



## Position Statement:

# The need for psychosocial care and support for refugees and asylum seekers

## Overview

- **Poverty, destitution and worklessness are all detrimental to mental health; the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers is particularly vulnerable. The opportunity to access a range of interventions with psychologists and partner organisations is important.** Newly arrived asylum seekers deal with a range of issues which include uncertainty and concerns about being refused asylum and removed from the country, worries about family members at home and issues relating to adapting to a different culture and language. The experiences of homelessness, poverty, negotiating the asylum system, ensuring basic necessities such as accommodation, meals and health care can be extremely difficult. Living with this uncertainty and knowing there is a risk of being removed is likely to be detrimental to psychological wellbeing, often made worse by the lack of familial or community support. The government's dispersal policy, (Section 95 support of the Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999) whereby asylum seekers may be required to move to a different area away from developing community supports is an additional challenge.
- **Early identification of psychological distress and trauma, and effective care is essential in ensuring individuals receive the care they need and deserve.** In the UK there were 30,603 applications for asylum in 2016, (Refugee Council, 2017) of these 3175 were from unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Whilst the Home Office, the Refugee Council, the British Red Cross and others are organised to provide for the material needs of recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers the Society points out that many will have psychological needs and some will have multiple and complex psychological needs.

**The Society calls upon the Home Office, UK Border Agency, Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Social Care professionals to provide a route to:**

## Assessment

- Prompt, holistic assessment of their overall wellbeing and medical, psychological, welfare and educational needs by an expert multidisciplinary team, including psychologists, drawn from the NHS, Social Services and Local Authorities.
- Psychological assessments of the impact of traumatic experiences precipitating and during their flight including loss of home, family, community, employment and status and their vulnerability including risk of being subject to violence, abuse, exploitation or further harm. Such assessments should be age, gender, culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Multidisciplinary assessments in cases where the ages of minors is disputed in the legal asylum determination process. No single discipline has the expertise to provide a definitive or even a best approach to age determination and any such assessment requires repetition to provide an approximate age.
- Psychological assessments must take into account socio-economic and other context factors which impact on the wellbeing, development and learning of children and young

persons. The use of such assessments enables an informed and prompt multidisciplinary response to ensure families, individuals and minors are able to access: health and social care services; places in schools and colleges; and where necessary placement in culturally-appropriate, safe foster care.

## Service delivery

- Support for refugees and asylum seekers to facilitate their integration into life in the UK. For example, registering with a local GP, help with applying for social security entitlement, education and housing needs.
- Training for teachers, foster carers and staff in residential settings, in recognising and responding to the specific emotional needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Training for health service commissioners and local authorities in the specific additional needs of refugees and asylum seekers to ensure satisfactory systems are in place to allow prompt access to social, health and educational systems to promote wellbeing and social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees.