

# A Report On Asylum Seekers & Refugees In Cambridge 2016



## **Acknowledgements**

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# **A Report on Asylum Seekers & Refugees in Cambridge**

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## **1. Introduction**

Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum was commissioned by Cambridge City Council to conduct a piece of research on asylum seekers and refugees currently residing in Cambridge. This was also done on behalf of Cambridge City of Sanctuary. CECF, through its Refugee Service, provides welfare advice and practical help to asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge. City of Sanctuary is a grassroots, national movement of local people and community groups working to make their cities a place of welcome and safety for people seeking sanctuary from war and persecution. Cambridge has a well established tradition of sanctuary. From Basque children fleeing the Spanish civil war, Jewish Kindertransport, Vietnamese, Bosnian and Chilean communities, through to more recently Syrian refugees.

### **1.1 Aims of the research**

The aim of this research is to get a better understanding of the number of adult asylum seekers and refugees living in Cambridge, in order to learn what issues they may face and what support they may need. It is intended that the findings will allow statutory and voluntary service providers and organisations to plan services or activities more effectively. In order to better meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge. Although the research and recommendations are in regards to adult asylum seekers or refugees who arrive through their own efforts to Cambridge, we have included short sections on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). This to help illustrate the different strands and how they contribute to the total number of asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge.

### **1.2 Methodology**

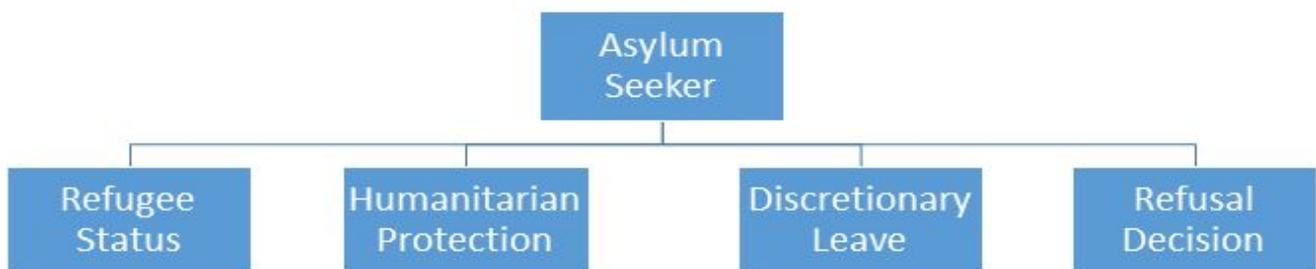
For this research CECF compiled a questionnaire to find out whether asylum seekers and refugees needs were being met or if they required extra assistance and resources. The questionnaire focused on the areas of English language, qualifications, occupation / employment, housing, health, access to immigration advice, access to financial support and living in Cambridge. Research participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. Those interviewed were adults with direct experience of the mainstream asylum process. Prior to each interview, participant information sheets were handed out. To explain the purpose of the research. Participants were then formally asked to record their willingness to participate by filling in a consent and confidentiality form.

The number of interviews were too small to be of statistical significance. However, percentages are used throughout the report as indicators of the proportions into which responses were divided. The questionnaires were completed from May to December 2016 in Cambridge, United Kingdom.

## 2. Background and definitions

The United Nations Refugee Convention from 1951 defines a refugee as someone who is outside their country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution for one of the following reasons: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for protection from the UK Government and is waiting for the Home Office to make a decision on their application. Persecution under the Refugee Convention may include being tortured or treated in an inhuman or degrading way for one of the reasons listed above. In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the Government. There are however other types of decisions someone seeking asylum maybe given by the Home Office. (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Status**

**Refugee Status** – Someone whose asylum case is accepted and they are granted refugee status. This gives them an initial grant of 5 years ‘Leave To Remain’ in the UK. After which current Immigration policy means they can apply for ‘Indefinite Leave to Remain’, also known as Settlement.

**Humanitarian Protection** – Someone who the Home Office has decided does not meet the criteria for refugee status. However will be allowed to stay if it is judged that they face a real risk of suffering serious harm, if they are returned to country of origin. This also gives them an initial grant of 5 years ‘Leave To Remain’ in the UK. After which they can also apply for ‘Indefinite Leave to Remain’.

**Discretionary Leave** – The Home Office decides that the person does not meet the criteria for Humanitarian Protection or Refugee Status. But accepts there are exceptional reasons for allowing them to stay on a temporary basis. They maybe granted ‘Discretionary Leave’. Usually given for a maximum of two and a half years (30 months) at a time.

**Refusal Decision** - Following an asylum interview the Home Office may completely refuse a claim for asylum. This may carry a right of appeal.

### 3. Findings

This report is based on evidence gathered through interviews with a sample study of 20 adult asylum seekers and refugees living in Cambridge. They represent 42 people including partners, adult dependants and children. The report also draws on statistical data collected from the CECF Refugee Service and meetings with relevant agencies, as well as existing literature.

The number of asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge is low compared to some other cities in the UK. Cambridge is not a designated Home Office 'dispersal' area, where asylum seekers are sent who require accommodation and subsistence. In the Eastern region of England those designated area's are Ipswich, Norwich & Peterborough. Although this is set to change.

