reunited refugee families, it hugely increased their vulnerability. Delays to Universal Credit could push them into further debt and increased the stress and worry during the initial period of reuniting. Receiving Universal Credit is also used by other services to demonstrate need and delays had a knock-on effect on access to

these services. For example, in some areas, the parent(s) needed to be in receipt of Universal Credit for their child(ren) to be eligible for free school meals. Thus, during the Universal Credit processing period or any delays, children did not get free school meals, further increasing the family's destitution.

BEST PRACTICE: DWP partnerships (Birmingham)



Many FRIS teams have developed productive relationships with local DWP Partnership Managers.

In Birmingham, the Red Cross emails the DWP Partnership Manager every time a reunited family is due to have their initial evidence interview. The Partnership Manager then informs the Work Coach dealing with the claim that they have a family reunion visa and will need to apply for a NINO through a particular route if they do not have one.

These relationships have allowed information about family reunion visas to be disseminated to DWP staff as well as providing routes for escalation if there are problems.

The Benefit Cap²⁶ and the two-child limit²⁷ affected many reunited refugee families. Twenty-two per cent of families supported by FRIS arrived

with three or more children and therefore were affected by the benefit cap and the two-child limit increasing financial strain on families.

CASE STUDY: Impact of benefit cap (Sheffield)

The sponsor was living in a two-bedroom flat with one child born in the UK. The sponsor's single Universal Credit payment was **£1047.03**. Once housing costs were paid to the landlord, the sponsor and her child received **£645.72**.

The sponsor was reunited with her husband and their three children, who all had to move into the sponsor's flat. Their joint Universal Credit payment was **£1984.09**; with housing costs deducted the total was **£1582.78**. However, the family were now also subject to the benefit cap and a further **£589.99** was deducted, meaning that they were left with **£992.79 for two adults and four children**.

This had far reaching implications. The family arrived independently and were in debt. The sponsor needed to repay the loan she took out from Universal Credit. The family were unable to move out of their overcrowded flat as they did not have the income to set aside and save for rent and deposit. The children were delayed in starting school as the family did not have enough money to buy school uniform and PE kit for all three. The Red Cross applied for a BBC Children in Need grant for school uniform.

The family relied on food banks as they struggled to make the Universal Credit payments cover all their essential daily living needs. They also had few opportunities for travel and leisure activities, to explore their local area, due to their very limited income.

²⁶ The benefit cap places a limit on the amount of money that working-age households can receive through benefits. The cap is applied through deductions made to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

²⁷ 'Two-child' policy limits support under Universal Credit. If the children are born before 6 April 2017 the family will get an additional amount for every child. If the child is born after 6 April 2017 Universal Credit will not pay for the third or subsequent children unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Impact of welfare system on arriving spouses

Many of the arriving spouses in families supported by FRIS relied financially on the refugee sponsor and tended to not engage with the benefit system. In only 27 per cent of families interviewed about benefits the arriving spouse engaged with the claim.

Universal Credit payments tended to go to sponsors as they were more likely to have a bank account and a claim prior to their partner's arrival. Although couples can receive Universal Credit payments split across two bank accounts DWP guidance states this should happen only "in very exceptional circumstances".^{xix}

Arriving spouses were often already more isolated with fewer social connections to draw upon than sponsors.¹ The benefit process thus further disempowered them hindering their independence and choice to begin their own integration journey. Financial security is an important element of integration yet it is often out of reach for the arriving spouse.

To mitigate this and empower arriving spouses, Red Cross caseworkers informed them about the benefits process, encouraging them to take an active role in the benefits applications and to open their own bank account. However, due to high caseloads and the immediate on arrival needs this was not always possible.

“Most of the work I do around benefits in the beginning has to be as efficient as possible and prevent destitution... I don't have the time to see [the arriving spouse] afterwards to say “okay, now you have a bank account let's make sure you update the details on the Universal Credit and Child Benefit, to make sure you can choose the split option.””

Caseworker, Glasgow

Experiences of applying for housing support

The type of housing families live in determines how they are supported to pay rent. In emergency and temporary social housing, families receive Housing Benefit through their local authority to cover rent. In permanent local authority or private housing, families receive a housing element as part of Universal Credit.

Although Housing Benefit is not affected by the benefit cap, the Universal Credit housing element is. Families supported by FRIS who were affected by the benefit cap were often financially worse off when they moved into permanent housing as their income was reduced and were often unaware that this would happen. Families must make up the shortfall created by the benefit cap with their remaining Universal Credit payment, tightening an already small budget for living costs.

“The house is £650 but when they gave us our house they cut out our Universal Credit. They [used to] give us £625 but they reduce £220 from the total money they were giving us, so we can say they're only paying £400 to us for housing instead of £650... we're taking from the money the other [Universal Credit allowance] and giving to the landlord.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham

Some families were also missing the housing element of their Universal Credit payments. This led to these families falling into rent arrears which can cause serious problems.



Experiences of applying for Child Benefit

Child Benefit is a non-means tested benefit, administered by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). People who are responsible for a child who is under 16 (or under 20 if in approved education or training) are eligible. Child Benefit is paid every four weeks to one claimant (in one bank account). There is no limit to how many children an individual can claim for, but Child Benefit is subject to the benefit cap.ⁱ

The adult claimant must have right to reside and in most cases have been living in the UK for three months. Refugees are exempt from this condition, however individuals on family reunion visas are not.ⁱⁱ Due to the three-month eligibility criteria, sponsors must apply for Child Benefit and so, these payments, as well as Universal Credit payments, often go into their bank accounts.

“The arriving spouse is definitely the one [in the family] who I would say is probably the least integrated and independent and the way that the welfare benefits work they don’t facilitate them having independence... I know very, very few families who have chosen the split payment option so at least having Child Benefit, one benefit in one of their names would be ideal but we can’t even put that in their name.”

Caseworker, Glasgow

As with Universal Credit, the Child Benefit application processes increase arriving spouses’ financial dependency on their sponsors – and the majority of arriving spouses are women.

Reunited refugee families’ access to Child Benefit

Of the 1,173 reunited refugee families FRIS supported, 69 per cent arrived with children and therefore needed to make Child Benefit applications once they arrived. The process for applying for Child Benefit is more straightforward than Universal Credit as it is one form to fill in and post.

However, families often still needed support to apply for Child Benefit as it required English language, access to a computer and printer, understanding the postal service and ensuring a reliable return address was given. As reunited refugee families can move accommodation multiple times in the initial period of being in the UK, it was sensible to use a more stable address, such as that of a friend or the Red Cross office.

Language barriers affected the families’ ability to deal with delays or provide further information requested by HMRC. Although offered an interpreter when they spoke to someone over the phone, many found it difficult to navigate the initial automated identity checks that were only in English.

Generally, the families supported through FRIS received Child Benefit in a timely manner. Across the nine FRIS regions it took on average 45 days (six and a half weeks) to receive Child Benefit after applying for it, well within the 12 weeks the government states it can take to process a new claim.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nonetheless, it took on average 37 days (just over five weeks) after arriving in the UK to *apply* for Child Benefit. Reunited refugee families often delayed applying for Child Benefit as it required sending away original identity documents²⁸ and these documents were needed to apply for other services such as housing, schooling and healthcare. Additionally, some families felt nervous sending away original identity documents, especially if their housing situation was still unstable.

While Child Benefit can be backdated for three months, and the timing was still within the government’s timescale, not having this income for an average of nearly 12 weeks significantly stretched the families’ finances further in the initial period and increased the risk of debt.



In addition to the identity documents needed to claim Child Benefit, children aged between 16-20 must be in approved full-time education or training for parents to receive payments for them. As discussed later in the report, children arriving through the refugee family reunion process often struggled to enrol and/or experienced delays in getting into schools and colleges.²⁹ This was particularly problematic for families who arrived during summer holidays. In some cases, this held up the entire family's Child Benefit application.

In addition, Child Benefit is used by some services as proof of the relationship between parent and child. When families experience delays in accessing Child Benefit, it can almost render those children invisible to certain services.

Impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that support given to FRIS families to apply for, and maintain, Universal Credit had to be provided remotely which was extremely difficult. Universal Credit is a complicated process, especially for those with limited language and digital skills. Caseworkers and families often worked by taking a screen shot of Universal Credit journals and sending pictures to each other through WhatsApp.

Quarantining often exacerbated the financial strain many reunited refugee families faced, especially when living in shared accommodation, as it meant they were unable to access shared kitchen facilities to cook. Families reported having to buy takeaways each day, using money they would have spent on other essential items.



