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Executive summary

This report examines the intersecting challenges that refugee women encounter in securing safe, suitable, and stable housing in the UK. Commissioned by Places for People and produced by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, the report draws on an extensive review of literature and practice insights, alongside stakeholder reflections gathered in a July 2025 roundtable. It aims to inform housing interventions that are inclusive, trauma-informed, and responsive to the specific needs of women refugees.

Women seeking asylum and those with refugee status face multiple housing-related barriers, often compounded by gender-based violence, discrimination, and precarious legal status. Challenges include a lack of control over housing location, short transition (moving-on) periods following the gain of refugee status, and limited access to support services. These challenges impact the social networks, heighten risks of homelessness, and negatively affect health and well-being. The no-choice model of dispersal, poor accommodation standards, and the condition of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) further exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

The report outlines what works in supporting refugee women, such as social support and sponsorship schemes, more transparent communication, trauma-informed services, and co-produced solutions, and brings forward several recommendations. These include extending the refugee transition period, investing in trauma-informed training, ensuring access to culturally appropriate services, and fostering cross-sector collaboration. Key messages from the stakeholder feedback reinforce these findings and underscore the urgent need for equitable access to public resources, greater autonomy in housing decisions, and long-term planning that supports the integration of refugee women into society.

By addressing the housing inequalities experienced by refugee women, housing providers and local authorities have the opportunity and responsibility to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group and to strengthen systems of support that benefit all disadvantaged tenants.

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1. Introduction

Women face a wide range of growing challenges, including with regards to housing inequalities, Gender Based Violence (GBV), and cost of living pressures. For Housing Associations looking to tackle these inequalities, it is essential to have a strong understanding of the nature of the challenges faced, and to place emphasis on addressing these challenges in decision-making across all areas of service delivery. With this in mind, CCHPR has produced this positioning paper for Places for People, with the aim of enabling conversations in the sector around meeting the diverse needs of women through housing interventions.

Existing literature makes clear that women face a wide range of challenges which directly relate to their housing circumstances. Recent research highlights that women are typically disadvantaged compared with men with regards to housing affordability. This is partly on account of the gender pay gap, with an average house costing more than 11 times the average woman's income, compared with around 8 times the average man's income (Women's Budget Group, 2024). Homelessness is also a key issue facing women, with two thirds of families with children experiencing homelessness headed by a single mother (ibid.). GBV and domestic violence against women has been shown to be closely connected to housing insecurity: domestic abuse is often a factor contributing to women's homelessness, and homelessness also can exacerbate women's vulnerability to violence (Engender, n.d.). Housing is known to be essential for abuse survivors' safety and security, and shortages of affordable housing can represent a barrier to people wanting to leave an abusive relationship (National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group, 2021). Evidently, housing is critical to addressing the intersectional inequalities faced by women. In a context where many services, including social care and mental health support services, are under immense pressure, the question of what Housing Associations can do to support vulnerable people is increasingly pertinent.

Through its Living Plus and Communities teams which deliver different programmes, Places for People provides supported housing for people with complex needs. Around half of Places for People's vulnerable customers are refugees, with slightly over half being women over the past year. It is therefore crucial for Places for People to understand the array of challenges faced by women refugees, who are likely to be experiencing a wide range of intersectional inequalities. Refugees are known to face numerous difficulties which housing challenges can exacerbate. For instance, recent research shows that having to move regularly at short notice between different temporary accommodation arrangements can negatively affect people's ability to settle and integrate (Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024). As the

British Red Cross (2022) highlights, local support networks built by women are vital to their wellbeing, and a vital source of assistance or information, and having to leave places at short notice due to housing arrangements can prevent women from accessing this support, and lead to a sense of isolation. Understanding this group's complex needs can present Housing Associations such as Places for People with opportunities to consider what they might do better to address these needs.

In order to inform Places for People's approach to providing housing interventions to support women facing multiple inequalities, CCHPR has conducted a rapid review of existing evidence drawn predominantly from grey literature and has pulled together key insights from recent existing literature around women refugees' experiences of housing inequalities and of accessing housing in the UK. While the focus of this paper is on refugees, as Brown et al. (2022) note, it is difficult to disentangle refugee's experiences of their housing pathways from their experiences prior to being granted asylum, while waiting for a decision on their refugee application. Therefore, this paper also includes some discussion of the housing challenges faced by asylum seekers which endure downstream. This positioning paper sets out the key challenges facing women refugees which relate to housing, as well as examples of successes in supporting women refugees through housing interventions. The papers also collate key recommendations around how best to address the needs of women refugees through housing interventions.

2. Women Refugees in the UK

The number of people seeking asylum in the UK has increased considerably over recent years, with over 100,000 people claiming asylum in 2024 (Home Office, 2025). This compares to figures of 22,000 to 46,000 per year from 2004-2020 (ibid.). Most asylum seekers in the UK are male, with men representing just under 60% of asylum seekers last year. Meanwhile, women and girls made up 30% of people claiming asylum in the UK in 2024, of which 22% were aged over 18 years. A total of 20% of asylum seekers last year were children (ibid.). People arriving in the UK to claim asylum come from many different countries, and in 2024, the ten countries from which the highest number of refugees came were Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Syria, India, Vietnam, Eritrea, Sudan, and Iraq (ibid.). The challenges faced by women refugees are widely documented, and the following section of this report sets out some of these difficulties, with specific reference to the multiple ways in which housing challenges shape people's experiences.