In response to questions put to the Minister of State for the Home Office (Immigration) by Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner, the Minister Mr Robert Goodwill MP stated that their records indicate that the number of asylum cases awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, where the latest address is in a City of Cambridge postcode area was 15. The data includes the number of asylum cases awaiting an asylum decision. A case may be for a single claimant or for more than one person (the main asylum claimant and their dependants).<sup>1</sup> There is also an unknown number of asylum seekers in Cambridge, whose files are with the Case Assurance and Audit Unit (CAAU). This was set up by the Home Office in 2011 to conclude a backlog of what had been known as 'Legacy cases'. Those cases yet to be resolved.<sup>2</sup>

As at 31 October 2016 there were also 65 unaccompanied asylum seeking children aged under 18 who were looked after by Cambridgeshire County Council. 14 (22%) were living in-county and 51 (72%) out of county mostly in the City of Peterborough.<sup>3</sup> There were 9 living in Cambridge.

Through the Syrian (VPR) scheme, 18 adults with Humanitarian Protection were accommodated in Cambridge in 2016, including children a total of 36 people.

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<sup>1</sup> Data extracted from UK Visas and Immigration CID (Case Information Database) on 13th October 2016

<sup>2</sup> In response to a question on this topic Mr Robert Goodwill MP stated that data on the numbers of Legacy cases specifically in Cambridge cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost because checks of individual records would be required

<sup>3</sup> Reports to the Local Safeguarding children board business committee - Cambridgeshire LSCB - Update on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People who are the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council - 12th December 2016

The CECF Refugee Service assisted 19 other adult asylum seekers and refugees in 2016. Including children, 27 beneficiaries in total. This number includes those seeking asylum, those with Refugee Status, and a number who had been refused asylum.

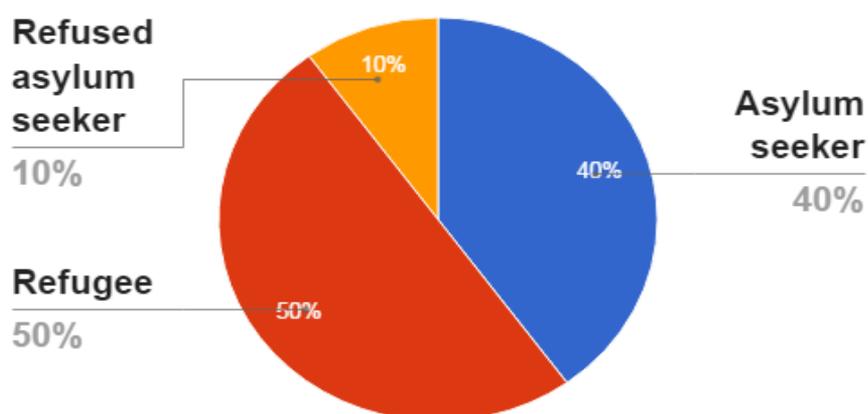
The research participants came from a range of countries including Syria, Sudan, Libya, Iraq, Iran, China, Burma, Algeria, Somalia and Turkey. They spoke 6 different languages: Arabic, Kurdish, Mandarin, Farsi, Burmese and Swahili (Figure 2).

<b>Nationality</b>	Syrian	Syrian	Iraqi	Libyan	Sudanese	Chinese	Iranian	Burmese	Algerian	Turkish	Somalian
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Kurdish	Arab	Kurdish	Arab	Arab	Chinese	Persian	Burmese	Arab	Kurdish	Bajuni
<b>Mother tongue</b>	Arabic	Arabic	Kurdish	Arabic	Arabic	Mandarin	Farsi	Burmese	Arabic	Kurdish	Swahili
<b>Numbers</b>	1	2	1	3	1	4	3	1	1	2	1

**Figure 2. Country of origin, ethnicity and mother tongue of research participants**

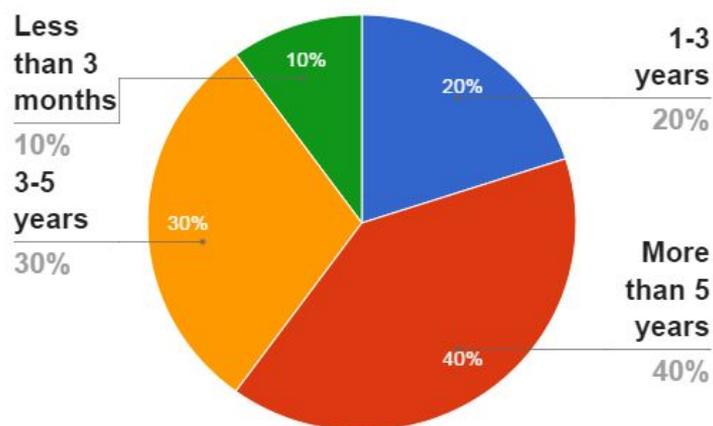
This report draws on data from 8 asylum seekers, 2 refused asylum seekers and 10 refugees. Please see (Figure 3) regarding the immigration status of all research respondents.

20 respondents in total, with 7 partners, 12 children and 3 adult dependants. 42 asylum seekers and refugees.



**Figure 3. Immigration status of research participants**

45% of the respondents were female. 55% of respondents were male. 20% aged between 18-24, 45% aged between 25-40, 25% aged between 41-64, and 10% between the ages of 65-80.



**Figure 4. Period research participants have lived in the UK**

40% of respondents have lived in the UK more than 5 years, 30% have lived 3-5 years, 20% have lived 1-3 years and 10% less than 3 months (Figure 4).