“The time when we were having corona symptoms we couldn’t go and use the [shared] kitchen to cook and there was no one to go to help. We had to everyday get [takeaways], we ended up spending £500... It’s just not the food it’s all the other things that you need to get like medication, other stuff, if I had neighbours to go and cook my stuff it would be a lot more economical than getting [takeaways] but we didn’t have that option.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Birmingham

During the pandemic, the government increased the Universal Credit standard allowance by £20 per week. The Red Cross welcomed this change. However, this measure was temporary and ended in October 2021.

²⁸ Children’s birth certificates as well as passports or travel documents used to enter the UK are required as well as original supporting documentation to prove identity and eligibility of the adult claimant.

²⁹ For further details see the Education section of this report.

Health



Key findings

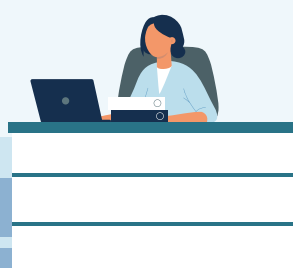
- **It took on average 31 days after families arrived in the UK to register for a GP.**
Many GP surgeries requested identity documents for registration which caused barriers for some families who did yet not have proof of address or their BRP. Additionally, families faced language barriers when registering with a GP as interpreting facilities were not available during registration or at reception.
- **There was a lack of interpreters for GP appointments. Half of the families interviewed said they used their partner as an interpreter** – in most cases this was the husband interpreting for the wife. Reliance on family members for support and interpreting meant a lack privacy which can affect people's willingness to disclose health concerns, including mental health needs.
- **Families faced long waiting times for access to mental health support after arrival.**
Given that the majority of people arriving on a family reunion visa are coming from situations of unrest and would qualify as a refugee in their own right, there was also a high level of need for mental health support.

The Home Office *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019*^{iv} recognises that access to healthcare is vital to integration. The key aspects concerning integration are the equity of access to healthcare and the responsiveness of the healthcare system to the needs of the individual. Good health facilitates better integration, participation and engagement in other areas of life such as employment and educational activities.

However, despite this, unlike arrangements for people arriving through a resettlement programme, there is no medical assessment of needs for people arriving through family reunion. The Red Cross works to identify any health needs of the reunited refugee families they support in advance, to ensure arriving family members can access

the support they need on arrival. For those who arrive independently, however, the lack of statutory medical assessment can mean there are delays in getting the support they need.

This section explores reunited refugee families' experiences of accessing healthcare and the barriers encountered. It focuses on GP access because it acts as the gateway to healthcare in the UK and the Red Cross offers support to families with this.



Access to healthcare for reunited families

Registering with a GP

“The main problem was getting the proof of address. Also, it is very difficult for us to register with the GP and fill the forms, they want us to fill without an interpreter, it’s impossible to do that because of the language barrier.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff

Arriving family members supported through FRIS experienced multiple barriers to registering with a GP. On average it took 31 days after families arrived in the UK to register. The primary issues reunited refugee families faced were language barriers and practices wrongly refusing to register them. One refugee sponsor in Leicester explained that registering with the GP was *“one of the biggest issues in this country that I face”*.

Many reunited refugee families reported that GP surgeries did not provide interpreting support during the registration process, booking appointments or at reception. As 51 per cent of sponsors and 94 per cent of arriving partners spoke little or no English this was a key issue, especially for those who speak English may not be able to read or write in English and so can still encounter language barriers.

Although NHS England guidance states that on registration patients should be made aware of the different types of interpreting available^{iv}, it does not specify that interpreters should be provided for the registration process itself. The Red Cross supported over half of the families interviewed to register with the GP.

In addition to the language barrier, families supported by the Red Cross were often refused registration by GP surgeries because they could not provide proof of address or ID, despite NHS guidance stating that GP surgeries should not refuse to register a patient on this basis.^{vi}

Reunited refugee families are unlikely to have the documents requested for proof of address³⁰, as many of them are in emergency or temporary accommodation, or proof of identity, as they may be experiencing delays in obtaining their BRPs.³¹ The Red Cross was often asked to verify families’ identities in order to access such services.

“It wasn’t easy at the beginning because we were living in a hostel then they moved us into this accommodation. When we tried to register with the GP, they asked us to provide proof of address, but because my wife and my children their names are not in the tenancy agreement and we couldn’t provide a proof of address that’s why we had to ask the Red Cross to help us and give us a letter, evidence that we are living together.”

Refugee sponsor, male Cardiff

In addition, some families were hesitant to register with a GP until they are in more stable housing so they do not have to move GPs multiple times.

Reunited families’ access to healthcare is crucial for them to start their integration. The issues highlighted above show how access to one key service is often reliant on another and illustrates how delays in one area can impact the family’s access to other services and their integration as a whole.

³⁰ Such as tenancy agreements, bank statements or utility bills.

³¹ Refugee sponsors may have their BRPs, but their arriving family may be waiting and have limited identity documents from their home country.

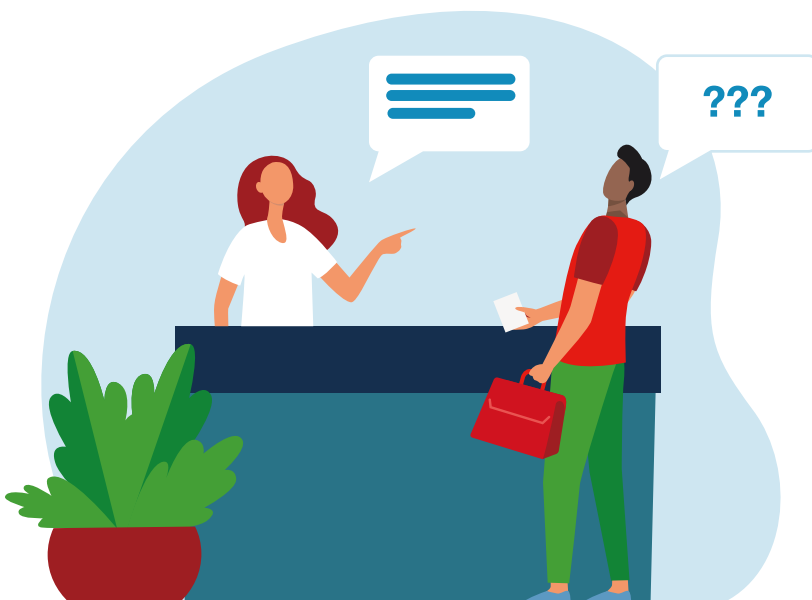
Ongoing access issues

Once families were successfully registered with a GP, accessibility remained an issue. The language barrier remained a big challenge at all stages from booking the appointment through to picking up a prescription. This was mainly due to an absence of interpreters and translations.

“Unfortunately, I can’t book appointments with my GP if I need because of the language barrier and they speak very fast and I can’t understand the language, that’s why we always ask the lady from the Red Cross to book appointments on our behalf and sometimes my husband he helps, he understands a little bit English.”

Spouse, female, Cardiff

While interpreters should be available during GP appointments, this did not always happen in practice for families supported through FRIS. Although the lack of interpreters at GP surgeries is not an issue everywhere³², over half of the families interviewed about healthcare mentioned that their partners interpreted for them at GP appointments. In some case it was the sponsor’s choice to interpret, but other families were unaware that they had a right to request an interpreter or were not provided with one despite asking.



“I had to contact [the surgery] to mention that I have an appointment and I needed interpreter and they used to say it’s okay they will book an interpreter, and then whenever I used to go there wasn’t any interpreter available and they would say that they booked it and they don’t know why the interpreter is not there... 15 times I’ve had appointments and only one I had interpreter.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Leicester

This often led to families not understanding what treatment they were receiving. One family supported by FRIS reported that the arriving spouse went to the GP for a blood test and her children had vaccinations without being offered interpreters. The sponsor explained that “we used the dictionary to translate the letter so we understood what the appointment was for”. For families who have limited literacy skills, this is not an option. And indeed on being asked if he would have accepted an interpreter the sponsor replied “yes of course”.

FRIS teams also found that families had difficulties picking up prescriptions. One family had been told by their GP to collect what they described as a “powder” from the pharmacy however they did not know the name of it or which pharmacy the GP sent the information to. The sponsor felt that he could not telephone the GP surgery to ask because he did not have sufficient English and that he could not go and ask a friend due to the pandemic.

³² A sponsor in Birmingham, for example, explained that communication is not an issue for his family as his GP surgery has interpreters offering three different languages.