3. Housing Challenges for Women Refugees

The Commission on the Integration of Refugees (2024) states that “the availability, quality, location, and security of accommodation has been shown to have a direct effect on people’s ability to integrate” (p.28). Housing is therefore a key issue with broader ramifications for people’s lives. While housing inequality is a problem faced by many disadvantaged groups, refugees face a heightened exposure to this as a result of the multiple concurrent vulnerabilities they experience on account of being refugees (see Brown et al., 2022). This section of the paper therefore sets out the key housing challenges faced by refugees throughout their time in the UK. While many of these issues are not specific to women, they do nonetheless form an important part of the experiences of many refugees in the UK and so are important to include in a discussion of the challenges faced by women refugees.

3.1. Housing as a political issue

Notably, controlling access to housing is also a key mechanism through which governments are able to manage asylum and refuge (Brown et al., 2022). The Bibby Stockholm – the barge docked in Dorset which was intended to accommodate 500 asylum seekers – is a case in point: Turner et al. (2023) show how Robert Jenrick, who was Minister for Immigration at the time, justified the use of the barge for housing asylum seekers both as a money-saving measure, and as a deterrent for would be asylum seekers. The authors highlight that the spatial distinction created by placing asylum seekers in a barge on the periphery of the local area “works to constitute people as peripheral and unwanted subjects” (ibid., p.6) and generates tension in the relationship between asylum seekers and the existing local community, thereby contributing to a difficult experience for those housed there. Further, Brown et al. (2022) indicate that given the context of the housing crisis in the UK, whereby there is a distinct shortage of affordable housing, alongside poor-quality housing and insecure tenure, media and public discourse often wrongly paints asylum seekers and refugees as taking priority when it comes to housing, at the expense of existing local communities. Compounded by racist attitudes, asylum seekers and refugees thus face considerable challenges when it comes to both their housing pathways, and public attitudes to their housing (ibid.).

3.2. Dispersal and social support

Even where people have been housed in more appropriate accommodation, people seeking asylum do not have a say in the location of that accommodation (British Red Cross, 2022). Indeed, under the ‘dispersal’ scheme through which asylum seekers are provided with accommodation by the Home Office, people are given no choice as to which

accommodation they accept or where this might be (Meer et al., 2019). While people can lodge requests to be housed in a particular location, these are only “granted in exceptional circumstances” (Gov.uk, 2024). This means that when people have formed local support networks, which can be an invaluable source of information and assistance, they can lose connections to these networks as a result of being relocated to new accommodation which could be in a distant location, and people in this situation can become isolated (British Red Cross, 2022). Women for Refugee Women (2024) shows that the uncertainty caused by having to move away from established support networks has a negative impact on women’s health, both physical and mental.

Similarly, once people have been granted refugee status, they often must move to different accommodation to that they were provided with during the asylum application process. This can mean that people must move to a new neighbourhood within the same city, leading to children being made to move from a school they may have just settled into (Meer et al., 2019). Such uprooting can disrupt a child’s education, affecting their academic progress, emotional well-being, and social development, and may fuel deeper inequalities. And while Meer et al. (2019) highlight that local authorities may seek to avoid moving people with new refugee status to avoid the impact of being uprooted again, shortages of social housing along with an imperative to avoid being seen to give refugees ‘special treatment’ (p.19) when it comes to housing, can create difficulties here.

The disruption of refugee’s ability to form social networks within local communities is also important for their long-term housing pathways: Brown et al. (2022) show that since there is a notable lack of ongoing ‘formal support’ for refugees, social networks are especially valuable to refugees in securing housing. Importantly, in a study of social capital and employment among refugees in the UK, Cheung and Phillimore (2014) found that the kind of housing people live in as asylum seekers makes a difference to their social networks: People who live in dispersal accommodation are less likely to have support from friends and relatives compared with those who are staying with family and friends, likely due to their lack of choice in location meaning that people are separated from these forms of networks (ibid.). Further, they found that outcomes are typically better for those who lived with relatives in the UK while they were waiting to be granted refugee status, highlighting the importance of enabling people to stay close to their social networks (ibid.).

Bonding capital – involving close relationships with relatives and friends – and bridging capital – involving relationships outside of these groups – are aspects of social capital, which have been highlighted in the literature as being of importance for the wellbeing and integration of refugees (Tuominen et al., 2023). As Pittaway et al. (2016) highlight, bonding capital provides essential social support, while bridging capital has been shown to help

people to access opportunities that might not otherwise be to hand within their close social networks (including employment and education opportunities), and is therefore important to social mobility. In a study of refugee communities in Australia, the authors highlight that strong bonding capital can be helpful for refugees to then go on to benefit from bridging capital as well, as this can give people the confidence to form relationships outside of their close personal relationships (ibid.).