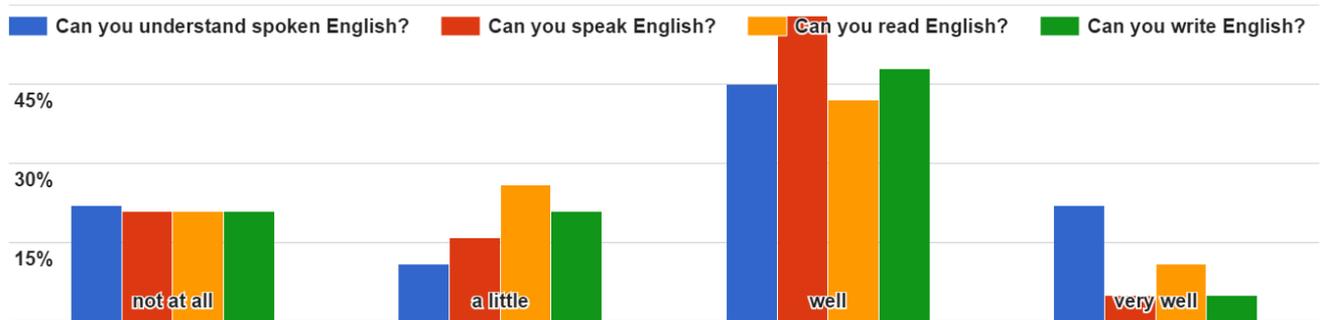
50% of respondents are single, 10% are widowed and 5% divorced. 35% of respondents are married, or are in a civil partnership. All except 1 lives with their partner.

9 respondents have children: 7 of them have 1 child, one respondent has 2 children, and another one has 3 children. Only one child ages 12-17 years old is not in education. 16% of respondents, 3 respondents, also have adult dependants living with them in Cambridge.

### **3.1 English Language**

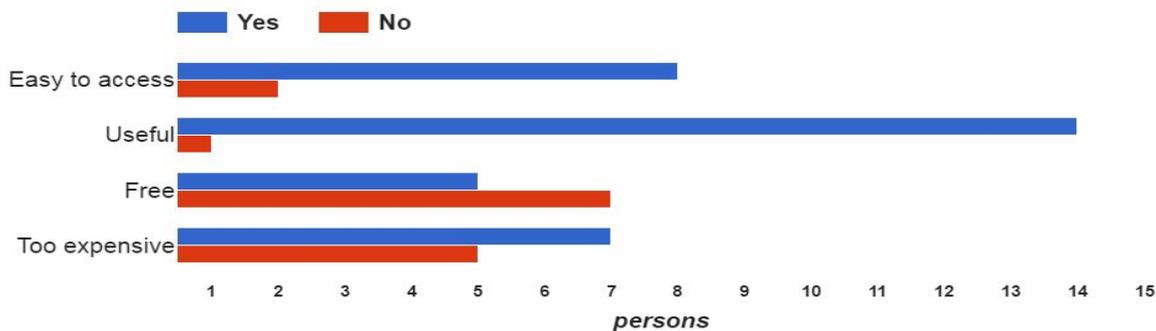
The majority of respondents did not have a good grasp of English before their arrival in the UK. However 80% of respondents stated that they were learning English reasonably well after their arrival in Cambridge, 45% attending English courses for adults (ESOL courses), 15% classes provided by local community e.g. churches, women's groups and cultural

centres. 25% from the media e.g. television, radio and internet and 10% from friends. 5% from studying in the UK.



**Figure 5. Level of English of research participants in Cambridge**

93% of respondents found their English courses useful. For 73% of those who have been learning English they stated it was easy to access. For 42% of respondents the courses were free, but 58% declared that the English courses were too expensive (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Experience with English courses for all research participants**

Almost everyone 90% are willing to improve their English, but there are barriers preventing them from accessing English courses. These are in the following order of priority :

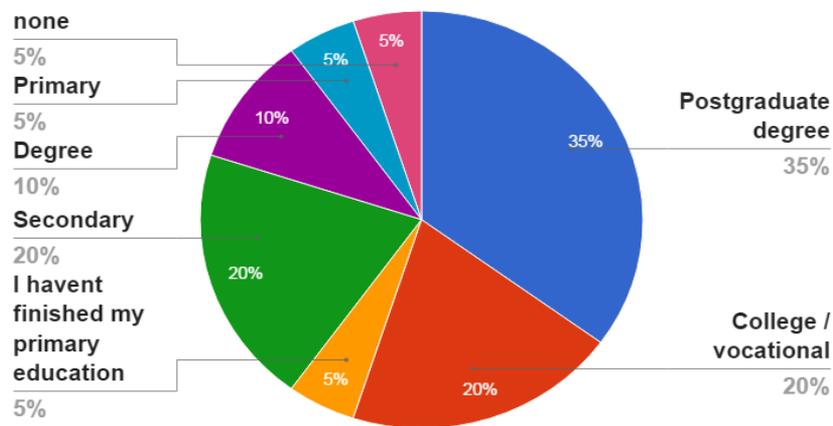
1. Lack of information about where to find classes.
2. Courses not available
3. Courses too expensive
4. Too busy working
5. Caring for other dependants, eg children
6. Person has confidence issues
7. Transport difficulties
8. Courses don't start at a convenient time
9. Health problem and difficulties with concentration

50% of respondents required an interpreter to help them access services in Cambridge.

### 3.2 Qualifications

25% of respondents have primary/ secondary education, 20% college education, 10% have a degree. The single biggest group of respondents 35% have a postgraduate degree (Figure 7).

Respondents have degrees in plant science, psychology, physics, manufacturing and engineering. 31% of qualified respondents are aware that their qualification is recognised in the UK, 38% of respondents know that their qualification is not recognised, 31% don't know whether their qualification is recognised in the UK.