Lack of information about system

Reunited refugee families often arrived in the UK with very little knowledge about the healthcare system, and available information and resources required a higher level of digital and English literacy than families tended to have. For families supported through FRIS, this caused a lot of confusion about healthcare which delayed access to appropriate services and created health inequalities.

Many families struggled with tasks such as booking appointments. Some families were asked to book online which was difficult for those with limited digital literacy as it was a new system to learn and understand. Other families had to call at 8am to try and get emergency appointments, but this was difficult for those who needed support to call as it is out of working hours for Red Cross caseworkers.

Limited understanding of the system also meant that families missed appointments and then had to start the process again. In some cases, families received letters stating they'd missed an appointment which they found difficult to understand. In others, families reported that they were unable to make new appointments as they had missed one without cancelling it with the surgery, resulting in the surgery refusing to book a new appointment.

“I guess that’s something that can happen very easily, especially when you have quite a lot of things to do in the beginning when you don’t really know the system [or] the impact it could have on you if you don’t cancel appointments.”

Caseworker, Glasgow

Barriers to receiving mental health support

“Every single family that I have worked with needed mental health support.”

Caseworker, London

Reunited refugee families have experienced the effects of being separated from each other and the challenges involved in reuniting, in addition to traumatic experiences related to their situation before arriving in the UK and the reasons why the sponsor initially sought asylum in the UK.^{lvii} Evidence collected through the FRIS project shows that poor mental health can affect families' integration experiences, while the integration experience itself can have an adverse effect on the family's mental health.

Disclosure

The initial period after arriving in the UK is difficult for families and a lot of time is spent navigating services to access basic needs. Families supported through FRIS were initially in crisis mode when they reunited. It was not until families felt more settled and able to trust service providers that they tended to disclose mental health issues. Families may experience cultural differences in terms of attitudes and ways of talking about mental health.

“A lady I was working with from Afghanistan had never heard of emotional support or counselling or anything like that.”

Caseworker, Glasgow



Barriers to accessing mental health services

Once a disclosure has been made, there were significant barriers to accessing the right support. Mental health services are oversubscribed across the UK and have long waiting lists. While this issue is not specific to reunited refugee families, it can have an adverse effect on newly arrived families who are not used to UK systems. For example, FRIS teams found that long waiting times can discourage individuals from getting the mental health support they need. For those with trauma-related mental health needs this was particularly difficult.

“We’re talking six months to a year [to receive psychological support] and for people with PTSD this wait can be a nightmare.”

Caseworker, Sheffield

Families supported through FRIS also experienced other barriers to accessing mental health care. During a focus group conducted with caseworkers who work closely with families, issues such as a lack of trust in the overall system, individuals not wanting to appear as though they are complaining or as a burden and general low expectations of the system were discussed. Some of these issues can be seen as a result of the lack of sensitivity and support they receive from statutory agencies as well as information that is inaccessible and complex to understand due to language barriers.



Barriers for Children

Children, like their parents, are trying to cope with the loss of their homeland, culture, friends and extended family as well as possibly facing judgement and isolation in their new community. FRIS partner Barnardo's found that many children in reunited refugee families expressed a sense of uncertainty and fear of the unknown.

Some parents expressed to caseworkers concerns about their children being unhappy, reluctant to engage and becoming withdrawn from socializing. In addition, some children experienced bullying and isolation at school.

FRIS caseworkers described being worried about the lack of mental health support for children:

“For unaccompanied minors there is automatic mental health screening from the mental health service, but children that are arriving into families get no support. I really feel like they should have some sort of mental health screening as soon as they enter the country because often family members are receiving mental health support and aren't in a place to offer it to their children.”

Casework coordinator, Plymouth

Reunited refugee children's experience of loss and change, coupled with the lack of mental health support to help them through the transition, has a significant impact on their integration. Without the stability offered by established social connections, for example, children can find it difficult to feel comfortable in their new home and thus delay successful integration. This then can have an impact on the whole family, as many of the parents FRIS supported often struggled themselves if their children were unhappy.

Impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that GP services moved predominantly online, creating further access issues for those with limited English language, digital literacy and access to technologies. FRIS teams found that families had to rely more on the Red Cross as a result. Cancelled appointments and long waiting lists for appointments and treatments further increased anxiety for those already struggling to navigate the UK health system.

The mental health implications of Covid-19 are only just becoming apparent and are concerning for those already vulnerable to mental health issues. Isolation affects mental health and is something that reunited refugee families arriving during the pandemic experienced more so than those arriving at other times. A Red Cross psychosocial practitioner highlighted that reunited refugee *'families have that added layer, being isolated in one room'*.

Restrictions in response to Covid-19 further affected families' mental health, especially children who did not have the opportunity to integrate and play while being confined to a hotel room, in some areas for months.

The lockdown also meant that there was a lack of privacy for reunited refugee families, especially for those in shared accommodation. Often an individual's sense of dignity meant that family members did not want to disclose sensitive information with other family members around.

"If you're in a room, just one room with all the family members you can't talk freely, you don't have privacy. Some of the arriving wives don't have phones, they only have their husband's."

Project coordinator, Leeds

Remote working exacerbated this issue as families could not go to GP surgeries for their appointments. This meant that families were less able to disclose sensitive issues and doctors, or indeed Red Cross caseworkers, couldn't easily identify any potential mental health needs. Remote working hindered health professionals' ability to identify additional causes of concern due to not being able to read body language, not meeting the whole family and being unable to understand the family dynamics.



Education



Key findings

- **Children supported by FRIS generally started school between two weeks and four and a half months after arriving in the UK.** Across all nine FRIS regions, it took on average 66 days from arriving in the UK for children to start school.
- **Families often needed support to navigate a school's admissions process as they were often complex and applications tended to be in English only.**
- **Delays in children getting into school not only negatively impacted their integration but also their parents' integration.** For example, parents were unable to attend ESOL classes due to childcare.
- **Access to other services had an impact on access to education:**
 - Delays accessing Universal Credit can delay children getting Free School Meals as eligibility is contingent on receiving Universal Credit (except in Scotland where children in primary one – four are eligible for free school meals regardless of their family's financial situation.^{lviii})
 - Housing impacted schooling in two main ways
 1. Frequently moving accommodation meant that children must move schools or delay applying for school until they were living in more permanent housing.
 2. Unsuitable housing such as issues of overcrowding resulted in children having nowhere to do homework or get proper rest.

The Home Office *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019*^{lix} recognises that access to education is critical to integration and serves as a significant integration marker. Access to and progression in education is recognised as greatly impacting employment opportunities, wider social connections, language learning and cultural exchange.

Schools are crucial spaces for forming and developing social relationships and have been argued to be the place, outside of the family,

where refugee children develop a sense of belonging.^{lx} QMU found that “*school itself was a pivotal site for making connections and acted as an accelerator for integration for both children and parents*”.^{lxi} Therefore, if children are not in school or face delays getting into school it negatively affects the whole family's integration.

This section explores reunited refugee families' experience of accessing schooling, both primary and secondary, and the barriers that they encounter.