Referring to the 'weak ties' of bridging capital, Granovetter (1973) states that such ties are "indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities" (p.1378). As Cheung and Phillimore (2013) highlight, refugees with strong connections within their own national and ethnic groups are also more likely to have more connections with organisations and groups outside of these communities. Strong personal social networks are therefore potentially beneficial for refugee integration. Importantly, refugees who receive support from their networks to access work and education are also likely to receive support from housing organisations (ibid.).

3.3. The moving on period

As Brown et al., (2022) make clear, a key challenge for refugees in finding appropriate housing is that when asylum seekers are granted refugee status, they have until recently had just 28 days in which to make this transition, and will no longer be allowed to reside in the asylum seekers' accommodation provided by the government after this time has passed. The challenges of trying to find housing during this short window can create considerable stress, particularly given the shortage of social housing in the UK, and being unable to find suitable housing can have knock on effects on people's ability to secure work (ibid.). This transition period is a key point at which refugees are at particular risk of homelessness, since 'twenty-eight days is frequently not long enough to find housing' (Mitton, 2020). Further, many refugees are single people, who are often not prioritised for housing in the socially rented sector (Allsopp et al., 2014). This means that single refugees may have to seek housing in the private rented sector, and in these cases, not having a deposit or lump sum saved, as well as not yet having a job or a bank account in the UK, can be considerable barriers to accessing housing. Responding to this issue, the Home Office is currently piloting a longer moving on period of 56 days, in order to reduce the risk of refugees becoming homeless (Gecsoyler, 2024). However, this trial will end in June 2025, and it is as yet unclear whether the longer moving on period will be retained beyond this point (ibid.).

New refugees who have been staying in dispersal accommodation during their asylum application period commonly decide to leave dispersal areas, and to move to other places where they may have a better social network or to larger cities, where they may struggle to

find housing (Homeless Link, 2017). Alternatively, some asylum seekers may have been given dispersal accommodation in some areas of the UK where housing is very expensive, creating an additional barrier to securing housing locally, and people may want to stay in these areas once they have been granted refugee status if they have developed local social networks, if they are aware of a greater number of job opportunities in these areas than in less expensive alternative locations, or if they are accessing local services with long waiting lists (such as language classes) (Lindley et al., 2024). Looking for housing outside of the area asylum seekers have been dispersed to during the 28-day moving on period is also problematic, as asylum seeker's allowances are very low, and people may struggle to travel to view potential rentals or to pay for internet connections to search property listings (ibid.). The pressures of the 28-day moving on period therefore create serious housing challenges for new refugees.

3.4. Homelessness and inappropriate accommodation

Further, a recent report by the British Red Cross (2022) highlights that prior to being granted refugee status, asylum seekers face multiple obstacles to accessing appropriate housing. The report indicates that women seeking asylum face a risk of becoming homeless, and that single women are less likely than women with children to be prioritised by the Home Office when it comes to arranging accommodation and so are more likely to face street homelessness (ibid.). And even where people are provided with accommodation, this does not always meet their needs: people interviewed for the British Red Cross's (2022) report highlighted that their mobility needs were not always taken into account when allocating accommodation, with one woman being placed in accommodation with stairs for over 12 months, despite making clear that she had an injury which meant she was unable to manage stairs. Another person interviewed for the report indicated that she was made to share a bedroom with another woman, which was particularly difficult on account of her nightmares (ibid.). Not being able to access appropriate housing is known to have negative effects on women asylum seekers' wellbeing (ibid.).

There is also a clear issue with housing quality in England, with 3.5 million households (approximately 14% of all households) occupying homes which do not meet the Decent Homes Standard (MHCLG, 2024). The picture is worse for people renting privately, with 21% of households in this tenure living in homes which do not meet this standard (ibid.). It follows that housing quality is an issue faced by refugees, who experience a multitude of problems in this regard, including overcrowding, cold homes, mould and damp, and poor maintenance of buildings (Brown et al., 2022). This is on top of being unfamiliar with the UK, with language barriers and unfamiliarity with local culture and complaint procedures presenting further issues. Cumulatively, these have clear implications for refugees' wellbeing, with research showing that a lack of satisfaction with accommodation results in a much

higher likelihood of poor wellbeing (Campbell et al., 2018). There is also a gendered dimension here, as it is also clear that women refugees are more likely to have poor emotional wellbeing compared with men (ibid.).

3.5. Gender-based violence, safety and security

The Commission for the Integration of Refugees (2024) indicates that being placed in housing which is not appropriate can lead to people feeling unsafe, while living in temporary accommodation can prevent people from feeling able to settle, since there is always a chance that they will be relocated. Not feeling safe is a particular problem for women early in their refugee housing pathway: Meer et al. (2019) highlight that when asylum seeker women are living in dispersal accommodation, they can feel uncomfortable with housing officers coming to inspect their homes without warning, particularly if they are unused to dealing with male officials in their cultures. Research by Women for Refugee Women (2024) shows that some women placed in hotels are afraid to leave their rooms and may not feel comfortable reporting issues with harassment or abuse, either from male staff or from other people being accommodated in the same hotel.