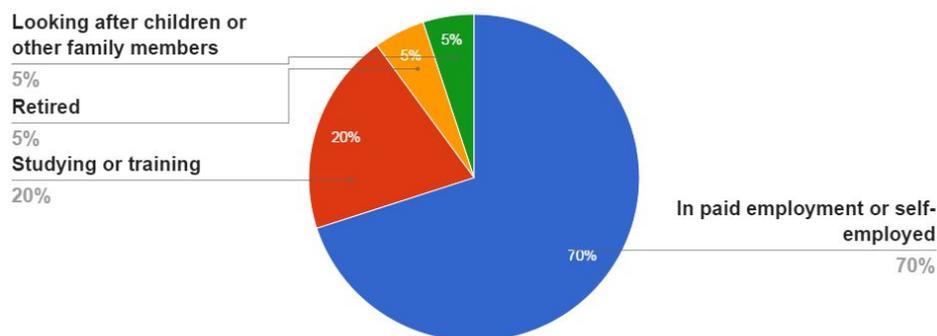
**Figure 7. Level of education of all research participants**

61% of respondents would like to gain another qualification in the UK, in areas such as:

- in medicine;
- in engineering;
- in education;
- in psychology;
- in beauty industry;
- acupuncture / massage therapy.

39% of respondents have not decided yet about gaining another qualification in the UK.

### 3.3 Occupation / Employment



**Figure 8. Occupation of research participants in their home countries before arrival to the UK**

70% of respondents were in paid employment or self-employed in their home countries. They were employed in a wide variety of different occupations ranging from driver to medical lecturer. 20% were studying or training, 5% retired and another 5% were looking after children or other family members (Figure 8). After arrival to the UK respondents stated facing barriers preventing them from entering the employment market, such as :

1. Immigration status does not allow them to be in paid employment
2. Lack of English language skills
3. Qualifications not recognised

25% of respondents described themselves as unemployed, 40% of respondents were not allowed to work due to their immigration status and 10% are in paid employment. Only 2 of the respondents had managed to gain employment out of 14 that had been employed before coming to the UK. Only one of them is working in the same profession, or at about the same level as they did in their own country. Another one is not working in their own profession because their qualification is not recognised. The remaining respondents are looking after children / other family members, are long term sick / disabled or are retired.

40% of respondents are studying or doing training and 15 % are doing voluntary work.

50% of respondents feel that there is a need for training for employment in the UK. There are different factors that prevent them from training opportunities, e.g 39% English

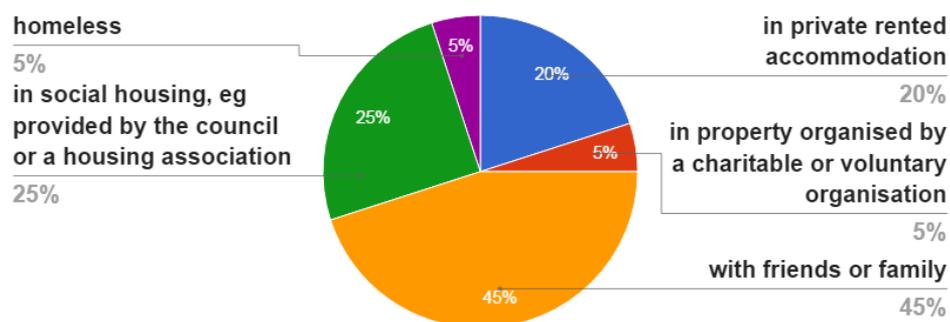
language barriers, 23% financial situation, 15% health condition, 15% lack of information and 8% taking care of dependants. 79% of respondents are willing to do volunteering in order to gain experience, improve English and get references.

### 3.4 Housing

When they first arrived in the UK the majority of asylum seekers 52% lived with friends and family. 19% of respondents lived in Home Office Asylum Support accommodation. Charitable and voluntary organisations assisted 9% of respondents with their first accommodation in the UK. 5% of respondents were homeless. The rest of our respondents lived in:

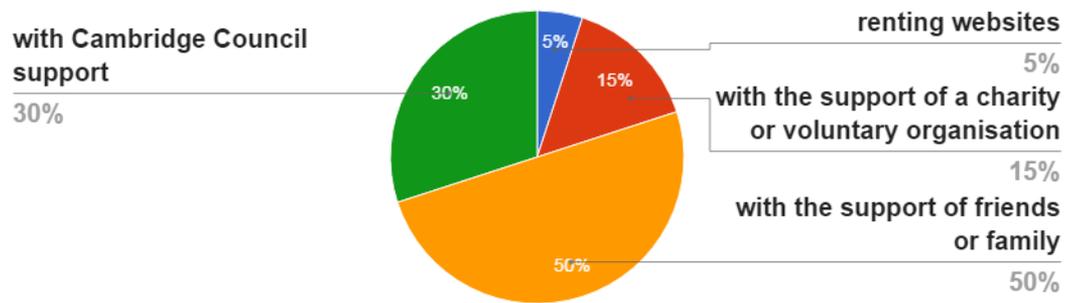
- 5% private rented accommodation
- 5% University colleges
- 5% hostel / hotels / guest house

After coming to Cambridge 45% of respondents continued to live with friends or family, 25% of respondents are living in social housing, provided by the council or a housing association, 20% in private rented accommodation, 5% in properties organised by a charitable or voluntary organisation. 5% of respondents are currently homeless (Figure 9).



**Figure 9. Research participants' current accommodation in Cambridge**

As (Figure 10) shows 50% of respondents found their current accommodation with the help of family and friends, 30% with Cambridge Council support, 15% of respondents were assisted by local charity or voluntary organisations and 5% of respondents found their accommodation through renting websites.



**Figure 10. How did research participants find their current accommodation**

35% of respondents are residing in CB4 postcode area, 29% in CB1 postcode area, 24% in CB2 postcode area, 6% in CB5 postcode area and 6% in CB22 postcode area.