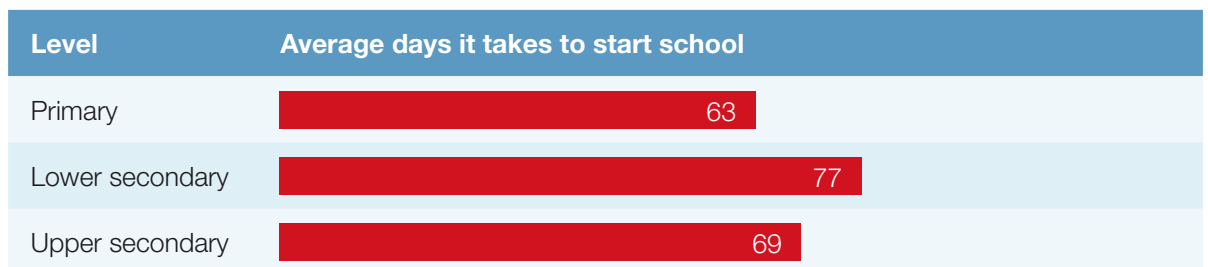
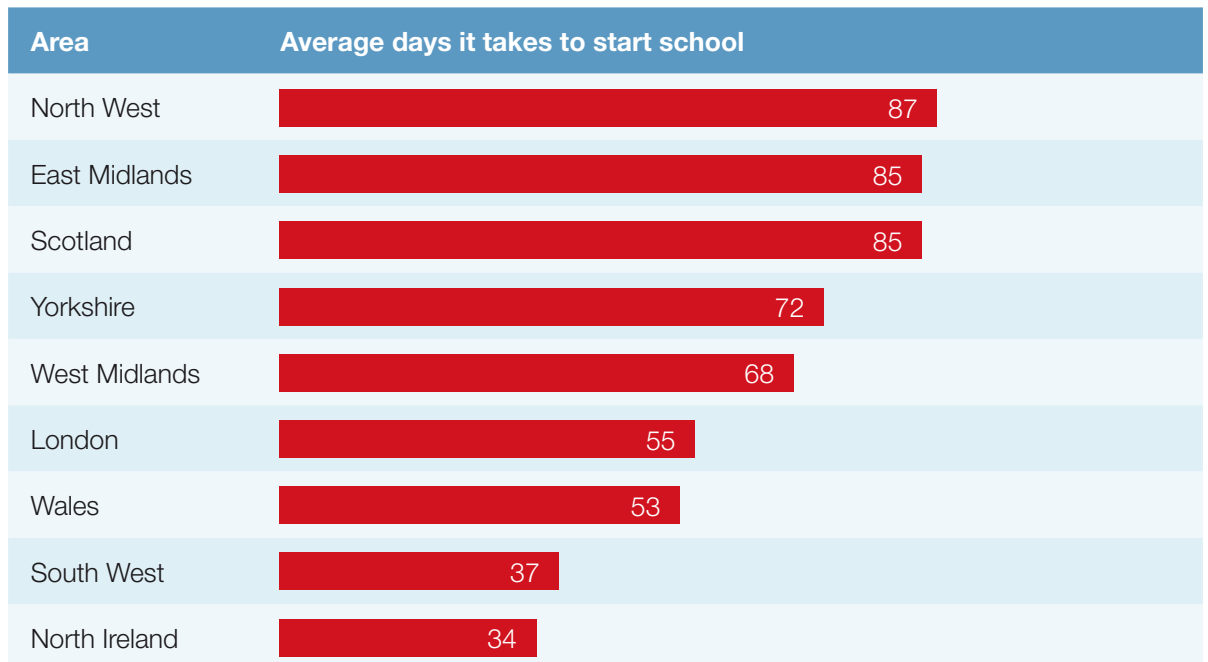


Delays in access to schooling

Refugee sponsors or organisations such as the Red Cross often notify local authority homeless teams of a family's expected date of arrival to the UK if known. FRIS teams found that local authorities generally did not take advantage of this advance notice in terms of supporting families to apply for school places or ensuring that the children were enrolled in school. As a result, children could be missing from education for long periods without the local authority being aware of it.

Nearly half (46 per cent) of the children supported through FRIS waited for at least two months before starting school. One in 10 were out of education for over 120 days after arriving in the UK.

Sixteen- to 19-year-olds experienced longer waiting times to get into school or college. There are more barriers to accessing education for this age group including less statutory support, for instance the Children Missing from Education Teams (CMET) do not help with college enrolment. ESOL enrolment processes were also affected by access as if students have missed the first set of lessons they must wait for the new term.



School admissions processes

School admissions processes are generally designed for children starting schools due to age rather than a change of location. “In-year applications” are used for non-standard admissions, such as a change of location. Reunited refugee families generally use in-year applications. Families must often wait until they are in the UK before applying to schools as they do not know exactly where they will live after arrival.

Different areas have different school application processes. Some are centralised for local authority areas while others involve individual applications to schools. Some involve paper applications while others use online applications or portals.



The Fair Access Protocol (FAP) exists in England and Wales³³ to ensure that vulnerable children and those struggling to access in-year admissions are allocated a place as quickly as possible.^{lxi} Every local authority must have a FAP in which all schools (including academies) must participate.

While the FAP does not provide a definition of vulnerability, the guidelines identify children of refugees as eligible. This means that if reunited children have arrived in England or Wales, and have been unable to secure a school place despite taking all reasonable measures to do so, the local authority should allocate the children to a school. The Education Act 1996 states that schools cannot refuse mid-term admission due to children not being resident in the area at the start of the term.^{lxiii}

The in-year admissions process is difficult to navigate. Reunited refugee families experience language barriers and struggle to complete applications which are normally only available in English. In addition, families may have to complete multiple applications depending on the local admission process. Some of the families supported through FRIS experienced difficulties even locating the appropriate form and understanding the standard application procedures. As a result, families were heavily reliant on support from the Red Cross, other local charities and/or their community to make school applications.

BEST PRACTICE: Fair Access Protocol (Birmingham)

In Birmingham, an effective partnership was set up with the local authority through which all children supported by FRIS are referred directly to the Fair Access Protocol (FAP) team.

Prior to using the protocol, families had to approach local schools and complete the individual school application forms. This could be a long process, as families would often approach the school and be told that no places were available. Families would then have to research and approach other schools. This was made more difficult when families were in emergency hotel accommodation and unsure where they would move next.

The protocol simplifies the process for families as it requires only one form to be filled out (often by the Red Cross or other organisation) and sent to the FAP team. The FAP then allocates a school for the children. This saves a lot of time as families do not need to approach multiple individual schools and children often start attending school much quicker. Also, once a family have arrived in Birmingham, school admissions are emailed with the children's names and dates of birth, meaning they are automatically added to the “out of school” register, something which did not happen previously.

³³ In Wales it is the Fair Access Policy.

Language barriers do not stop at the application stage but exist throughout the school system. One sponsor explained his experience of parents' evening:

“When they phoned us we told them that we don’t really understand, they said okay we will call you again but they didn’t call and this is exactly the issue we have – we cannot make the communication to find out the exact progress of [our son] or if there are any issues or if the school needs anything from us. So that two-way communication which obviously is required for a child at school is something we are suffering with and not able to deal with.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Belfast

FRIS partner QMU found that children's education is important for parents' wellbeing. Not being able to communicate with the school causes another source of worry for parents.



BEST PRACTICE: Children Missing from Education Team (Sheffield)

The Red Cross can refer reunited refugee children to Sheffield local authority's *Children Missing from Education Team* (CMET). The families have an appointment with CMET who verify their identity and complete one application on behalf of the family, with interpreters if needed. The family has three preferences and the CMET send applications to the schools directly. The family are sent a School Place Allocation letter from CMET stating which school has accepted the child for a place, which usually takes about two weeks. The CMET will follow up a few weeks later to see if the children are enrolled or on the way to enrolment. If they are not, CMET contacts the family or does a home visit.

This process addresses language and digital barriers that affect applications and means that families are not left chasing individual schools. It also means that once the CMET are aware of a child not in school in the Sheffield area they ensure the child enrolls.

As a result, children in Sheffield start school on average one week earlier than children elsewhere in England.



Impact of other services on education **Housing**

Welfare benefits and school grants

For reunited refugee families who are on limited income, costs associated with their children's schooling can become a source of anxiety. While there are certain grants available to help with things such as Free School Meals (FSM), parents must be in receipt of benefits and/or have a low household income for their children to be eligible, except in Scotland.

In Scotland, FSM are universal for children in primary one – four (and as of January 2022, primary five).^{bv} Outside of these years and for support over school holidays, FSM entitlement is means-tested. In Wales FSM entitlement is means-tested regardless of what year pupils are in.^{bvi} In England, FSM are universally available for four-year-olds to 16-year-olds with a household income of less than £7,400.^{bvii} In Northern Ireland, the household income threshold is much higher at £14,000.^{bviii}

For reunited refugee families the eligibility criteria can cause issues, as they often face delays in receiving their Universal Credit as illustrated in this report. Only in Scotland is it possible for parents who have applied for, but are not yet in receipt of, benefits to have their FSM application processed. This can mean that families are left trying to provide three meals a day on their limited income, increasing destitution as well as heightening stress and anxiety.

This is exacerbated by the fact that across the UK there is no clear guidance on how long it will take to process the FSM application. The process varies across the UK³⁴ and FRIS teams found that it depended on the individual school's admin team. This meant that even for some families who were in receipt of benefits, there were delays in accessing FSM.

The benefits criteria also impact other costs such as help with uniform as, where grants are available³⁵, they are only eligible for those on FSM.

Reunited families who were accommodated in emergency housing or who moved multiple times when they initially arrived in the UK often delayed starting the process of applying for school. Families supported by FRIS, who spent between two weeks to six months in emergency social housing (depending on the area), were given advice by local authorities or other organisations to delay school applications until they were living somewhere more permanent. Families therefore tended to delay school applications to avoid having to make them again when they moved.

