

# Home Office

## **Syria Briefing**

A summary of findings from refugee  
resettlement programmes

Home Office Science: Migration and Border Analysis

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# Executive summary

Where does the UK Syrian diaspora live, how large is it, and what is its make-up?

- **The Syrian diaspora in the UK is small compared to many other diasporas**, but it is growing. In 2013 the UK had the fourth largest Syrian population in Europe: a quarter of the size of Germany's and just over a third of the size of Sweden's Syrian diasporas, and also smaller than that of France.
- **The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that, in 2014, the size of the UK's Syrian-born population was 14,000.** If defined by Syrian nationality, the Syrian population is slightly lower (est. 12,000).
- **Syrians appear for more likely to reside in England** (and to some extent Wales) than Scotland and NI. ONS data indicates that around 7,000 of the estimated 12,000 Syrian-born residing in England live in London.
- Annual Population Survey data indicates that the **Syrian population in the UK is young, and that males outnumber females.**

What do we know about the impact of existing resettlement schemes?

- Information has primarily been drawn from the Gateway Protection Programme, which has resettled refugees from a variety of countries to a number of UK locations.
- **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is critical to integration.** Refugees' English improved over time: a 2012 Gateway evaluation indicated that at six months. Men were far more likely than women to progress: a previous evaluation indicated that 18 months after arrival 72% of women had "very limited" English, compared to just 26% of men. Childcare was consistently a major barrier to attending classes and progressing.
- **Gateway ESOL provision is sufficient in many areas to meet demand.** Many other countries provide more language training than the UK: for example, in Denmark the resettlement programme offers three years of Danish language training post-arrival.
- **Gateway refugees have had poor employment outcomes:** a 2014 evaluation found that only 5 out of 75 refugees were in paid employment 18 months after arrival: this has implications for the extent to which resettled refugees will need to be supported after a year.
- **ESOL is not the only barrier to employment:** work experience, qualifications or recognition of qualifications, IT skills and Jobcentre Plus practices all appeared to be barriers to employment. For those who did find employment, it was often not

commensurate with their skills. There may be scope to improve outcomes by proactively engaging employers: 51% (103 of 201) of businesses surveyed in Gateway areas said they would consider providing Gateway refugees with a work placement.

- **Integration programmes should consider mental health:** Resettled refugees may have experienced severe trauma and are at risk of developing mental health issues. Mental health issues can impede language acquisition and employment. It is crucial that refugees are screened for mental health difficulties on arrival and offered appropriate provision. Those interacting with resettled refugees, such as foster parents and teachers, should have an understanding of the support needs of refugees with mental health issues.
- **Integration was affected by age, life history and previous levels of education:** children appeared to be integrating more readily than adults. The 2014 evaluation indicated that ESOL attainment related to education levels: for example, that 22% (4 of 18) of those with no previous formal education spoke English “well”, compared to 65% (11 of 17) of those with further education. 98% of refugees from urban areas felt they were coping with life in the UK, compared to 83% from rural areas.
- **It is difficult to establish differences between different nationalities and how well they integrate** because of the characteristics of successive Gateway intakes. For example, Iraqis have previously been found to need less help from caseworkers, but historically many of the Gateway Iraqi intakes have been former interpreters.

## What do we know about where to resettle refugees?

- **Refugees find it harder to integrate in deprived areas.** Resettling refugees in areas of high unemployment means refugees enter an extremely competitive labour market. Settling refugees in prosperous areas is not always the answer – many have high graduate populations and hence competitive low-skilled labour markets. High-skilled opportunities may not be accessible due to difficulties in converting foreign qualifications.
- **Community tensions may be exacerbated in areas with a lack of jobs and social housing.** For instance, an Open Society Foundation report on the white working class found that in Higher Blackley, an area of high deprivation in Manchester, job insecurity, disconnection to institutions and cultural anxieties were combining to produce a negative attitude towards immigrants.

## Suggestions arising from the Gateway Resettlement Evaluation

- **Increase the amount of ESOL training clients receive, and ensure everyone is able to access free provision (including providing childcare):** Delivery staff and many refugees across all three Gateway regions felt that this was the most important way to improve

the programme and speed up the progress towards self-sufficiency. However, this has clear cost implications. Indeed, in the past, ESOL provision was a formal Gateway programme requirement, which has been removed because of budget restrictions.

