

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of migrants in vulnerable circumstances

Guidance to support integrated mental health and wellbeing provision at Place across the North East and Yorkshire and Humber

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1. Introduction

This document is aimed at any organisation working at Place to support the mental health and wellbeing of migrants in vulnerable circumstances. It was originally developed by a task and finish group under the North East and Yorkshire Migrant Health Network (NEYH) in 2024 and has since been updated. The task and finish group had representation from stakeholders from integrated care boards (ICBs), Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (part of the Department of Health and Social Care), NHS England (NHSE), local authority (LA) and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE). It was established to facilitate improvements in meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of migrants in vulnerable circumstances. This relates to promoting good mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental health issues occurring as well as interventions for those requiring more specialist support for their mental health.

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2. Why develop this guidance?

People belonging to inclusion health groups, tend to have very poor health outcomes, often much worse than the general population. They have significantly ^(1, 2, 3) worse health, quality of life and live shorter lives than the general population and are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, live in over-crowded conditions, and live and meet socially with other at-risk groups. More specifically, some migrants may be at increased risk of mental health problems because of their experiences prior to, during, or after migration to the UK. Risk factors do not only relate to their country of origin but also their journey to the UK and even once here. There is also the issue of stigma around mental health in some cultures and a lack of understanding amongst professionals of their needs with few dedicated pathways to support them.

Many migrants living in the UK arrive on a work or student visa, have good social connections and good health and wellbeing. However, there are more vulnerable migrants who come to the UK through various routes which can have a significant impact on their mental health. Some may arrive on small boats to seek asylum, and some will arrive in a more planned way under the various government funded schemes. Data on many of these schemes for the NEYH can be found here. Some people arrive having fled war and conflict or faced persecution because of their sexuality or beliefs, they often do not know anyone, may not speak English and

spend several months accommodated in shared housing or a hotel with little money to spend on activities or travel to visit new places.

It is important that organisations work collaboratively to not only ensure access to specialist mental health support but also to ensure refugees and asylum seekers are able to access safe spaces to socialise, learn new skills and build resilience.

3. Things to consider in supporting migrants' mental health and wellbeing

3.1 Local authority public health (mental health and/or inclusion health lead), migration lead and the ICB (mental health and/or inclusion health lead) can work together to map existing mental health and wellbeing services and how **available and accessible** they are to refugees and asylum seekers against the [WHO pyramid framework of optimal mix of services](#) (**figure 1**). This would need to be informed by people with lived experience. NB: Places may wish to do separate ones for adults and children.

This could not only capture commissioned mental health support but also the wellbeing activities that are **available, accessible and effective** to migrants in vulnerable circumstances. **Figure 1** has been adapted to include service examples and how each tier is commissioned.