“My case is that I don't have any temporary place. I have been going from hotel to hotel and staying there 28 days, being moved from here to there and I think that because they can see that I'm moving about, until I have somewhere that I can stay I think it is wise that they are not accepting the kids into school, as they're going to go to a different place.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham



³⁴ In both England and Northern Ireland, physical paper forms are submitted to the school or local authority, or the Education Authority; in Wales and Scotland forms are completed online on the local authority's website.

³⁵ Grants are available in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England, help with uniform depends on the local authority. Some will provide support while others advise parents to ask the school directly for help.

“When [my] family arrived we moved to a hostel... I don’t know when I will be moved to a temporary home so I submit the application for school and they accept them and I went and bought the uniform... and when they were supposed to join the school, the housing send me the letter they will move us to a temporary house... then I asked for them to be moved schools again and bought them another uniform and imagine that they have friends and their teachers now... and when we get a permanent house again we will need to change schools again.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Cardiff

One family in Birmingham spent five months living in hostel emergency accommodation. They had one room, shared kitchen facilities and there was nowhere to wash clothes. The two eldest of their five children were not at school during this time, their mother explained the effect this has had on them:

“They do nothing, so even now living in the hostel, it’s still the same thing... when they’re there, nothing, nothing. They don’t do anything... Their behaviour has changed, especially if I have to do the school run to pick up the children. [My older child] has to wait in front of the house for one hour because I only have one key. So their behaviour and everything changes.”

Spouse, female, Birmingham

Detrimental impact of children not being at school

Delays on starting education have a serious impact on children’s integration. FRIS teams found that waiting for a school place and not being in school had a significant effect on children’s mental health. Many parents reported that their children suffered from loneliness and felt depressed.

School is usually the place where newly arrived children can make friends. Not being in school meant making friends was more challenging and caused children to feel very different to their peers, further impacting the child’s mental health and integration. It was especially difficult for children whose siblings get a place in school before them and they must continue to must wait.

“[The children] are emotionally not happy, very upset, frustrated, they don’t have school, they don’t have friends, they feel bored.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham

“Kids, all they talk about is which school you go to and what you’re doing. And then what they can say, oh we’re going from hotel to hotel, and we have not started any education, we are just going to a charity two days a week... [the children] come and ask me... ‘Why are we excluded from other kids? Why can’t we go to school like others?’”

Refugee sponsor, male, Birmingham



In addition to the impact on children's mental health, long gaps in education also have an academic impact as there are no resources or support for children who are waiting for school places.

Delays to schooling not only affect the children but have a significant impact on parent's integration. QMU found that getting children into school is an upmost priority for parents in order to get the family established in the UK. Only once this happened did parents feel able to "extend their own horizons".^{bix}

Delays to education also have an impact on the parents' integration, in practical terms, such as affecting the family's eligibility for welfare benefits as 16 to 19-year-olds must be in full time education to qualify for the child element of Universal Credit and Child Benefit. This often caused a significant decrease in a family's income and increase in financial insecurity.

As well as this, parents were unable to get on with their own integration such as attending ESOL classes if their children were at home and required childcare. Almost a third of parents FRIS interviewed about schooling spoke about a parent, mostly mothers, not being able to attend ESOL classes because their children had not yet got a school place.

“It was a very difficult time. My husband and [eldest child] are going to college and I had to stay with [my youngest child] because I couldn't leave this child alone at the hostel. I had to manage the family... it was a very difficult time for him and for us and for me.”

Spouse, female, Birmingham

In stark contrast to the example above, an arriving spouse in Belfast explained what it meant to her having her children in school (and nursery) a few days after they arrived in the UK:

“It's a very big help to us because even you go to a new place or a new city with new culture you know nothing about that area, you can't speak the people's language. So when your mind is free about your children, where are they, what they're doing, their plan and school whatever, my mind is really free. Wherever I am, whether I am in the world or in the class or anything I'm doing my mind is really free, it's a really huge help.”

Spouse, female, Belfast

Impact of Covid-19

In most areas, Covid-19 exacerbated the problems families faced getting children into school. The need for extra support to start and progress applications was felt even more acutely because of new processes in response to Covid-19 and the need to self-isolate.

Families were in emergency housing for longer, children were out of school for longer and, as a result, FRIS partner Barnardo's observed an increase in depression and loneliness among reunited children.

The pandemic highlighted the challenges of living space generally across the UK and for reunited refugee families, living in already overcrowded or poor accommodation, it was extremely difficult.

“Now because of lockdown my daughter studies for college and we have meetings on Zoom, we have a small space... my [15-year-old] boy must study too in his room. My young boy needs to do some activities too. This space is too small and sometimes my daughter goes to the toilet or the kitchen [to study]. My daughter does not get space to be quiet when doing her course. It is very difficult.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Glasgow

Furthermore, children did not have the opportunity to integrate and make friends during lockdowns.

“The pandemic has been difficult for children, especially if they arrived during lockdown. It was very disorientating, and they were not able to start school and make friends. Going to school is crucial for them to begin to make sense of where they are, friendships and culture. Also something positive and meaningful to focus on.”

Barnardo's caseworker, Birmingham

In addition, some families had to rely on non-statutory support to access resources needed for home schooling. One sponsor with three children explained that an organisation provided her with a voucher to buy school clothes and also a laptop for her child to do schoolwork on.

“This has happened for the other two kids in the lockdown when it was home learning we didn't get, we couldn't get the classes. Because of that my kids' academic level was affected. Especially because we were in hostel, they didn't have laptop and even the wifi – I didn't have wifi – even for me, the English school for me I didn't join them because I didn't have laptop. We were in hostel and the school was far away from us and it was corona and I have to travel with the bus for long distance, so they didn't go to school.”

Refugee sponsor, female, Plymouth



Family dynamics

Barriers to accessing services negatively affect the whole family's integration. However, it is important to acknowledge that integration journeys and goals are related to individual and personal experiences. Different family members have different integration journeys.

When considering the integration journey of a family it is important to understand the context these families are reuniting under and the unique circumstances they face. There are different factors at play including the refugee sponsor's own integration pathway, the length of separation, the strain the family reunion process puts on families, the dynamic between reunited family members, gender imbalances and the impact on children.

Refugee sponsors

The period of separation and then the process of reuniting once in the UK can be extremely challenging for families and can have a major impact on family dynamics. Sponsors need to re-establish relationships with their family, while adapting to new roles and navigating changes in family composition. It can be extremely difficult for sponsors and arriving family members to get to know each other again, and to re-build connections that may have been lost during their time of separation.

“My children were raised with my wife all the time we were apart. Because of this, my children are now more attached to her than me. They have less contact and interaction with me. This is a big problem that I am working on, I am trying to be their friend again. Especially for my youngest daughter, I have not been there for most of her life. They didn't know me for a long time, no close contact at all. Now we are communicating again, my children are starting to get to know me again and things are improving.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Leicester



“I had thoughts all the time that I would never see my family again... I felt constant fear that we would never be reunited. I am incomplete without them. The separation really affected my children. When they were ill or feeling low they would ask, ‘why are you not here?’ I was suffering so much, I couldn’t explain why I am not there, why I wasn’t able to support them. For my wife, she had to compensate and be everything for them and I just live in hope that one day things would change. She did such a good job and I appreciate her so much for it. The process was so hard, to be so far from home and to be so far from my family.”

Refugee sponsor, male, Leicester

“It’s everything all at once, the lack of money, the housing issue... the family saying why have we come here and sort of blaming him for the family problems and putting a lot of stress on him.”

Project coordinator, Birmingham

“It is more common for the sponsor to experience poor mental health. This impacts on the whole family as they are often relying on the sponsor to help them to settle in the UK. If the arriving family have a difficult time on arrival the pressure on the sponsor can be immense.”

Barnardo’s caseworker

Sponsors play a key role in supporting the family to establish themselves in their local area.^{lxx} Yet, the family’s dependency on the sponsor can result in the sponsor experiencing great stress and pressure to take care of them when they arrive.^{lxxi}

This can be exacerbated by the barriers in accessing key services many reunited families face, for example if arriving family members have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) restrictions attached to their visa.

CASE STUDY: Impact of NRPF condition on family dynamics

A sponsor sponsored his wife and two younger brothers, aged 17 and 18 years old. His brothers were given NRPF conditions on their visas which had a huge impact on the family’s ability to settle:

- The NRPF condition meant that they weren’t able to access local authority housing support and so lived in one bedroom in a shared flat for six months.
- The NRPF condition negated the overcrowding guidelines.
- The sponsor and his wife temporarily sofa surfed with two of the sponsor’s friends, which was especially difficult for the wife as she was staying on her own with people she did not know.