Many refugee women have fled from gender-based violence, including rape, exploitation, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation, and may also have faced further gender-based violence on their way to the UK (Women for Refugee Women (2021). For those who have faced sexual exploitation and abuse from people in positions of authority, such as peacekeepers and aid workers, it may be difficult to trust support services (see House of Commons, 2018). For women who have experienced such violence, there are concerns that poor conditions in accommodation provided for asylum seekers (including a lack of privacy) can retraumatise them (ibid.). Etwaria (2023) highlights that trauma-informed services within the social housing sector can prevent this re-traumatisation, as well as providing improved support for the large numbers of people who have faced trauma. However, Etwaria (ibid.) also notes that amidst the range of pressures on the sector, trauma informed approaches are often not prioritised. Findings from the SEREDA project (2021) note that in addition to the violence faced by many refugees before arriving in the UK, or during their journeys to the UK, there are also risks of violence within asylum and refugee housing, or during experiences of homelessness. The project findings also highlight that living in inappropriate housing as an asylum seeker or refugee further increases the risks to individuals of gender-based violence (ibid.).

3.6. Health and wellbeing

The Refugee Council (2012) shows that the healthcare needs of refugee women can be highly complex. Care for pregnant asylum seekers is a particular concern: A report by Maternity Action (2022) shows that women seeking asylum are vulnerable to poor health during pregnancy, and that issues such as not being able to access decent housing, or challenges with eating a good diet, contribute to difficulties with maternal health. And as previously highlighted, many refugees – including women refugees – have undergone traumatic experiences, and health services will need to provide appropriate care for both their physical and mental health (ibid.). A lack of access to services equipped to support people facing trauma can present a barrier to people recovering (SEREDA project, 2021). Housing is also shown to have a clear bearing on asylum seekers' mental health, with detrimental impacts caused by asylum seekers not feeling safe, not having autonomy over their own housing circumstances, and not being able to access appropriate support in the places they are housed (Spira et al., 2025). Anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are all shown to have a higher prevalence among asylum seekers compared with refugees (ibid.). And while some supported housing – including some which is designed with refugees in mind – may offer some mental health support (Homeless Link, 2021), many asylum seekers experience a lack of access to support from health professionals (Spira et al., 2025). Refugees and asylum seekers may also face challenges accessing health services owing to a lack of familiarity with how the UK health system works, as well as language barriers (Asif and Kienzler, 2023).

3.7. Discrimination

Evidence suggests that discrimination against migrants has long been embedded into the housing system in the UK (Lukes et al., 2018). This discrimination is also racialised, with black and ethnic minority communities known to be more exposed to discrimination and more likely to face homelessness than white British groups (Lindley et al., 2024). For refugees, discrimination in the private rental sector includes landlords increasing rent for non-British citizens, requiring British or EU passports to process tenancy applications, or not progressing with prospective tenants' enquiries if they do not "look or sound British" (Homeless Link, 2017: p.8). For refugees looking for lodgings within a home, many people's preferences for women lodgers mean that young male refugees are at a particular disadvantage (Lindley et al., 2024). Beyond acquiring housing, refugees can also face discrimination within their local communities, including in areas where asylum seekers are housed in dispersal accommodation. Women report feeling particularly vulnerable when they are housed in areas with little ethnic diversity and may not have access to support networks in these areas following experiences of racism (Meer et al., 2019).

3.8. The role of Housing Associations

In a study of refugee integration in Yorkshire and the Humber, Brown et al. (2020) show that housing organisations, including Housing Associations, play an important role in integration. However, these organisations often do not view themselves as playing a key role in refugee integration beyond their involvement in refugee resettlement: the authors highlighted that the roles of housing organisations in this regard varied widely, with some providing extensive support, and others simply allocating housing (ibid.). Notably, Brown et al. (2020) identify a lack of sharing of best practice among housing organisations around supporting refugees, meaning that learning is not typically shared across different housing providers. There are several reasons for this which were identified in the study: firstly, housing association staff interacting with residents might not always be aware that they have refugee status. Secondly, the existing pressures on housing associations might mean that organisations prioritise other pressing agendas over support for refugees. Additionally, there may be competition between different housing organisations to secure contracts for resettling refugees, which could disincentivise best practice sharing (ibid.).

4. What works?

This section draws together evidence of schemes or practices highlighted within the existing literature of delivering more positive outcomes for refugees with regards to their housing experiences in the UK.

4.1. Social support and sponsorship

Social support is known to be crucial to enabling refugees to settle into new communities (see Cheung and Phillimore, 2014). One way to facilitate this is through sponsorship within families and communities (Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024). The Homes for Ukraine scheme – which allowed UK residents to host Ukrainian families or individuals displaced by the war in their homes for at least six months – has been widely viewed as successful. Indeed, receiving hospitality in people’s homes is thought to have been a factor which has improved Ukrainian refugees’ experiences of integration into communities (Kandiah, 2023a). As well as being far more cost effective than housing refugees in hotels, costing around £702 million per year to house refugees in people’s homes, compared with an estimated £5.12 billion a year to house the same number of people in hotel accommodation, the scheme is thought to have enabled people to settle better into communities, with a lower risk of social isolation (ibid). Further, as previously highlighted, Cheung and Phillimore (2014) show that refugees who stayed with family and friends during their asylum application, rather than living in dispersal accommodation, are more likely to build social networks with friends and relatives, and to fare better when it comes to securing employment further down the line.

However, there exist several issues facing refugees even where they have initially been able to settle well, such as through the Homes for Ukraine scheme: The shortage of social housing and affordable housing in the UK means that after their initial placement with a host family, refugees can find it difficult to find alternative suitable accommodation (Kandiah, 2023a). This can place refugees at risk of homelessness (see Kandiah, 2023b). Additionally, mental health support for individuals being sponsored by families can be lacking, since hosts are often not trained in providing this kind of support, and access to existing mental health services in the UK is typically challenging (Kandiah, 2023a). It is also important to highlight that while public support for Ukrainian refugees has been strong, several commentators have shown that the same welcome has not been extended to asylum seekers and refugees from elsewhere, and that this is underpinned by racism and xenophobic attitudes (see Positive Action in Housing, 2025; Bayoumi, 2022).

4.2. Mitigating the impact of the moving on period

The moving on period in which people who have just been granted refugee status have in which to move out of their Home Office provided accommodation is highly problematic. As previously highlighted, the length of time refugees have to find alternative accommodation upon being granted refugee status was doubled in recent months to 56 days (Gescoyler, 2024). While this has yet to be evaluated, it may have a positive effect on refugee's housing outcomes.

Another approach which has been used on a small scale to address the issues created by the moving on period is to convert Home Office accommodation into local authority housing when the asylum seeker living there is granted refugee status, so that they do not have to move once the moving on period has elapsed (Brown et al., 2022). However, this is not replicable everywhere: As Meer et al. (2019) indicate, where asylum seeker dispersal accommodation provision has been contracted to a private firm, the company may not receive funding for the accommodation to be converted to house refugees after the moving on period. Additionally, since multiple asylum seekers may be sharing a flat, it may not be feasible to convert the flat into local authority accommodation when one person living in the flat is granted refugee status, while the other residents are still awaiting a decision (ibid.).

4.3. Communication

As a report by Homeless Link (2017) makes clear, in order to improve refugees' experiences of accessing housing, ensuring information on the processes and organisations involved in securing appropriate accommodation is communicated clearly to refugees from the outset is essential. This will include setting out the different kinds of housing available to refugees (including private rental housing, social housing, or supported housing in some cases), making clear what people can expect to pay for private rental housing in different areas of the UK to mitigate against discriminatory practices such as overcharging (see section 2.6 of this report), and raising awareness of housing benefits which people may be entitled to (Homeless Link, 2017). Providing access to appropriate translation and language services will also be important here, as language barriers can cause challenges for accessing various essential services (Global Interpreting Network, n.d.) As many services are accessed through online communication, it is also crucial to ensure that provisions are put in place to tackle digital exclusion among refugees, as this can play a key role in mitigating isolation, social exclusion, and financial challenges (Jama, 2022). Asylum seekers' accommodation and temporary accommodation often has poor connectivity, and addressing digital exclusion within housing settings is therefore also an important step towards improving outcomes for refugees (ibid).

4.4. Coaching for refugees seeking housing in the private rental sector

A pilot by Asylum Welcome in Oxford provided coaching to people with newly granted refugee status to support them with finding private rental housing (Lindley et al., 2024). Volunteers explained how the UK housing system works, making use of a guidebook produced by the organisation, and supported refugees with creating online accounts for property platforms and with contacting potential landlords. The scheme also involved volunteers on the pilot undertaking their own searches on property platforms to find opportunities which might be suitable for refugees' circumstances, as well as accompanying refugees on property viewings. The pilot also helped refugees to get their finances in place ready to secure a property, including through helping them access rental deposits provided by the local authority. This small-scale pilot has seen 15 refugees supported to find accommodation successfully. Importantly, support does not end when refugees find somewhere to live, but are instead still in touch with the organisation, who provides continued assistance to ensure people are receiving the help to which they are entitled, and to provide support with things such as budgeting (ibid.).

4.5. Co-producing solutions

Women for Refugee Women (2024) has a Campaign Forum, through which women refugees can come together to campaign around key issues affecting them throughout their time as asylum seekers and refugees. This provides women with an opportunity to make their voices heard and ensures that ideas for solutions are directly informed by lived experience. The group has produced a vision of what characteristics good accommodation for asylum seekers ought to have. These include ensuring accommodation is safe, of a decent quality, offers stability so that people can form local connections, and that people have agency with regard to their housing. Some of these recommendations are outlined in the following section of this report.