30% of all respondents reported different problems with their accommodation. These were particularly overcrowding experienced by 1 respondent living with friends and family, 1 in accommodation organised by a charity and 1 renting privately. 1 respondent renting privately reported high rent costs and 1 in social housing had issues with stairs, as they had a health condition and lived on a top floor.

### **3.5 Health**

75% of our respondents are registered with a General Practitioner (GP).

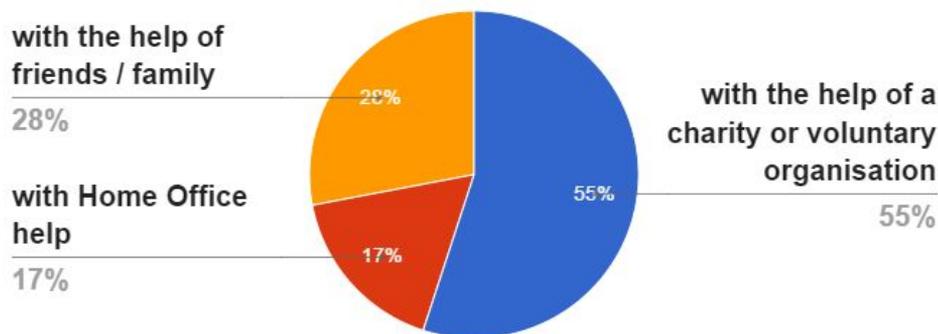
45% of them reported long-term health problems, that needs regular medical treatment and psychological help with anxiety, post traumatic stress or depression.

15% of respondents that had children or another adult living with them regularly need medicines. 10% need regular hospital visits, 5% need physiotherapy, psychological assistance, or treatment including dental and surgery.

20% of respondents did not get the necessary health treatment, because of lack of investigation of the health issue or immigration status.

### 3.6 Access to Immigration advice

Access to high quality legal advice and representation from the outset and throughout the asylum process is a critical part of an effective asylum determination system. 20% of respondents stated they did not receive any immigration advice. From those who received immigration advice 25% of respondents stated they had to pay for it, 69% of respondents received Legal Aid funded immigration advice, and 6% did not pay for immigration advice.



**Figure 11. How did research participants find an immigration adviser**

55% of respondents were assisted to access immigration legal advice by local charity and voluntary organisations. 28% of respondents were assisted by friends and relatives and 17% of respondents found their legal adviser with Home Office help (Figure 11).

### 3.7 Access to financial Support

40% of all the respondents had accessed Asylum Support. 80% of respondents that were awarded refugee status were claiming welfare benefits. They receive the following :

50 % Child benefit

50% Housing and Council Tax benefit

37% Jobseeker's Allowance

12% Employment and Support Allowance

12% Disability Living Allowance / Personal Independence Allowance

12% Pension Credit.

20% of those who get welfare benefits had faced difficulties mostly because of the complexity of the welfare benefits system and how to make a claim. 80% of respondents indicated that at some point they were assisted by charity and voluntary sector organisations.

### 3.8 Living in Cambridge

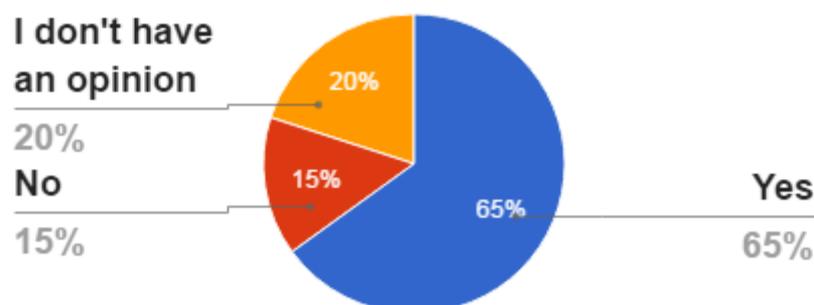
25% of respondents have been residing in Cambridge for 1-3 years, with another 25% for 3-5 years and 15% over 5 years. The remainder varying periods of a year or less.

15 respondents arrived in Cambridge because they knew someone living here. However only 7 of them were aware about the possible help and advice when they first arrived in Cambridge and 2 of them did not know that they were entitled to any kind of help at all. Nevertheless every respondent feels safe living in Cambridge, 2 of them stated they faced discrimination. 1 stated reporting it. 15% of respondents noted that their children, who are in full-time education are experiencing the following difficulties:

1. 43% language problems
2. 29% feelings of loneliness and isolation
3. 14% illness or disability
4. 14% psychological problems linked to being the child of an asylum seeker or refugee.

Parents all reported receiving the required help with problems at school.

65% of respondents think there is the need for a specialist service in Cambridge for asylum seekers and refugees, 15% do not think so and 20% of respondents don't have an opinion.



**Figure 12. Research participants' opinion about the necessity of a specialist service in Cambridge for asylum seekers and refugees**

## 4. Conclusions

The following are our conclusions and recommendations based on analysis of information gathered from our sample group of asylum seekers and refugees in the following areas - English language, qualifications, occupation/employment, housing, health, access to immigration advice, access to financial support and living in Cambridge. The total number of asylum seekers and refugees living in Cambridge is a difficult figure to quantify, at any given moment in time. However based on our research, we believe there were over one hundred including dependants in 2016.

If we consider those that may have been given Refugee, or another status, over the past five years. Some of whom are still using CECF Refugee Services. Then that figure could be considerably higher. Then there are the 'Legacy cases'. Historically a fairly sizeable number, although the Home Office has made some progress in clearing the backlog of these cases. As this report was being completed early in 2017 CECF Refugee Services had six completely new clients, mostly referrals, including two that may be considered 'Legacy cases'.

### English Language

The level of English language ability was high in our sample group with about a half, to two thirds indicating good levels of English proficiency.

*"Recent research found that approximately half of refugees surveyed had qualifications and were more likely to speak English than not (Daniel et al 2010)" - [Refugee Qualification Equivalence: Improving Integration through Skills Recognition Tom Ellis, Walter Myer, Eddie Reynolds, Kartik Upadhyay - TWS the Wilberforce Society - Cambridge UK, April 2016]*

More than three quarters of respondents have taken steps to learn, or improve their English. Nearly half attending ESOL classes for adults. This indicates the importance of these classes, however, as current policy stands asylum seekers cannot access government funded ESOL classes unless they have been in the UK for 6 months without a decision on their application.<sup>4</sup> Nearly a fifth attended more informal classes in the community emphasizing the important contribution of the charity, voluntary and faith sectors.

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<sup>4</sup> Asylum seekers who've been in the UK for six months without a decision on their application can receive co-funded ESOL (they have to pay 50% of the course fees). Refugees who receive Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in the 'Work Related Activity Group' can have free ESOL classes - CASCAID

However, despite half of the respondents having lived in Cambridge for between one to five years, more than a third indicated that they still had problems with their understanding of English. Half of respondents required an interpreter to help them access services. Extensive studies have found that there are many reasons why this may be the case including country of origin & education. In Cambridge where nearly half of respondents stay with friends or family the following is another interesting factor to be considered.

*“Refugees who did not have regular contact with friends or family in the UK at the time of the asylum decision were more likely to report improved English language skills over time than refugees who had frequent contact with friends or family” – [The Research, Development, and Statistics Directorate – Research Report 37, Summary - Home Office 2010]*

All respondents indicated they are willing to improve their English but stated issues that might prevent them. The reason most often cited was lack of information about where to find classes, followed by courses not available, courses too expensive, too busy working, caring for other dependants, eg children, transport difficulties or confidence issues. Whatever the reasons maybe and they can be very individual. What is very clear from all the evidence widely available is that the ability to communicate in English is crucial

*“The ability to communicate is essential for everyday living tasks such as shopping and using public transport. It enables asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to communicate with agencies in order that they can access services – health, housing etc. A key benefit is gaining employment for refugees and migrants. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) argues that asylum seekers with English language skills are better placed to move straight into employment if their application is successful. The mental health organisation MIND has identified English language skills as a key factor in preserving mental health. A lack of language skills can lead to profound isolation and increased social exclusion. This both causes mental distress and exacerbates existing mental health problems. For the wider community there are benefits as the ability to communicate improves social cohesion across communities” – [Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum – Metropolitan Migration Foundation – ESOL programme – ‘Step Up For English’ - 2014]*

## **Qualifications**

Almost half of respondents stated that they were educated to degree level, with over a third stating postgraduate degree. Over a third however state that that their qualification is not recognised in the UK. This is potentially a stumbling block to employment. Even where there may not be a legal requirement in many sectors to have a qualification recognised, and skills rather than a formal qualification maybe more necessary.

*“However, reports indicate that formal qualification equivalence procedures are ‘highly valued by employers and are associated with better labour-market outcomes’ (OECD 2014: 39). It stands to reason that qualifications conferred in countries with less familiar academic standards – non English-speaking countries outside the EU – are those most in need of equivalence recognition, and the vast majority of refugees, including Syrian refugees, fall into this category. For them, it is an uphill battle to secure employment commensurate with their educational level; many find themselves in jobs for which they are overqualified, while many do not find jobs at all” - [Refugee Qualification Equivalence: Improving Integration through Skills Recognition Tom Ellis, Walter Myer, Eddie Reynolds, Kartik Upadhyay - TWS the Wilberforce Society - Cambridge UK, April 2016]*

Nearly a third of the respondents did not know whether their qualification was recognised in the UK. Between a half and two thirds would like to gain another qualification in the UK. continuing education can help refugees to support themselves, become more employable and more integrated through contact with colleagues and fellow students.

## **Occupation/Employment**

The majority of respondents were not in paid employment in Cambridge. However, the majority of those interviewed were in employment prior to coming to the UK. Nearly three quarters of respondents were in self-employment, or paid employment prior to coming to the UK. With another fifth studying or training.

Over a third of respondents stated that their immigration status didn’t allow them to work. Asylum seekers are not permitted to engage in paid employment after coming to the UK.<sup>5</sup> However they are able to do voluntary work and half of our respondents stated a training need for employment in the UK, with most willing to do voluntary work to improve their English language, gain experience and obtain references. Another quarter of respondents that could work, were unemployed. Over a third of respondents were in studying or training.

English language, non-recognition of qualifications, and unfamiliarity with the job market were all given as reasons for difficulties in gaining employment. Only two respondents managed to get into paid employment out of fourteen that had been employed prior to coming to the UK. Only one was working in a profession at about the same level as in their

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<sup>5</sup> They may apply for permission to work if they have not received an initial decision on their asylum claim after 12 months. But they are very restricted in what jobs they may do as this permission is tied into the shortage occupation list printed by the Home Office and will end if the case is refused and appeals exhausted - [Home Office - permission to work and volunteering for asylum seekers - guidance published for Home Office staff on 12 January 2017]

own country. The other stated not working in their own profession because their qualification was not recognised.

