

Draft Refugee Integration Strategy for Northern Ireland 2022-2027

Consultation Document

2021

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Section 1 – About This Consultation

1.1 Background

The Executive's Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 provides a framework for Government departments to tackle racial inequalities and to promote and encourage good race relations and social cohesion for Irish Travellers, minority ethnic people whose families have been here a number of generations or who have recently arrived, migrant workers and asylum seekers. The Racial Equality Strategy states there is a strong case for a separate Refugee Integration Strategy, to ensure a smooth transition between being an asylum seeker and a refugee and to ensure that refugees can build a new life here and realise their full potential. Accordingly this draft Refugee Integration Strategy has been developed for consultation.

The draft Strategy has been developed and informed through research and engagement with stakeholders with expertise in the area. A report was commissioned by The Executive Office from Queen's University Belfast on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland. The report helped to focus the Strategy on the main areas raised by those interviewed.

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/home/media/Media,784971,en.pdf>

Since 2015 we have welcomed over 1800 refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme. We are keen that the knowledge, experience and systems developed through this are shared and used for the benefit all refugees and new comers. The Executive Office, working with the Department for Communities and the NI Innovation Lab, held a two day Strategic Insight Lab to look at the question **How do we enable refugees and the communities in which they live build a cohesive sustainable future together?** The event was attended by representatives from Government departments, councils, community groups and academia. A number of recommendations were made focusing on gaps in services, challenges and opportunities. These have also been used to inform the development of the Strategy.

1.2 Purpose of this Consultation

We are now seeking views on the draft Refugee Integration Strategy which has been developed. We want to ensure the final Strategy is one that focuses all our efforts on the support required to enable integration at all levels. The Strategy should set the strategic direction for all who have a role to play, whether they are from statutory organisations or the voluntary sector or members of local communities.

This consultation is therefore intended to seek the views of all stakeholders to ensure the final Strategy is focused on the priority issues and needs and sets out the most important actions that must be taken to support Refugees and asylums seekers here.

Section 2 – How to respond

2.1 Duration and closing date

The consultation will commence on **12.00 on 29 November 2021** and last for 12 weeks. It will close on, **23.59 on 20 February 2022** and all responses will be welcomed up to that date. Please note that late responses will not be accepted.

Section 3 of this document sets out the key elements of the Strategy to assist you in providing your views.

2.2 Submit a response

Consultees are encouraged to complete the questionnaire online and copies of this Consultation document plus the online questionnaire are available through NI Directs consultation application 'Citizen Space' and can be reached through <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/teo/refugee-integration-strategy-for-northern-ireland>. However, should you wish to provide alternative input or have difficulty responding in this way, you can submit a written response. This can be sent in hard copy or email to the address set out in paragraph 2.5.

2.3 Public Consultation Events

It is intended to hold public consultation events to provide an overview of the draft Strategy and enable stakeholders to ask questions and feed in their views. Given the ongoing pandemic these events will be held virtually and you can contact us at race.equality@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk for details.

The key views gathered at these event will be summarised and used as part of the consultation analysis to inform the final Strategy.

2.4 Engaging those with lived experience

In order to ensure we seek the views of those with lived experience, we will be taking forward facilitated engagement with small groups which will be used alongside the other responses to inform the final strategy

2.5 Enquiries and Responses

Please address any enquiries you may have and responses to:

By e-mail: Race.Equality@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

In writing: Racial Equality Unit
E3.18
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SG

2.6 How we will use your responses

A summary of responses will be published on the TEO website following the consultation process. Any contact details or information that would identify a respondent as a private individual will be removed prior to publication. All information will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA).

Respondents should also be aware that the Department's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) may require that any responses, not subject to specific exemptions under the Act, be communicated to third parties on request.

2.7 Alternative Formats

An electronic version of this document is available at <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/teo/refugee-integration-strategy-for-northern-ireland>. Copies in other languages and formats (including Braille, large print etc.), can be made available on request. If it would assist you to access the document in an alternative format or language other than English, please contact us by e-mail at

Race.Equality@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk or at the postal address listed above.

2.8 Complaints

If you have any concerns about the way this consultation process has been handled, you should send them to the following address:

Machinery of Government

Room SD03

Stormont Castle

Belfast

BT4 3TT

Email: info@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 9037 8055

Please note, if you choose to send your complaint in writing, you should clearly state the reason for your complaint in the 'Subject' bar of your email, or at the top of your letter.

Section 3 - Overview

This Refugee Integration Strategy sets out how the Executive will take action to support refugees and asylum seekers to ensure they are treated fairly, do not suffer injustice, can live here as valued members of our community and have every opportunity to realise their full potential.

3.1 Vision

Our **vision** is for a cohesive and shared society where refugees and asylum seekers are valued and feel safe, are integrated into communities and are supported to reach their full potential.

3.2 High Level Outcomes and associated Key Areas Actions

To achieve this vision this Refugee Integration Strategy identifies four **High Level Outcomes and associated actions**.

OUTCOME 1 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE VALUED AND RESPECTED

Refugees and asylum seekers are respected as members of our communities and their presence, knowledge and contribution to society is recognised and valued.

Engagement and Inclusion

- Develop a framework to ensure the lived experience of refugees is taken into account and that the co-production model is embedded in policy making.

Education and Training

- Ensure involvement of refugees and asylum seekers and teachers in the design of course material and resources, informed by best practice examples internationally, for all pupils in schools to help aid integration for asylum and refugee pupils.

- Ensure the language, cultural and social needs of refugee and asylum seeker pupils are met and consider the need for alternatives to the existing curriculum options, particularly for young people who arrive here aged 14-16.
- Extend coverage of the schools of sanctuary programme.
- Provide support for employment, including ensuring ESOL is available in a timely manner for all who need it and education, training and volunteering opportunities are accessible.

Community Support

- Apply lessons learned and best practice emerging from the review of the Syrian VPRS to the delivery of mainstream services.
- Develop and support formal and informal structures that will facilitate direct engagement with refugees in policy making.
- Under T:BUC, work collaboratively with colleagues across the good relations arena to ensure good relations programmes give due consideration to the needs and input of newcomers.
- Ensure that existing vehicles such as the Community Planning Partnerships and the structures that support them are used to best effect in ensuring the needs of refugees and newcomers are met.

OUTCOME 2 – REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE SAFE AND FEEL SECURE

Refugees and asylum seekers feel welcome and live here safely without fear of persecution or discrimination resulting from their immigration status.

Housing

- Enhance engagement with the Home Office, PSNI, NIHE and other relevant agencies to ensure housing provided to asylum seekers by the Home Office under the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract (AASC) is safe and secure.
- Build on the positive engagement with Home Office during the Covid19 pandemic to ensure effective consultation with NIHE and other agencies to support those entering the move on process.
- Build on the positive engagement between agencies to ensure a joined up and holistic approach to the provision of housing for refugees which includes taking account of the availability of other services such as schools and healthcare provision.

Destitution

- Develop a pathway out of destitution for refugees and asylum seekers facing destitution and those who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status.
- Develop training for policy staff on the issues facing those with No Recourse to Public Funds Status, Right to Work Restrictions and/or Migrant Access to Benefits issues.

Ensure asylum seekers and refugees are identified as an at risk group in strategies, guidance and services tackling human trafficking and modern slavery.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable

- Regularly review safeguarding arrangements for the most vulnerable asylum seekers and the oversight structures developed for the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract (AASC) and Advice Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) operating framework.

- Explore the potential for the development of a vulnerability assessment on arrival for Asylum Seekers to ensure appropriate support is in place for those most vulnerable such as victims of trafficking, women, children and LGBT.
- Ensure early health screening is available and easily accessible and pathways to accessing health services including trauma, therapeutic and specialist support services are clearly communicated to asylum seekers and those who work with them.
- Review resourcing to ensure appropriate services and expertise is in place to meet potentially increased numbers and needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children here.

OUTCOME 3 – REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Refugees and asylum seekers are integrated into diverse and inclusive communities and are aware of, and able to exercise, their rights and responsibilities.

Pathway to Citizenship

- Ensure the provision of legal advice free of charge, in a timely manner and by appropriately trained individuals to those navigating the asylum system including recognition of the needs of particularly vulnerable groups such as UASC.
- Develop resources to outline the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and promote awareness of cultural differences including child friendly resources.
- Work with partners across sectors to ensure appropriate advice and guidance at every stage of the journey to citizenship and in particular at transition stages where individuals are often most vulnerable.

Partnership with communities

- Work with partners across sectors to develop programmes to facilitate cultural exchange and increase cultural awareness in both newcomer and indigenous communities.

Access to services

- Ensure front line staff delivering key services receive training to recognise and respond effectively to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Develop easily accessible and culturally sensitive information to support refugees to understand and access their entitlements.

OUTCOME 4 – REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE SUPPORTED TO ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Refugees and asylum seekers have access to services and support to achieve their full potential.

ESOL

- Ensure asylum seeker needs are identified and recognised in the proposed ESOL strategy, and that the direction proposed takes into account their unique and specific needs and circumstances.
- Ensure pre-beginner levels are recognised within ESOL policy.
- Ensure appropriate resourcing for ESOL support in schools for newcomer pupils and the development of parent and child programmes to facilitate whole home learning.

Employability and Welfare

- Ensure pathways to work strategies take account of the circumstances and needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

- Maintain Executive engagement with Home Office on any future review of the right to work restrictions on asylum seekers.
- Develop support to help refugees and asylum seekers to identify equivalent qualifications or access additional or alternative training where necessary.

Effective Partnership Working

- Ensure appropriate structures are in place across departments to develop a coordinated approach to the delivery of services for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Ensure regular engagement between policy makers and organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees as well as directly with those with lived experience.

Section 4 – Impact Assessments

- 4.1 The Executive Office has conducted a rural needs impact assessment and equality screening exercise on the draft strategy.
- 4.2 This strategy's potential impacts are all intended to support equality of opportunity and access for the range of cross-cutting identities represented by the communities it is aimed at. The main aim of the strategy is to support the integration needs of asylum seekers and refugees who have arrived here and the communities in which they find themselves and is not a strategy which impacts on migration patterns or immigration policy. Immigration policy is an excepted matter and as such is exclusively set by the Home Office. This policy will have no impact on the number or scale of arrivals we experience here. As a result we have concluded that a full Equality Impact Assessment was not required.
- 4.3 These screening assessments will be revisited if necessary if there are significant changes to the strategy as a result of consultation responses.

Section 5 – Freedom of Information and Privacy Notice

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Confidentiality of Consultations

The Department intends to publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process.

Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may also be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this public consultation.

Subject to certain limited provisos, the Freedom of Information Act gives members of the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case, the Department. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation.

The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential, information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties "in confidence" if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature;
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

Further information about confidentiality of responses is available by contacting the Information Commissioner's Office (or at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk).

Privacy Notice

Data Controller Name: The Executive Office
Address: The Executive Office,
E5.19, Castle Buildings,
Stormont Estate,
Belfast
BT4 3SR
Telephone: 02890 528242
Email: DPO@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Data Protection Officer: Michael Curran
Telephone: 028 9052 0694
Email: DPO@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Why are you processing my personal information?

- TEO is seeking comments from interested parties as part of its public consultation on the draft Refugee Integration Strategy. TEO is not seeking personal data as part of the consultation but is likely to receive names and addresses/e-mail addresses as part of a consultee's response.
- Consultation is a requisite part of the development of public policy and strategy.

ONLY if you are relying on consent to process personal data.

- TEO is not relying on consent for processing the data supplied by the applicant. TEO is required to seek consultation responses as part of policy development.

What categories of personal data are you processing?

- Responses to the consultation will include names and addresses and/or e-mail addresses.

Where do you get my personal data from?

- The personal data will originate from the person responding to the consultation.

Do you share my personal data with anyone else?

- We will not share your personal data with other organisations.

Do you transfer my personal data to other countries?

- No.

How long do you keep my personal data?

- The Department will ensure that personal data is kept no longer than necessary. It manages records effectively from when they are created, including how they are stored and used, through to their destruction or archiving. The disposal of records is determined by the Department's retention and disposal of records schedule, which was approved by the NI Assembly.

(If you use automated decision making or profiling) How do you use my personal data to make decisions about me?

- TEO will not use automated processing for responses to this consultation.

What rights do I have?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being [processed, and access to your personal data](#)
- You are entitled to have personal data [rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete](#)
- You have a right to have personal data erased and to prevent processing, [in specific circumstances](#)
- You have the right to ‘block’ or suppress processing of personal data, [in specific circumstances](#)
- You have the right to data portability, [in specific circumstances](#)
- You have the right to object to the processing, in specific circumstances
- You have rights in relation to [automated decision making and profiling](#)

How do I complain if I am not happy?

- If you are unhappy with any aspect of this privacy notice, or how your personal information is being processed, please contact the Department’s Data Protection Officer at the address above.

If you are still not happy, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO):

Information Commissioner’s Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>