4.6. Trauma-informed services

As Etwaria (2023) makes clear, many people have experienced trauma, and this is more likely among people from different cultural backgrounds and among people on lower incomes. Etwaria (ibid.) highlights that adopting trauma-informed approaches in the social housing sector – through emphasising safety, trust, choice, collaboration, peer support, and wider cultural matters – can support tenants who are facing challenges related to traumatic experiences and can lead to improved services which meet people's needs. Trauma informed

approaches can also be beneficial for staff in the social housing sector, as training in this area can provide resilience against compassion fatigue, and can help staff to better deal with the issues which directly affect tenants (ibid.). Switchboard (2020) also highlights that for service providers which support refugees, understanding that traumatic experiences may be ongoing for refugees during the resettlement process is important. Trauma-informed care provides an opportunity to recognise this, and to understand how people are affected by their trauma (ibid). Notably, trauma-informed approaches can be implemented at organisational level (including organisational governance and policy), at office level (including day-to-day operations and committees), and at a personal level (including staff interactions and interactions with service users) within refugee services (ibid.).

5. Recommendations

This section draws together recommendations which have been made in existing literature around how best to support refugees – including women refugees – through housing interventions.

The Commission on the Integration of Refugees (2024) makes several interconnected recommendations around accommodating refugees in such a way as to encourage integration to deliver better outcomes for people:

- A Comprehensive Resettlement Scheme should be devised, based on learning from existing and former schemes, including for instance the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and the UK Resettlement Scheme. The Commission on the Integration of Refugees further specifies several recommendations as to what this Comprehensive Resettlement Scheme ought to look like, including the following:
- Local partnerships will be vital for delivering the scheme effectively, and these should work with civil society groups, such as charities and faith groups.
- Funding for the scheme should be agreed for several years, to enable a long-term vision for delivery.
- The scheme should be flexible, enabling it to respond to local needs, and to adapt to emerging humanitarian crises.
- Evaluation of the scheme should take into account the success of integration aims, including whether refugees feel safe, attitudes towards the scheme among local communities, and the extent to which refugees have been able to find paid employment.

Sanctuary Foundation has made a number of recommendations arising from the lessons learned through the Homes for Ukraine scheme (see section 3 of this report). These include:

- Mechanisms for local authorities and local groups involved in delivering support for refugees should be devised in order to enable them to share learning, and to improve consistency of support across different locations in the UK.
- When refugees being sponsored within the community are first welcomed, they should be provided with information about the process of finding independent accommodation. At the same time, Sanctuary Foundation

recommends providing continued payments to incentivise hosts to continue to support refugees until they are in a position where they are able to secure their own accommodation.

- More broadly, tackling the shortages of affordable housing, including through making funding available to support local authorities to tackle this, will be key to ensuring that refugees are able to move into long term appropriate housing.
- Sanctuary Foundation also recommends utilising Modern Methods of Construction to deliver homes which can be relocated to make best use of under-used land to house people in need.
- Quotas ensuring a proportion of new housing is allocated to refugees could also be a helpful move.
- Providing refugees with a guarantor who could support with rental property applications could also help refugees to move into long-term appropriate accommodation.

Mitton (2021) makes a number of recommendations intended to overcome the considerable issues created by the moving on period faced by refugees who have newly been granted their refugee status:

- Refugees should be given greater support upon leaving the accommodation they were provided with by the Home Office while their asylum claims were being processed. This support should include advice about housing, quicker access to housing benefits, and support with deposits for rental properties. Resources should also be provided to better enable charity support of refugees at risk of homelessness.
- Local authorities should design pathways for refugees to be provided with temporary accommodation and permanent housing, without the need for refugees to first access emergency homelessness services.

Cheung and Phillimore (2014) make a recommendation for improved labour market integration of refugees, which directly relates to their housing situations prior to being granted refugee status:

- Refugees who lived with relatives or friends prior to being granted refugee status tend to have better labour market integration outcomes than those who lived in dispersal accommodation. More asylum seekers should therefore

be provided with housing within a shorter distance from friends and family where possible, and more should be done to encourage to offer accommodation in their homes to asylum seekers within their social networks, including payments to support this.

As well as calling for a permanent extension to the 28-day moving on period, as has been recommended elsewhere, Brown et al. (2020) draw several policy implications relating to housing from their research on how a range of organisations shape refugee integration:

- Cross-sector partnerships should be fostered, both regionally and locally, so that local authorities, housing associations, and other organisations, can share learning and best practice to improve support for refugees.
- Local policy-making on supporting the integration of refugees should be co-produced with refugees, wider local communities, and a range of local organisations.

Drawing on evidence from the housing challenges faced by refugees in Oxford, Lindley et al. (2024) make a series of recommendations with broader relevance for the housing sector.