The experiences of these respondents illustrates that the path to employment for many refugees is very difficult. While people can be willing to take work that does not reflect their skills and experience in order to pay the bills, the goal of resuming former career can be a long way off. As has already been highlighted previously the difficulties in re-qualifying or getting employers to understand overseas qualifications and experience can result in stagnating talent and missed opportunities for refugees to contribute their full potential.

## **Housing**

Nearly a quarter of respondents were in Home Office asylum support accommodation, formerly NASS when they first arrived in the UK. But over half of respondents lived with friends or family when they first arrived in the UK. The British Refugee Council has found that many asylum seekers live with those friends, or family who are themselves on the economic margins and it can also lead to overcrowding which contributes to a cycle of poverty.

In coming to Cambridge nearly half of respondents continued to live with family or friends. Followed by a quarter housed by the Cambridge City Council. The charity, voluntary and faith sectors also contributed towards assisting with finding accommodation. One respondent was homeless.

Over a third of respondents lived in the CB4 postcode area of Cambridge. This postcode area of Cambridge includes Arbury, East Chesterton & Kings Hedges.

*Figures from the 2011 Census show that some of the highest concentrations of BAME communities – African, Arab, Caribbean/Black British & Bangladesh live in the city's more deprived wards. Wards with the highest numbers of benefit claimants. Abbey, Arbury, East Chesterton & Kings Hedges –‘The distribution of the benefit population follows similar patterns to the distribution of other factors relating to deprivation, such as poor educational attainment and poor health status’ – [Mapping Poverty in Cambridgeshire 2009 - Cambridgeshire County Council Research and Performance Team ]*

Nearly a third of respondents reported issues with their accommodation. These ranged from dampness and overcrowding experienced by those living with friends and family. High rent costs experienced by those renting private accommodation. As well as, stairs that are hard to climb, or living too high up in a building experienced by those in social housing.

## **Health**

Nearly half of respondents had long term health problems that requires regular medical treatment and help with anxiety, post-traumatic stress or depression. Some also indicated that their children or adult dependent living with them, required the same help. Other research done recently in Cambridgeshire highlights similar findings.

*Mental distress has higher prevalence among refugees compared with non-refugees. Risk factors include: being a woman, older age, having experienced trauma, lack of social support, more stress after migration. There is evidence to suggest unmet mental care needs amongst refugee children particularly unaccompanied minors and those exposed to violence. Evidence also to suggest that their needs are not distinguished from those of adults. Research shows stable settlement and social support, school participation, local friends and language proficiency correlate with children's improved mental health [ Migrant and Refugee Joint strategic Needs Assessment for Cambridgeshire, 2016]*

As highlighted previously with at least half of the respondents requiring the use of an interpreter to access services, language barriers are potentially an obstacle to getting the right help. Anecdotal evidence from CECF Refugee Services suggest sometimes GP's use family members to interpret and a quarter of respondents did not feel that they received the necessary health treatment.

*MIND found that one of the major barriers preventing refugees and asylum-seekers accessing mental health services is language and there were concerns that not enough is being done to overcome this obstacle. In addition, mainstream staff lack skills in working with face to face interpreters and telephone based interpreters. Interpreters are not experienced in the field of mental health and effective interpreting in a therapeutic setting. [ Migrant and Refugee Joint strategic Needs Assessment for Cambridgeshire, 2016]*

## **Access to Immigration advice**

Our research highlights how important the need for immigration advice is in helping a person present their case to the Home Office. With most respondents, over three quarters, having received immigration advice to assist them in their case. Over two thirds had received Legal Aid funded immigration advice, without which it would very difficult for most asylum seekers to access the proper advice and representation they may need. What is also clear from our findings is the very important role that the Charity & Voluntary Sector plays in facilitating this access for asylum seekers. Over half had assistance from the charity and voluntary sector in helping them find an immigration solicitor.

*“As legal representation makes a significant difference to the outcome of an asylum claim, the legal aid system as it is currently administered is preventing genuine asylum seekers from obtaining access to justice. The consequences is not only denying asylum seekers the opportunity to present their case as effectively as possible but, for many, it will result in the dismissal of their claim. [Refugee Council client experiences in the asylum process. Refugee Council research report, 2010]”*

## **Access to financial Support**

Over a third of respondents had accessed asylum support. Cambridge is not a dispersal area where adult asylum seekers are sent by the Home Office. However those staying with friend or family still have a ‘subsistence’ only option they can apply for. This gives them a small amount of monies<sup>6</sup> collected weekly through their ARC<sup>7</sup> normally from the main post office in Cambridge. This is for basic living expenses and isn’t intended to cover any rent costs. Home Office records show fifteen asylum seekers in Cambridge, but statistics provided by EELGA (East Of England Local Government Association) show only two asylum seekers in receipt of this assistance. The CECF Refugee Service have found accessing this assistance on behalf of beneficiaries both difficult and bureaucratic.

More than three quarters of those with Refugee Status and entitled to do so were claiming some kind of welfare benefit. The main difficulty in accessing welfare benefits was given as not understanding the complex welfare system and how to go about claiming it.

*“Navigating the complex welfare system can be challenging, even for those who understand it and have always lived in the UK. For new refugees, especially those with limited identity documents to confirm eligibility, the feat is more difficult” [28 days later: experiences of new refugees in the UK. Refugee Council, 2014]*

More than three quarters of respondents had been given assistance by the charity and voluntary sector, at some point.

*Because of the insufficiency of mainstream benefits, asylum seekers are at the centre of discussions of welfare pluralism (Bloch and Schuster 2002; Morris 2010). Asylum seekers and refugees are supported by mainstream voluntary sector agencies such as Citizens’ Advice Bureaux and specialist voluntary sector agencies, such as those that work with Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities. Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and NGOs are shown to play a key role in facilitating access to support along with*

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<sup>6</sup> Currently £36.95 weekly for each person in your household - Asylum support GOV.UK website

<sup>7</sup> The Application Registration Card (ARC) a credit card-sized plastic card issued as an acknowledgement of an Asylum claim, or a claim under Article 3 of the Human Rights Convention. The card is also used by asylum seekers to access Home Office cash support

*faith groups (Snyder 2011) in addition to extended social networks [Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. An evidence and policy review of University of Birmingham, 2014]*

## **Living In Cambridge**

Three quarters of respondents came to Cambridge because they knew someone living here already. However only about a third knew where to go for advice and help after they had arrived. Nearly two thirds of respondents felt therefore that there was a need for a specialist service in Cambridge for asylum seekers and refugees.

Two of the Respondents stated that they had suffered discrimination, one stated specifically that this was of a racial nature, which was reported. However all of the respondents stated that they felt safe living in Cambridge, which was encouraging.

Half of those with children of school age said that their children are experiencing language difficulties, feelings of loneliness and isolation, illness or disability. Language difficulties being the biggest problem. Those parents all felt that their children were receiving support with these issues. School represents an opportunity for children to make friends, to learn English, to start or continue their education and to gain knowledge and experience of the culture: all of which are key for integration.

## 5. Recommendations

- ❖ To provide relevant information for asylum seekers and refugees about English Language provision in Cambridge, both informal as provided through the community and formal e.g. Government funded ESOL classes
- ❖ To link and provide more effective communication and coordination between those who provide front line services to asylum seekers and refugees and those who provide English Language provision
- ❖ To provide more specialist information for refugees revolving round qualification recognition, the steps to be taken for qualification equivalence and other options if the qualification is not recognised in the UK
- ❖ To provide all relevant information for asylum seekers and refugees regarding the opportunities and benefits of volunteering; to help refugees become better informed about the job market and opportunities for free or low cost training, or re-skilling
- ❖ Further investigations to be made regarding the housing issues for those asylum seekers and refugees who may be staying with friends and families
- ❖ To establish assistance for refugees seeking access to the privately rented sector, including steps to access suitable and affordable accommodation via the local community, in a manner similar to that provided by the Syrian (VPR) scheme
- ❖ To ensure that those in Social Housing are very clear about reporting procedures if they have problems
- ❖ To ensure that appropriate and professional interpreting is being provided with regard to medical appointments. To gather and disseminate information to ensure that everyone is clear about the services already available, including specialist refugee therapeutic casework teams such as those provided by the British Refugee Council
- ❖ Representation to enable Legal Aid funded immigration advice to be more accessible to all asylum seekers in Cambridge e.g. through EELGA
- ❖ To ensure that all asylum seekers in Cambridge are informed about the options for asylum support and that those with Refugee Status gain more effective access to the welfare benefits system
- ❖ To provide an established, specialist service for asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge that is able to respond to the needs highlighted by these research participants and increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees coming to Cambridge; to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees, particularly the most vulnerable, have the specialist advice and advocacy they need
- ❖ To develop through partnership working a more comprehensive city-wide awareness of support mechanisms and establish effective referral systems

## **Appendix I Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme**

The Prime Minister announced in his statement to the House of Commons on Monday 7 September 2015 that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years. The resettled Syrians under the government funded SVPR Programme were granted Humanitarian Protection, however with effect from 1 July 2017, they will be granted Refugee Status. This gives easier access to Higher Education and travel documents. After five years the resettled refugees will have the option of applying to extend their leave in the UK.<sup>8</sup>

Those being resettled under this scheme in Cambridge through the City Council arrive to a furnished house, benefits are organised, school places arranged for their children, GP and Dentist appointments confirmed, and ongoing support. They are therefore in a more advantageous position than those who arrive as asylum seekers, or refugees who manage to get here on their own, and who may have to establish these things alone.

Cambridge City Council has stated it's intention to take up to 100 Syrians through this programme. Under the scheme the refugees are entitled to customised intensive support for up to a year depending on their individual needs. The expectation is that by the second year their support needs will reduce, but there is flexibility to allow for situations where people have not gained the independence required, or have not made the connections with the local community for whatever reason that they would need for integration.

Cambridge City Council have employed two Arabic speaking support workers, working with all families and available according to individual needs, currently for the next two years. The Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign, a voluntary organisation, also assists with practical help.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/syrian-refugees>

## **Appendix II Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

An unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) - is defined by the Home Office as ‘a person under 18 years of age or who, in the absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age’ who ‘is applying for asylum in their own right: and is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so’.

Cambridgeshire Social Services have the primary responsibility for those young asylum seekers and have highlighted the following as key issues to us. Access to Legal Aid funded immigration advice, suitable local ESOL provision and suitability of specialist mental health services for LAC (Looked After Children) and Care Leaver asylum seeking young people in Cambridge.

The majority of the children living in Cambridge are sent over to Bury St Edmunds (six students) to attend West Sussex College rather than Cambridge Regional College (three students). The reason stated was that Cambridge Regional College, which would have been the nearest provider, would not commit to running a January start due to not having the sufficient numbers to run the course. WSC in Bury on the other hand were keen to have the students, willing to start them in January and offered a more holistic option with life skills and work experience opportunities with a view to process them on to vocational courses next academic year. It was felt best to get the students into education sooner rather than wait for a local option at a detriment to their progress.

Cambridgeshire County Council agreed 12th September 2016 to increase their looked after UASCs from 64 to 92.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stated in a letter from Councillor Steve Count, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council, responding to questions from Adrian Matthews (CRRC)

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