- The sponsor’s brothers enrolled in college for ESOL lessons but found it too difficult to concentrate because of their home life.
- The sponsor and his wife worked long hours to cover costs, as the brothers were not eligible for universal credit.
- The sponsor’s wife was not able to attend ESOL because she worked full time.

The family’s former lawyer eventually agreed to appeal the NRPF conditions pro bono. It was successful and the NRPF condition was lifted within weeks. It was only after the NRPF condition was lifted, and the sponsor was working and raised enough money to move, that the housing issue was solved and the family could move forward with their lives.

Arriving spouses

Arriving spouses came across increased barriers to their integration journeys. These barriers were further exacerbated by the fact that arriving spouses tended to have less English than sponsors. In addition, arriving spouses had less access to means of communication such as a phone or laptop; 39 per cent of arriving spouses had their own smart phone on arrival.

During the FRIS program, 84 per cent of arriving spouses were women, and 16 per cent were men. While the impact of gender is not explored in depth in this report, it is important context for the dynamics set out below and would merit further research.

Refugee sponsors tended to take the lead on navigating and negotiating with services, and this can result in restricting contact that arriving spouses have with external services and can affect the direct provision of services to arriving spouses. This is the case for housing, welfare support and healthcare.

The housing process is dominated by the sponsor as they are the ones usually using online systems, doing the bidding and who have knowledge of and therefore choose the area. For a homelessness and housing application to the local authority, the arriving spouse must be added as a 'secondary applicant' and the children as 'dependents' of the primary applicant. The bidding process is dominated by the sponsor as the login details for the original social housing application are used, and there is no separate login provided for the secondary applicant.

Similarly, arriving spouses often rely financially on the sponsor. Welfare benefit processes can disempower the arriving spouse – joint Universal Credit claims are paid into one bank account (unless there are exceptional circumstances) and that bank account is generally the sponsor's as they already have one set up. The arriving spouse cannot apply for Child Benefit as they must be resident in the UK for three months to be eligible. And there are further barriers connected to the difficulties arriving spouses experience trying to open bank accounts, as is mentioned earlier in this report.

In terms of access to healthcare, arriving spouses are often dependent on their sponsor for help to register and access services. There are often no interpreters for GP registration or reception, and arriving spouses often struggle to provide identification as their names are often not on leases or household bills. Arriving spouses therefore often rely on sponsors to help register with GPs and book appointments. Sponsors have also been known to interpret for spouses during appointments. This is particularly concerning as it does not allow women any privacy in terms of their own physical, mental and sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Delays to children getting into school have serious impacts on both the children's and parents' integration journeys. It is generally the mother's integration journey that is affected as they tend to be the primary caregivers. Therefore, they have fewer opportunities outside of the home such as attending ESOL and other integration activities.^{lxvii}

Similar to the challenges set out above, due to the urgency in which families must start navigating services on arrival to the UK, casework services through FRIS were sometimes forced to deprioritise the individual needs of arriving spouses.

“It's difficult when you have a high caseload and a lot of that is destitution support, finding that time to have an appointment with the arriving spouse to go through things like bank accounts just takes a back seat, which I think is not great because it's really important. But when it's between that and making a social services referral it does come second.”

Caseworker, Leeds



Arriving children

During the FRIS program 63 per cent of people arriving on family reunion visas were children. Research by QMU found that the integration of the whole family often centred around the children's wellbeing. If the children were not in school, unhappy or feeling unsettled, the parents' integration would not progress.^{lxviii}

Education is crucial for children's integration and, as detailed above, important in the parents' journeys too. The issues children face when waiting for a place in school can be exacerbated when the family is destitute, have very limited money for leisure activities or are living in unsuitable accommodation.

The Home Office *Indicators of Integration Framework 2019* states that access to leisure activities is important for the integration process.^{lxix} These activities help individuals learn more about the culture of a country and local area, provide a chance to increase social connections and practice language skills, and improve overall individual health and wellbeing. QMU's research highlights how accessing community spaces and leisure activities facilitates friendships.^{lxx} Yet due to the destitution many reunited refugee families face, they often cannot afford many leisure activities or the travel to attend free activities.

Pre-pandemic, families who had an appointment at the Red Cross were given an all-day bus ticket to get to their appointment. This ticket could be used multiple times in the day allowing the family to do numerous tasks such as food shopping, going to appointments or visiting different areas of the city.

In addition to the lack of leisure activities and delays to schooling, some children also play a supportive role to their parents due to language and digital skills. Children as young as 10-years-old who were supported through FRIS often helped their parents with Universal Credit journals and issues with housing. This hindered the child's integration as, in addition to being unable to learn and develop with their peers, they were also required to shoulder a lot of the responsibility for the whole family.

“They take on so much of the burden and I really try and take it off them but it gets to the point where even when I call the dad, where prior as a sponsor they were happy to speak to me, as soon as the family arrive they automatically pass it to the children.”

Caseworker, Plymouth



Improving integration for reunited families: learning from resettlement

Reunited refugee families, as this report shows, face numerous challenges in securing suitable accommodation, making sure they have an income, registering for health services and ensuring any children are able to start school as quickly as possible. This happens because, in most cases, it is only once family members have arrived in the UK that they are able to start the necessary processes to begin their new lives in the UK and, even after they have arrived, many of those processes are not set up to support reuniting families.

For too many families, the result is that the joy of being reunited in the UK is quickly followed by months of stress and instability, including experiences of destitution and homelessness. This severely impacts their prospects for integration.

Alongside refugee family reunion, the main safe route for refugees to travel to the UK is through resettlement schemes. The UK currently runs a number of resettlement schemes: the UK Resettlement Scheme, Community Sponsorship and the Mandate Resettlement Scheme. In the first nine months of 2021, 847 people arrived through these schemes, with a further 316 coming under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS)³⁶ and the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (both of which closed in early 2021).



In August 2021 the UK government announced a new scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). The government pledged to accept 5,000 refugees in the first year and “up to 20,000 in the coming years”.^{boxvi}

With the exception of the Mandate Scheme, refugees who are resettled in the UK under one of the resettlement schemes are supported to start their integration both pre- and post-departure. The way that resettled families are supported offers examples of how early interventions, as well as additional support, can work in practice and assist with integration.

As set out in the Home Office’s policy guidance, refugees who will be being resettled to the UK are offered pre-departure cultural orientation sessions providing basic information around health, housing, education, benefits and refugee rights and entitlements. This is age appropriate, with specific sessions offered to those aged between five and 18. Health assessments are also carried out and the information shared with local authorities ahead of arrival so that appropriate care can be arranged, and long-term accommodation is allocated eight weeks before the refugees arrive.

Once refugees arrive in the UK, the Home Office provides funding to local authorities to support refugees resettled in their area for the first 12 months. This includes the provision of a caseworker to support resettled families during that time. As the Home Office’s guidance states, the caseworker will: *“help the family to register with local schools or ESOL classes, attend Jobcentre Plus appointments for benefit assessments, register with a local GP, provide advice and referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture, and assist with access to employment.”*^{boxvii}

³⁶ Also known as the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme or VPRS.

Learning from resettlement

A number of issues that reunited families face could be alleviated if some of the processes in place for refugee resettlement were adapted to support reunited refugee families. In particular, if more support was in place as soon as it was known that family members would be coming to join a sponsor in the UK, this could have significant benefits.

Previous research has shown that, in relation to refugee resettlement, “pre-departure experiences and processes are vital to successful post arrival settlement and integration”.^{lxviii} As has been highlighted in this report, the FRIS programme was able to show that early intervention strategies for reunited families have positive outcomes, such as providing the sponsor with pre-arrival information and support, managing their expectations and helping them to understand the process of family reunion. This also helped manage arriving families’ expectations of life in the UK so they were aware of some of the challenges they might face.

The way that resettlement schemes have allocated housing to families eight weeks prior to being resettled in the UK removes the stress and anxiety of presenting as homeless to the local authority on arrival, as well as alleviating pressure on local authority homelessness teams. It also means that families have a realistic idea of where they will be living. In turn, this helps children register with schools and families to register at a GP much more quickly. Similarly, where local authorities proactively responded to a pre-arrival notification that a family was to be reunited in their area, the family was then able to start their integration journey much more quickly.

There is also generally better awareness across statutory services of the rights and entitlements of resettled refugees, the challenges they may face and the support they need to establish their new lives in the UK. In part this has been driven by the positive media coverage of various resettlement schemes, specific funding allocated to integration support through resettlement schemes and important relationships built up between statutory services and support organisations at a local level. More and better understanding of refugee family reunion could have similar positive impacts.