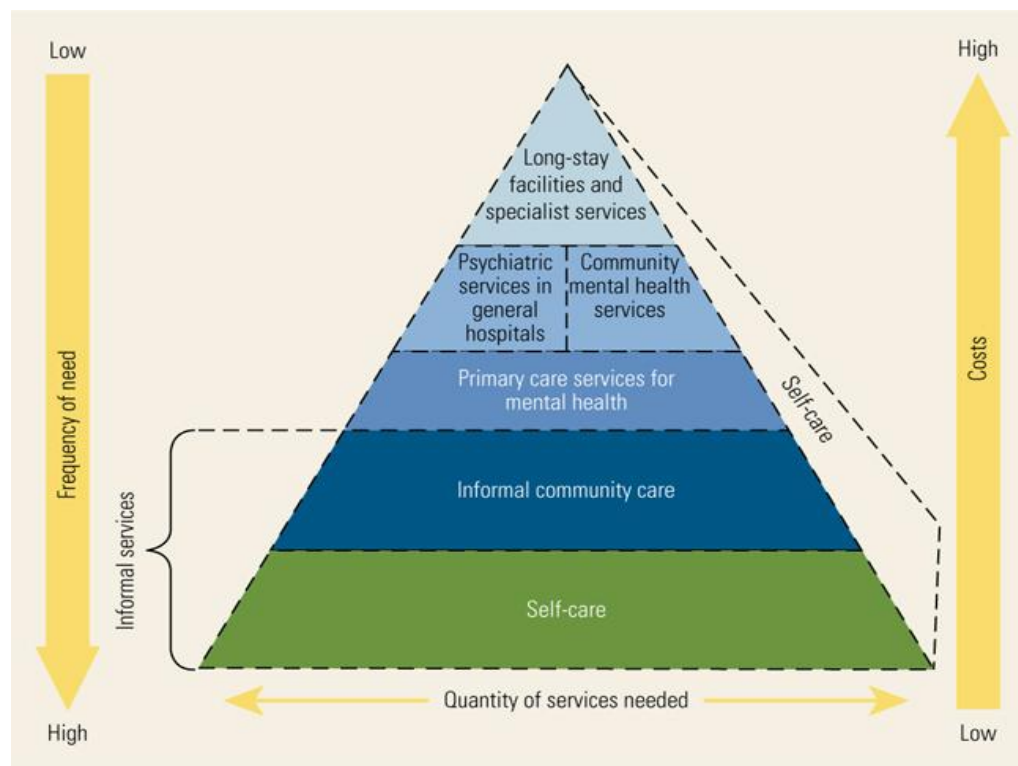
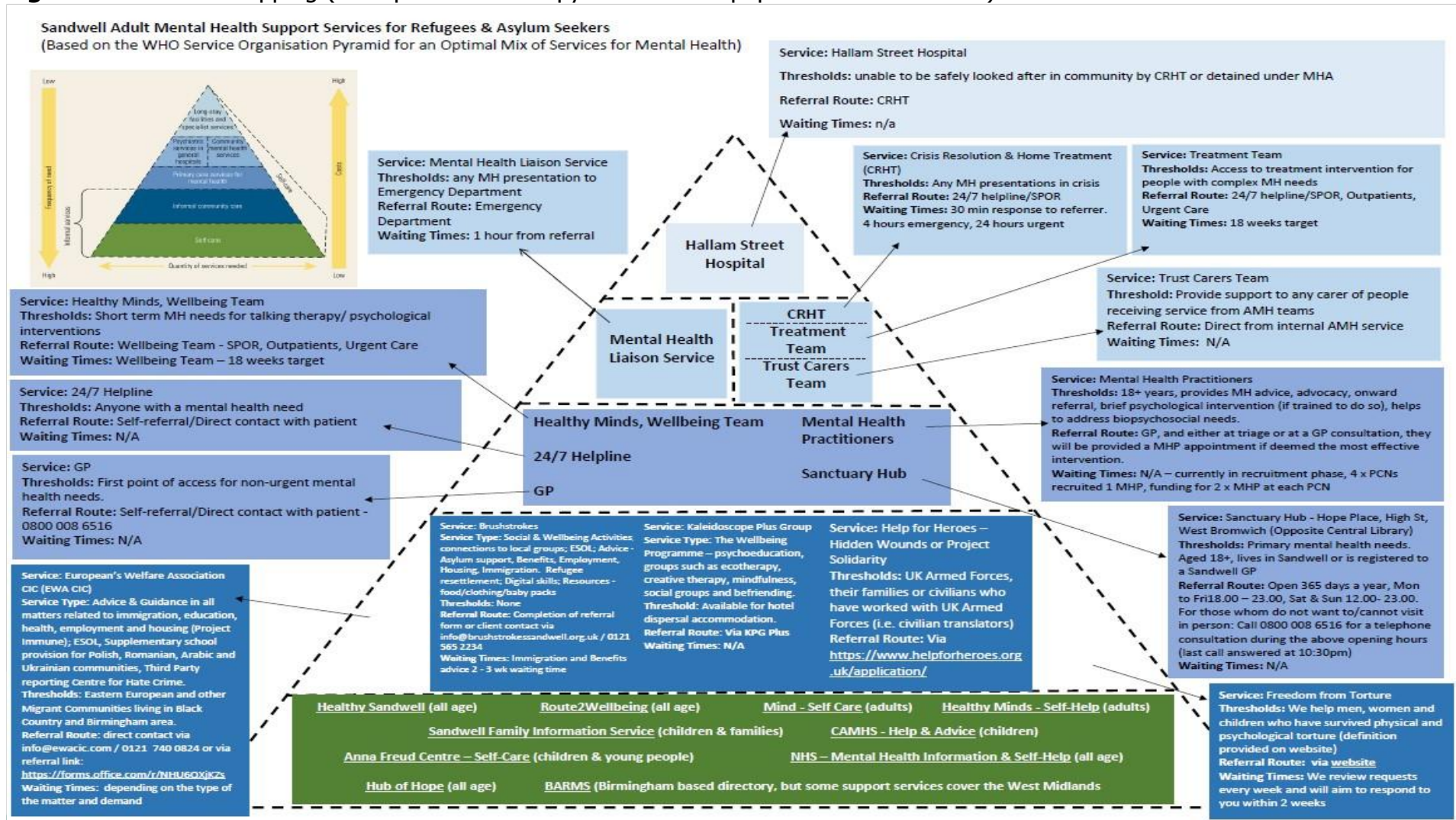