These include:

- Currently, different local authorities have different policies on supporting low-income groups into housing through deposit schemes, creating spatial variation in refugees' experiences. All local authorities should make deposit funds available for those on low-incomes and refugees to secure private tenancies. In addition, people should be able to apply for this kind of support, even if they are moving to a different local area.
- Collaboration between different organisations involved in supporting people who have newly been granted refugee status should be improved and information should be shared between organisations so that they are ready to respond to imminent evictions of refugees from their accommodation at the end of their asylum seeking process.
- Communication of key information to refugees about housing processes should be improved, and this should happen before refugee status is granted so that people are prepared. People should also be provided with information on how to sustain a tenancy, including information on paying bills and council tax, to reduce the chances of refugees facing eviction after they have secured housing.

Women for Refugee Women (2024) outlines a series of co-produced recommendations as to how to deliver appropriate accommodation for women asylum seekers. These include:

- Ensuring that women feel safe in their accommodation through:
 - Making women-only accommodation available for women who are single.
 - Housing families separately from other groups, in conditions which provide children with opportunities for playing, to support their development.
 - Ensuring that housing meets people's needs – including meeting accessibility needs for those with disabilities, as well as making sure LGBT+ asylum seekers are in an environment where they do not have to face discrimination or harassment.
- Ensuring that women feel dignified in their accommodation through:
 - Ensuring that all accommodation meets minimum standards, including a decent room size, access to a window, private bathroom facilities, and access to somewhere to do laundry.
- Ensuring women have stability with regards to their housing through:
 - Enabling people to stay within their current housing, and if this is not possible, ensuring that they only have to move locally.
 - Stopping the use of hotels and other forms of short-term options for housing asylum seekers, to reduce the likelihood that they will have to move.
- Ensuring that women have agency with regards to their housing through:
 - Preventing restrictive rules in asylum accommodation, so that people are not subject to curfews, are able to have visitors in their homes, and have access to cooking facilities so that they can make decisions around their own food.

Given that this report highlights that women refugees who have fled violence may be retraumatised by the asylum process, and that some women feel uncomfortable with checks by male housing officers in their accommodation, recommendations to respond to this could include:

- Providing more notice for women refugees as to when housing officers will visit, and where appropriate and possible, giving women refugees the option of having a woman housing officer perform these checks.
- Providing improved trauma-informed training to people and organisations working with refugees, including housing providers, to deliver services which minimise the risk of retraumatising people.
- Formalising trauma-informed training and making this training a requirement for staff interacting with refugees and asylum seekers.

Overall, it is clear that refugees face a complex array of challenges when it comes to accessing housing in the UK. Some of these challenges arise specifically from their legal status and the processes and pressures which they are compelled to go through on their journey from seeking asylum to being granted refugee status. However, it is also evident that a number of the obstacles to accessing and maintaining tenancies in appropriate accommodation are caused by inequalities in the UK housing system more broadly and are linked to the vulnerabilities arising from poverty and the precarity faced by many refugees. This report has shown the multiple concurrent disadvantages faced by refugees – and women refugees in particular – coalesce to produce varied experiences of navigating access to housing. Since many of these challenges are similarly faced by other marginalised groups, if Housing Associations are able to address the housing problems faced by refugees, this could be beneficial for disadvantaged tenants more broadly.

6. Stakeholder feedback and additional insights

This addendum presents supplementary insights emerging from a stakeholder roundtable convened in July 2025 in collaboration with Places for People. Centring on an earlier draft of the report, the discussion provided critical reflections and practitioner perspectives on the intersection of gender, housing, and immigration status. This was useful in making salient challenges not fully explored initially. The inclusion of this addendum addresses this lacuna, feeding into the intent of having more inclusive, equitable, and trauma-informed housing strategies for women refugees.

The additional insights would not have been possible without representatives from a wide range of organisations across the UK who participated at the roundtable, including the Centre for Mercy (Ukraine), the Sudanese Community in Edinburgh, Welsh Women's Aid, the Welsh Refugee Council, and Glasgow's Muslim Women's Resource Centre, among others. This diverse group reflected a range of expertise across the refugee, housing, and women's support sectors.

6.1. Context of the roundtable

The discussion was situated against the backdrop of a significant rise in asylum applications in the UK, from 22,000 to 46,000 annually between 2004 and 2020, to over 100,000 in 2024 (Home Office, 2025). Women and girls accounted for approximately 30% of applicants, while children represented a further 20%. Despite this increase, housing and specialist support services remain under-resourced, with providers experiencing considerable strain. The discussion also acknowledged the growing anti-immigration rhetoric in the UK, which risks further marginalising refugee women and diminishing public support for inclusive interventions.