Recommendations



1. Reuniting refugee families should be supported to integrate as soon as possible when they arrive, with processes starting prior to their journey to the UK.

The Home Office should:

- when issuing grant letters to successful applicants for refugee family reunion, include information on the steps the family should take next, including support with finding suitable housing, the welfare system, and registering children with schools.
- expand plans to enhance support for refugee integration within the New Plan for Immigration to specifically include reuniting refugee families. This includes ensuring practical and emotional support provided through schemes such as the Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund is available to support reunited families.
- work with other government departments and local authorities to ensure that the barriers to integration for reuniting families are removed and to increase awareness of refugee family reunion.
- the refugee integration loan criteria should be expanded to include costs associated with refugee family reunion.

The Scottish Government should:

- as the New Scots integration strategy is updated, include integration support for reuniting refugee families and ensure that funding is provided to support relevant commitments.

The Welsh Government should:

- as part of its commitment for Wales to be a National of Sanctuary, provide integration support for reuniting refugee families and ensure that funding is provided to support relevant commitments.

The Northern Ireland Executive should:

- include integration support for reuniting refugee families in the upcoming refugee integration strategy and ensure that funding is provided to support relevant commitments.

2. Reunited refugee families should be able to access suitable accommodation as quickly as possible and should not have to present as homeless to a local authority on the day of arrival in the UK. Where families are accommodated in emergency accommodation, this period should be kept to a minimum.

Local authorities should:

- act on notifications that families will be reuniting in their areas, whether this is from the sponsor or a support organisation, to secure suitable accommodation before the family arrives in the UK. This includes completing a homelessness assessment and explaining housing options to the family.
- ensure that reuniting families are provided with information about their housing options and the homelessness process in a language they understand.
- ensure that families accommodated by them are able to contact their housing officer. This includes making sure families have the correct contact information and have access to an interpreter if required.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should:

- amend the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* to state that an individual who is likely to become homeless within 56 days as a result of relatives arriving on a refugee family reunion visa is to be considered as 'threatened with homelessness', and that housing authorities should take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness as a result.

The Housing and Social Justice Directorate should:

- amend the *Homelessness: Code of Guidance* to state that an individual who is likely to become homeless within 56 days as a result of relatives arriving on a refugee family reunion visa is to be considered as 'threatened with homelessness', and that housing authorities should take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness as a result.

The Welsh Government should:

- amend the *Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness* to state that an individual who is likely to become homeless within 56 days as a result of relatives arriving on a refugee family reunion visa is to be considered as 'threatened with homelessness', and that housing authorities should take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness as a result.

The Northern Ireland Executive and the Scottish Government should:

- amend policy and practice to ensure the housing needs of reunited refugee families are met by applying best practice in securing suitable accommodation for reunited refugee families prior to their travel to the UK.

3. Reunited refugee families should be able to secure an income as quickly as possible, and welfare system processes should ensure that families do not face a destitution gap.

The Department for Work and Pensions should:

- allow a sponsor's Universal Credit claim, along with any relevant payments, to continue while a new joint claim is processed following the arrival of their family members.
- add people arriving on a refugee family reunion visa to the groups exempt from needing to meet the Habitual Residence Test by amending the Universal Credit Regulations 2013.
- ensure reunited families are offered, where necessary, advance payments while a new joint claim for Universal Credit is being processed.
- increase the accessibility of the Universal Credit process by ensuring that the online journal is available in the claimant's own language and offering translation/interpreters for face-to-face Jobcentre appointments and when people contact the Universal Credit Helpline.
- ensure Universal Credit case managers and work coaches are aware of the rights and entitlements of reunited refugee families and are able to provide additional support as needed. This includes offering split payments where a joint claim is made.
- allow applications for Universal Credit to be processed using verified copies of ID documents to allow families to retain their documentation.
- accept evidence that children aged 16 and above are on a waiting list for a school for the purposes of applications for Universal Credit.

The Treasury should:

- add people arriving on a refugee family reunion visa to the groups exempt from the 3-month residence requirement for the purposes of entitlement to Child Benefit by amending the Child Benefit (General) Regulations 2006
- allow applications for Child Benefit to be processed using verified copies of ID documents to allow families to retain their documentation.
- accept evidence that children aged 16 and above are on a waiting list for a school for the purposes of applications for Child Benefit.

4. Reunited refugee families should be able to navigate the health system to access any support they require.

NHS England, NHS Wales, NHS Scotland and the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland should:

- provide translated guidance for refugee families on how to access the health and care system, including how to register with a GP, book appointments and their entitlements for care.
- support healthcare providers to ensure interpreters are available for all appointments, including by providing relevant funding and training for front line staff on how to work with interpreters.
- issue clear guidance for GP surgeries that reunited families are not required to provide ID and/or proof of address in order to register.

The Home Office should:

- prioritise the provision of mental health support and services as part of the integration support for reunited families and refugees.

5. Children being reunited with their family members in the UK should start school as quickly as possible to minimise gaps in their education and to form new friendships.

Local authorities should:

- ensure housing and education teams are working together, including by notifying each other when one first becomes aware that a refugee family will be arriving in the area.
- provide translated information explaining the school admissions process.
- ensure reunited refugee families are offered the option of a referral to the local Fair Access Protocol.
- provide evidence when a child aged 16 or older is out of school and on a waiting list to act as proof of eligibility for Child Benefit and Universal Credit.

References

- ⁱ Marsden, R., & Harris, C. (2015). “We Started Life Again” Integration Experiences of Refugee Families Reuniting in Glasgow.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support; Marsden, R. (2018). ‘Voices of Strength and Pain. Impacts of Separation, Loss and Trauma on Health and Wellbeing on Reunited Refugee Families.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ⁱⁱ The Migration Observatory (2021). Asylum and refugee resettlement in the UK. Retrieved from: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migration-to-the-uk-asylum/; Home Office (2021). Asylum and resettlement datasets. Retrieved from: gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#asylum-applications-decisions-and-resettlement
- ⁱⁱⁱ British Red Cross (2020). ‘The Long Road to Reunion: making refugee family reunion safer.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ^{iv} UKVI (2021). Visa decision waiting times: applications outside the UK. Retrieved from: gov.uk/guidance/visa-decision-waiting-times-applications-outside-the-uk#join-family-in-the-uk
- ^v Beswick, J. (2015). ‘Not So Straightforward: the need for qualified legal support for refugee family reunion.’ Retrieved from: refworld.org/docid/560cfcd4.html
- ^{vi} British Red Cross (2020). ‘The Long Road to Reunion: making refugee family reunion safer.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ^{vii} Home Office (2020). ‘Family Reunion: for refugees and those with humanitarian protection.’ Version 5.0. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/947066/family-reunion-guidance-v5.0ext.pdf; Home Office (2021). ‘Public Funds Migrant access to public funds, including social housing, homelessness assistance and social care.’ Version 18.0. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1013601/public-funds-v18.pdf
- ^{viii} Derluyn, I., Mels, C., & Broekaert, E. (2009). & Smith, A., Lalonde, R. N., Johnson, S. (2004). in Marsden, R., & Harris, C. (2015). “We Started Life Again: Integration Experiences of Refugee Families Reuniting in Glasgow.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ^{ix} Home Office (2021). ‘New Plan for Immigration.’ Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972517/CCS207_CCS0820091708-001_Sovereign_Borders_Web_Accessible.pdf
- ^x Home Office (2021). Family Reunion Visa Grants. Retrieved from: gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets
- ^{xi} Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). ‘Understanding Integration: a Conceptual Framework.’ *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166–191. Retrieved from: academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262; Marsden, R., & Harris, C. (2015). “We Started Life Again” Integration Experiences of Refugee Families Reuniting in Glasgow.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support; Marsden, R. (2018). ‘Voices of Strength and Pain. Impacts of Separation, Loss and Trauma on Health and Wellbeing on Reunited Refugee Families.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ^{xii} Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). ‘Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019’. 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Balliot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). ‘Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.’ Retrieved from: gmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf
- ^{xv} Marsden, R., & Harris, C. (2015). “We Started Life Again: Integration Experiences of Refugee Families Reuniting in Glasgow.’ Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ^{xvi} UNHCR (2017). ‘Towards Integration. The Syrian Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme in the United Kingdom.’ Retrieved from: unhcr.org/uk/5a0ae9e84.pdf

- ^{xvii} Gov.UK (accessed 2021). Biometric Residence Permits. Retrieved from: [gov.uk/biometric-residence-permits/prove-your-status-without-a-brp](https://www.gov.uk/biometric-residence-permits/prove-your-status-without-a-brp)
- ^{xviii} Gov.UK (accessed 2021). Refugee Integration Loan. Retrieved from: [gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan/what-youll-get](https://www.gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan/what-youll-get)
- ^{xix} Lewis, M., & Keefe, J. (2021). Mental Health and Debt. Retrieved from: moneysavingexpert.com/credit-cards/mental-health-guide/
- ^{xx} Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). 'Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019'. 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- ^{xxi} Ibid.
- ^{xxii} Housing Act 1996. Section 176 Meaning of accommodation available for occupation. Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/176/1996-09-30
- ^{xxiii} Just Right Scotland (2020). 'Reunited Family Members.' Retrieved from: justrightscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rights-of-Reunited-Family-Members-July-2020.pdf
- ^{xxiv} Home Office (2020). 'Family reunion: for refugees and those with humanitarian protection'. Version 5.0. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/947066/family-reunion-guidance-v5.0ext.pdf
- ^{xxv} Just Right Scotland (2020). Reunited Family Members. Retrieved from: justrightscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rights-of-Reunited-Family-Members-July-2020.pdf
- ^{xxvi} Housing Act 1996. Section 189 Priority need for accommodation (1). Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/189; Housing Act 1996. Section 199 Local connection. Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/199; Housing Act 1996. Section 191 Becoming homeless intentionally. Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/191
- ^{xxvii} Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021). Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities. Retrieved from: [gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-8-priority-need](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-8-priority-need)
- ^{xxviii} Strang, A., Baillot, H., & Mignard, E. (2016). 'Rights, Resilience and Refugee Integration in Scotland: New Scots and the Holistic Integration Service.' Scottish Refugee Council. Retrieved from: scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Full_Integration_Report_June_2016.pdf
- ^{xxix} Baillot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). 'Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.' Retrieved from: qmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf
- ^{xxx} Moore, M. (2020). 'DSS discrimination in the time of coronavirus.' Retrieved from: blog.shelter.org.uk/2020/06/dss-discrimination-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/
- ^{xxxi} Cromarty, H. (2021). 'Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers (England).' Retrieved from: commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9057/
- ^{xxxii} Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). 'Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019'. 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- ^{xxxiii} Kone, Z., Ruiz, I., & Vargas-Silva, C. (2019). 'Refugees and the UK labour market.' Retrieved from: compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ECONREF-Refugees-and-the-UK-Labour-Market-report.pdf
- ^{xxxiv} Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). 'Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019'. 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- ^{xxxv} Scottish Government (2018). Scottish Welfare Fund: family reunion crisis grant guidance. Retrieved from: [gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-family-reunion-crisis-grant-guidance/](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-family-reunion-crisis-grant-guidance/)

- xxxvi Welsh Government (accessed 2021). Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) Guidance. Retrieved from: gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf
- xxxvii Department of Work and Pensions (2020). Alternative Payment Arrangements Guidance. Retrieved from: gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-alternative-payment-arrangements/alternative-payment-arrangements
- xxxviii Scottish Government (accessed 2021). Universal Credit (Scottish Choices). Retrieved from: gov.scot/policies/social-security/universal-credit/
- xxxix NI Direct Government Services (accessed 2021). How and when you get paid Universal Credit. Retrieved from: nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-and-when-you-get-paid-universal-credit
- xi Department for Work and Pensions (accessed 2021). Chapter 6 Working with participants with complex needs and/or additional support requirements. Work and Health Programme provider guidance. Retrieved from: gov.uk/government/publications/work-and-health-programme-provider-guidance
- xii Public Law Project (2019). Universal Credit: Refugees. Retrieved from: claimantcommitments.org.uk/universal-credit-refugees/
- xiii Department for Work and Pensions (accessed 2021). New to Universal Credit. Retrieved from: understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/new-to-universal-credit/how-and-when-youll-be-paid/
- xliii NI Direct Government Services (accessed 2021). Extra Financial Support. Retrieved from: nidirect.gov.uk/articles/extra-financial-support#toc-2
- xliv Social Security Administration Act 1992. Part 1 Claims for and payments and general administration of benefit (1B)(b). Chapter 5 Arrangement of sections. Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/5/pdfs/ukpga_19920005_300916_en.pdf
- xlv Universal Credit Regulations 2013. Section 9 Persons treated as not being in Great Britain(4)(d). Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/376/regulation/9
- xlvi Department for Work and Pensions (2013). Advice for Decision making: staff guide. Chapter C1: Universal Credit – International Issues (C1946). Retrieved from: gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-decision-making-staff-guide
- xlvii Ibid. (C1951 & C1957)
- xlviii Parkes, H., & Morris, M. (2020). 'Testing Times. Universal Credit and the Habitual Residence Test.' Institute for Public Policy Research. Retrieved from: ippr.org/files/2020-07/habitual-residence-test-july20.pdf
- xlix Department of Work and Pensions (2014). Personal Budgeting Support and Alternative Payment Arrangements Guidance. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378300/personal-budgeting-support-guidance.pdf
- i Balliot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). 'Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.' Retrieved from: qmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf; Marsden, R., & Harris, C. (2015). 'We Started Life Again: Integration Experiences of Refugee Families Reuniting in Glasgow.' Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- ii Gov.UK (accessed 2021). Claim Child Benefit. Retrieved from: gov.uk/child-benefit/what-youll-get
- iii Gov.UK (accessed 2021). Child Benefit if you move to the UK. Retrieved from: gov.uk/child-benefit-move-to-uk
- iiii Gov.UK (accessed 2021). Claim Child Benefit. Retrieved from: gov.uk/child-benefit/what-youll-get
- iv Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). 'Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019.' 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- lv National Health Service England (2018). Guidance for Commissioners: interpreting and translation services in primary care. Retrieved from: england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/guidance-for-commissioners-interpreting-and-translation-services-in-primary-care.pdf

- lvi National Health Service (accessed 2021). How to register with a GP. Retrieved from: nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/; Public Health England (2014). NHS entitlements: migrant health guide. Retrieved from: gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide
- lvii Marsden, R. (2018). 'Voices of Strength and Pain. Impacts of Separation, Loss and Trauma on Health and Wellbeing on Reunited Refugee Families.' Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications#Refugee%20support
- lviii My Gov Scot (2021). School Meals. Retrieved from: mygov.scot/school-meals
- lix Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). 'Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019.' 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- lx Sim, D., & Laughlin, K. (2014). 'The Long-term Integration of Gateway Protection Programme Refugees in Motherwell, North Lanarkshire.' Retrieved from: uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Long-Term-Integration-of-Gateway-Protection-Programme-Refugees-in-Motherwell-North-Lanarkshire.pdf; Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S.M., & Barnett, A.G. (2010). 'Longing to Belong: Social Inclusion and Wellbeing Among Youth with Refugee Backgrounds in the First Three Years in Melbourne, Australia.' *Social Science and Medicine* 71(8), 1399–1408. Retrieved from: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20822841/
- lxi Balliot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). 'Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.' Retrieved from: gmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf
- lxii Department for Education (2021). Fair Access Protocols. Guidance for school leaders, admission authorities and local authorities. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1012993/FAP_Guidance.pdf
- lxiii Department of Education (2021). Education Act 1996: Part 4 School admissions, Attendance & Charges. Chapter 1: Admission, Registration & Withdrawal of Pupils: Section 433. Retrieved from: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/part/VI#reference-c15250141
- lxix Balliot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). 'Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.' Retrieved from: gmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf
- lxx Ibid.
- lxxi Marsden, R., & Harris, C. (2015). "'We Started Life Again: Integration Experiences of Refugee Families Reuniting in Glasgow.'" Retrieved from: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications
- lxxii Balliot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). 'Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.' Retrieved from: gmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf
- lxxiii Ibid.
- lxxiv Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). 'Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019'. 3rd edition. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf
- lxxv Balliot, H., Kerlaff, L., Dakessian, A., & Strang, A. (2021). 'Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families.' Retrieved from: gmu.ac.uk/media/10689/pathways-report-final-with-exec-summary-final.pdf
- lxxvi Gov.UK (2021). Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme. Retrieved from: gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme
- lxxvii Home Office (2021). UK Refugee Resettlement: Policy Guidance. Retrieved from: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1011824/Resettlement_Policy_Guidance_2021.pdf
- lxxviii UNHCR (2017). 'Towards Integration. The Syrian Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme in the United Kingdom.' Retrieved from: unhcr.org/uk/5a0ae9e84.pdf

For more information

[redcross.org.uk](https://www.redcross.org.uk)

@RedCrossPolicy

March 2022

The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland (SC037738), Isle of Man (0752) and Jersey (430).