Figure 1: WHO pyramid framework of optimal mix of services

Figure 2: Sandwell mapping (example of how the pyramid can be populated at Place level)



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3.2 Use the mapping as a resource locally to discuss with stakeholders¹ and identify any gaps as well as examples of good practice.

Consider the following questions:

Commissioned mental health services

- Are refugees and asylum seekers using the service and are their outcomes comparable to non-refugee clients? Places may want to consider introducing outcome data to facilitate this if not already in place.
- How many referrals are received for refugees / asylum seekers and how many are accepted / declined?
- Are refugees and asylum seekers consulted on the model of service in place?
- Is the service model accessible – can people travel to it without funds? Are materials translated and available at venues such as community/religious settings, GP practices etc? Is professional interpretation support offered at the service where the interpreter is pre briefed and ideally the same during appointments?
- Are there clear pathways for asylum seekers and refugees that take account of the fact that they may not live in an area for long?
- Are referral routes to and from other services clear?
- Are the needs of children, young people and adults being catered for?
- Are staff trained in cultural competency and the needs of refugees and asylum seekers? This could include being informed about ill treatment and understanding how to interact with the Home Office when there are safeguarding concerns or risks.
- Consider an identified 'champion' in the service who is well informed about the needs of specific populations such as asylum seekers and refugees.

Primary care

- Are primary care practices signed up to [Safe Surgeries - Doctors of the World](#) which provides training and support for all staff around meeting the needs of migrants?
- Are staff trained in cultural competency and the needs of refugees and asylum seekers? This could include being informed about ill treatment and understanding how to interact with the Home Office when there are safeguarding concerns or risks.
- Is there an identified 'champion' in the service who is well informed about the needs of specific populations such as asylum seekers and refugees?
- Are materials available in translated versions and is interpretation support offered?
- Are there clear pathways for asylum seekers and refugees to access mental health support?
- Is social prescribing actively promoted to asylum seekers and refugees and are they making use of it?

¹ Stakeholders should include local VCSE services (both generic and ones with a refugee focus), mental health providers, generic health providers such as primary care, people with lived experience and others as appropriate.

Broader wellbeing support

- Are refugees and asylum seekers able to access local leisure facilities free of charge or at a reduced cost?
- Is there provision for refugees and asylum seekers to access affordable transport?
- Is there accessible information which details local provision available to new refugees and asylum seekers as well as other resources to support their mental wellbeing?
- Is there access to free [ESOL classes](#)?
- Can asylum seekers and refugees engage in meaningful activities that are culturally appropriate, e.g. community kitchens, walking clubs, park runs, sport clubs etc where there are opportunities to meet others?
- Are there opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to volunteer?

Local forums, networks and strategies

- Are the needs of refugees and asylum seekers addressed in existing health-related networks and forums?
- Do local needs assessments and strategies reference refugees and asylum seekers, e.g., ICB plan, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, suicide prevention plan etc?
- Is there a need to establish a place-based forum to look specifically at the broader health and wellbeing needs of refugees and asylum seekers as well as other inclusion health groups?
- Is the mental health support commissioned by the local Strategic Migration Partnership integrated into the local system?

Various

- Do local systems seek the views of refugees and asylum seekers on what would help their wellbeing?
- Are there opportunities for people to offer peer support to individuals and communities through community champion and other schemes?
- How do services connect, especially for people who are moved frequently. Are referral routes between services clear is there a pathway for when a person moves to another area?

4. Practice examples to support the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees

Yorkshire & Humber

- **City of Sanctuary groups** are in place across Yorkshire and Humber and the North East. They are locally organised refugee support and solidarity groups who work collaboratively to make sure their 'Place' is welcoming to those seeking sanctuary. They often provide different wellbeing activities, for example **Wakefield District City of Sanctuary** provide a range of **wellbeing support** to those seeking sanctuary. Likewise, **Harrogate District City of Sanctuary** offer friendship and support as well as social activities and **Sheffield City of Sanctuary** collaborate with various organisations to provide support around integration.
- **The Children and Families Wellbeing Project** provides specialist refugee mental health support to children and families to address the complex trauma faced by some that can impact on their family life, school attendance or behaviour and ability to integrate. A collaboration between Migration Yorkshire, **Refugee Council** and **Solace** the service is for those arriving in Yorkshire and Humber under UK resettlement schemes.
- **Solace** Is a specialist therapeutic organisation providing support exclusively to refugees and asylum seekers throughout Yorkshire and Humber. They have a number of video resources in multiple languages available on their website, and they also provide training and support to both mental health and refugee sector organisations.

West Yorkshire

- **Bevan** offers primary care support to refugees and asylum seekers and provides a multi-disciplinary service which includes a nurse, occupational therapist and a peer led wellbeing service.
- **The Whitehouse Centre**, Huddersfield is a specialist G.P. practice working with asylum and homelessness providing support and signposting.
- **Meeting Point Leeds** provides support and advocacy and hot meals, food packages, English classes.

- **Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network** runs a variety of activities including English at Home support, hosting, welcome and connect activities to support in accessing education and leisure opportunities.
- **PAFRAS – Positive Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers** provides support and advice including food parcels, case work and mental health support for individuals seeking asylum.
- **St Augustine’s, Calderdale** offer activities to support the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers such as gardening, sports and exercise sessions and art and music workshops.
- **Halifax Opportunities Trust** facilitate ESOL and integration classes for people on the UK Resettlement Scheme and Afghan schemes, they also have a community kitchen and garden.
- **Bradford African Community** work with African refugees to support them to integrate into the community of Bradford.
- **The Faith Centre**, Bradford provides support to asylum seekers and refugees and anyone with no recourse to public funds through groups, a clothes bank, community dinners and classes.
- **Humanity First** empowers people from the communities throughout Wakefield to enable them to engage with mainstream health and wellbeing services.
- **The Art House** delivers a wide range of projects to connect with the community including re-emerge art & health, which offers a range of therapeutic creative opportunities; studio of sanctuary.
- **Leeds Five Ways to Wellbeing Support:** Based on local mapping against the **five steps to wellbeing** model, the Migration Team at Leeds City Council have developed a directory of provision available to asylum seekers. Under each step (Connect, be active, keep learning, give and take notice), the guide outlines a range of services, activities and resources available in Leeds which relate to the step to wellbeing and are accessible for any Leeds resident including people who are seeking asylum.



Shareable Version -
Toolkit - Leeds Service

North Yorkshire and Humber

- **York and Selby Talking Therapies** offer narrative exposure therapy for refugees and asylum seekers. This is offered in addition to their usual interventions and for more complex presentations.
- **Refugee Action York** provides wellbeing activities for refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Crosby ONE**, North Lincolnshire provides structured, teacher-led ESOL classes. These are classroom based but also incorporates other skills and activities such as cooking and community orientation.
- **Hull Council** provide details about a network of organisations across the city providing support to refugees and asylum seekers: **Voluntary organisations | Hull**. Other provision is below.
- **Solidarity Hull** is a refugee and migrant led organisation that runs different activities for such as family support and food justice programmes.
- **Tigers Trust and Hull Culture and Leisure – Active Through Football project** aims to deliver engagement opportunities to all Hull and East Riding contingency accommodation sites, with a focus on football and physical fitness. Weekly football sessions are ongoing on-site and off-site.

South Yorkshire

- **Sheffield COMAC** run a scheme whereby bikes are provided to asylum seekers so that they can get around. They also help those using them keep the bikes on the road and in good condition.
- **Sheffield's New Beginnings Project** provides refugees and asylum seekers with information, advice and guidance to help them access opportunities in education and training, volunteering, employment and participation in social activities.
- **Doncaster Mind's Settle Project** supports the mental health of refugees in Doncaster by offering a safe space in which to practice spoken English, learn about local culture, share and teach homeland culture, participate in peer support and wellbeing activities, and access one to one mental health support when people are ready.

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- **SPRING Project – Voluntary Action Sheffield** is a partnership of 5 organisations providing joined up support for people when they get refugee status.
- **Feels Like Home**, Barnsley is a cultural sharing group for people from all over the world - asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, students and settled communities.

North East

- **The Regional Refugee Forum North East (RRFNE)** is a membership organisation created in 2003 by and for community organisations led by refugees and asylum seekers living in the North East of England. RRFNE empowers refugees and asylum seekers to take action to support their communities. More information about the support offered is [here](#).

Members are encouraged to develop their collective voice and use it to influence decision makers so as to promote equality and integration for all refugees and asylum seekers living in the region.

- **The Comfrey Project** offers activities and learning through contact with nature, other people and the local community to support refugees and asylum seekers with their mental health and wellbeing.
- **The Solace Project (Tyneside & Northumberland MIND)** and **Rainbow Home** offer specialist support to asylum seekers who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Action Foundation** provides support to adult asylum seekers living in Newcastle upon Tyne, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Northumberland, and County Durham. The project offers practical, non-clinical casework alongside opportunities for social connection and community integration. The service also works in partnership with specialist providers to offer wellbeing workshops and one-to-one therapeutic support within the drop-in setting.
- **Somewhere Else** (website is currently in development) provides support to adult asylum seekers living in Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Darlington, and Hartlepool. The project aims to provide a safe, structured, and welcoming environment where asylum seekers can stabilise their mental health, process difficult experiences, and develop tools to support

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emotional regulation, resilience, and recovery. Through a combination of one-to-one therapy, group based therapeutic interventions, psychoeducation, and creative and practical activities, participants are supported to build confidence, strengthen coping mechanisms, and reduce isolation.

- **Mindful Therapies** provides mindfulness activities for migrants. Sessions include mindful movement, mindful art, and mindful space. The sessions take place in person or online.

5. Resources

For professionals

- **Solace provides three-free e-learning courses**: One is for everyone focussing on understanding refugee and asylum seeker mental health. The second is more specialist looking at effective therapeutic support and the third is a quick access topic-based library with role specific information (including GPs and Talking Therapy providers) and links to resources on specific issues.
- **Solace** also provides other **more bespoke training** [here](#) and host [resources and information](#) for refugees to help manage stress and understand what they might be experiencing.
- **City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource Pack** provides information about the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers which can impact on their mental health and wellbeing and guidance for professionals on how to support them.
- The **Mental health of asylum seekers and refugees, 2025 report** provides an analysis of the current landscape as of April 2025, offering evidence-based recommendations to ensure that the mental health needs of asylum seekers are adequately addressed.
- **DHSC guidance** on improving the mental health of babies, children and young people. This framework explicitly references refugees and asylum seekers and can be used by stakeholders to guide promotion and prevention activities. It details modifiable factors where there is scope to intervene to create the conditions that help keep children and young people mentally well.

For asylum seekers and refugees

- **'Looking after your health' resource** is part of North East Migration Partnership's Welcome and Induction programme for newly arrived Refugee and Asylum Seekers, made in partnership with Regional Refugee Forum North East. The information explains how and when to access healthcare from the NHS and guidance on self-care and healthy living. Included are e-learning, leaflets and videos which are translated into the top ten languages at the time of production.
- **Royal College of Psychiatrists translated mental health information**
- **Six Ways to improve your wellbeing** translated materials (Doctors of the World)
- **The Refugee Council's Moments for Mindfulness** self help guide offers mindfulness practices to aid in decreasing stress and promoting a positive attitude. The guide can be used individually or in group sessions.