Participants highlighted acute and interlinked challenges facing women refugees, including limited access to safe and appropriate accommodation, heightened risks of homelessness, re-traumatisation, persistent barriers to support such as the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition. ~~These were seen to have detrimental impacts on health and well-being. The session also generated a range of practice informed recommendations aimed at strengthening the transition period, providing continuous and coordinated social support, embedding co-production, and promoting cross-sector collaboration and evaluation (see sections Three: Housing Challenges for Women Refugees, and Four: What works?).~~

NRPF refers to an immigration condition that prohibits access to most forms of public assistance, including social security benefits, tax credits, and local authority homelessness support (Bevan Foundation, 2024; Jolly, Singh et al., 2022). This condition applies to

individuals on certain types of leave to remain, including those granted status on private or family life grounds (Jolly, Singh et al. 2022). As the Bevan Foundation's report "What Am I Supposed to Do?" (2024) outlines, the complexity of NRPF rules and their interaction with the welfare system can negatively affect entire households, even when only one member is subject to the condition. The report calls for a coordinated response, recommending that local authorities develop tailored NRPF pathways, strengthen ties with legal and third-sector partners, and invest in staff training and data collection. It also urges the Welsh Government and WLGA to provide strategic and financial backing, as well as promote equal access to services such as school meals and legal advice. These findings are relevant across the UK and may offer a transferrable model for localised responses in England and Scotland.

Regardless, all challenges highlighted in this section. These were seen to have detrimental impacts on health and well-being. The session also generated a range of practice-informed recommendations aimed at strengthening the transition period, providing continuous and coordinated social support, embedding co-production, and promoting cross-sector collaboration and evaluation (see sections Three: [Housing Challenges for Women Refugees](#), and Four: [What works?](#)).

6.2. Practice-informed reflections

Participants repeatedly raised three specific areas as requiring immediate attention:

6.1.1 Equitable and timely access to resources and public funds

Participants raised widespread concern regarding ~~the~~ barriers posed by the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition, particularly for women at risk of domestic abuse. It was noted that ~~access to emergency accommodation is often withheld due to~~ immigration status creates challenges to accessing support such as emergency accommodation, due to a lack of clarity even when surrounding legal-statutory duties to provide housing existed. For instance, although local authorities in England and Scotland had ~~a~~ statutory duties to support women with children, the complex regime coupled with a lack of awareness or training ~~among frontline staff~~ can prevent this from being realised. Similarly in in Wales, a ~~broader~~ similar duty applies to women at risk of abuse regardless of parental status. However, similar operational challenges are encountered this may not always translate to the provision of support.

Additionally, NRPF is reportedly used by perpetrators of domestic abuse as a coercive tool, fostering dependency and preventing women from fleeing abuse. Language barriers and a lack of culturally appropriate services further compound these difficulties.

While the primary issue of a lack of sustained funding for safe, emergency housing options remains, there is more local authorities can do to better fulfil-ensure that their statutory obligations are met. Raising awareness would reduce instances of unpalatable choices that leave women at risk.

6.2.2. Relocation and the fracturing of social ties

The “no choice” model of housing allocation was identified as deeply traumatic, with women and families often relocated to unfamiliar and unsuitable areas, far from support networks and essential amenities. Dispersal to areas without linguistic or cultural infrastructure, including access to halal food or community spaces, was seen to amplify isolation and re-traumatisation, especially for children and young people. These challenges align with earlier findings regarding the disruption of bonding and bridging social capital (see Section 3.2. Dispersal and social support~~Dispersal and social support~~). Mitigation strategies could include emulating and scaling up some of the work done in Sheffield and Scotland by Places for People, which includes providing a ‘Third Space’ for Sudanese refugees and funding programmes on digital literacy. These are forms of cultural infrastructure which are an important requisite for refugee integration and resilience.

6.2.3. The need for sector-wide collaboration

Stakeholders emphasised the value of structured collaboration across housing, health, legal, and support services. It was noted that issues experienced by one organisation are often mirrored elsewhere, underscoring the need for shared learning and systems-level coordination. The “Move On Project” in Wales was cited as a promising example, where staff and volunteers collectively speak over 13 languages, enabling culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible support. Such efforts were reported to improve user engagement and trust significantly but are-were not widespread enough.

6.3. Opportunities for further exploration

Despite the increasing attention and initiatives addressing the described challenges and their impacts on health and well-being, several areas remain largely unexplored. Therefore, alongside the challenges outlined in this report, questions around leadership and accountability within the support ecosystem also warrant further inquiry. Specifically, the ambiguity over where the “centre of gravity” should reside (whether with local authorities, housing associations, or third sector organisations) highlights a gap in coordinated responsibility. These issues, together with the need for collaborative case management supported by cross-departmental funding, remain underexplored and could form an important area for future research and policy development.

6.4. Conclusion

This roundtable highlighted the crucial role of specialist organisations in protecting the rights and well-being of refugee women, as well as the importance of incorporating lived experience into policy development. While existing services provide critical support, greater alignment and knowledge sharing across sectors are essential. The Welsh experience offers instructive lessons on how NRPF-related challenges can be addressed through a coordinated, human-centred approach. More broadly, investment is required in networks, communication infrastructure, and high-quality temporary accommodation as an alternative to the widespread use of hotels. Participants⁷ also stressed the importance of planning for long-term inclusion, beyond immediate housing needs. This includes supporting refugee women's access to employment, education, and pathways to thriving (five to ten years post-asylum) so that they can rebuild their lives with dignity, agency, and security.

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