- **Assessing individuals' ESOL needs and ensuring that provision is available at the right skill level**, focusing on appropriate content (everyday needs, rather than simply finding a job) and accessible immediately on arrival or even prior to resettlement.
- **Specialised and tailored employment support** so that refugees can access individualised help with CV writing, job application, qualification recognition and identifying job opportunities, e.g. through providing an employment advisor or Jobcentre recognized job club.
- **Engaging potential employers:** Raising understanding of refugees; situations as well as their profile, in particular by ensuring that employers understand that Gateway refugees have the right to work in the UK as soon as they arrive (a fact many are not aware of): and establishing volunteering opportunities (through agreements with local charities and businesses) before clients arrive.
- **Caseworker and community support:** lowering caseloads to enable more intensive support, sharing best practice and creating drop-in "hubs" for refugees.
- **Improving outcomes for women:** addressing consistently poorer outcomes for women by providing childcare, to enable ESOL access, and supporting routes to integration other than through work – perhaps through measures to improve social connections and belonging, health and wellbeing, knowledge of rights, responsibilities and institutions, and engagement with children's schools.

## Key findings

### 1. Where does the UK Syrian diaspora live, how large is it, and what is its make-up?

The ONS (Annual Population Survey/APS) estimates that, in 2014, the size of the Syrian-born population in the UK was 14,000 (CI +/- 5,000), and the size of the population holding Syrian nationality as 12,000 (CI +/- 5,000)<sup>1</sup>. Of those who hold Syrian nationality, the ONS estimates that around 10,000 (CI +/- 4,000) were born in Syria.

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<sup>1</sup> Syrian nationals are likely to be Syrian born, though nationality can also pass on to children of Syrians born in other countries and those who are Syrian born may, for instance, have given up Syrian nationality.

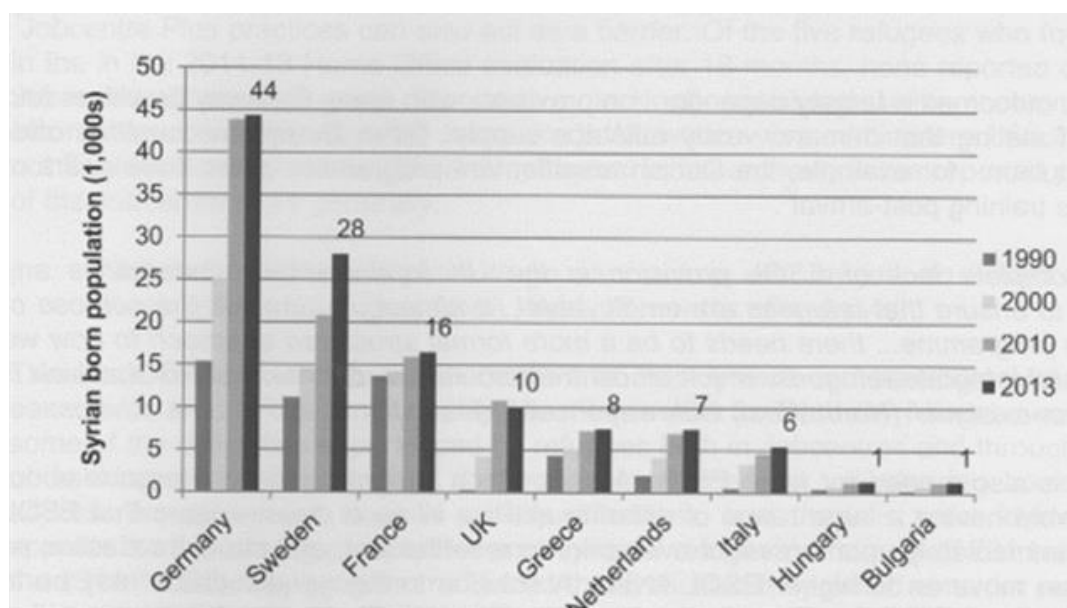
Sample sizes for the APS are too small to enable confident estimates of the Syrian population at both local authority and regional level. However, ONS data indicates that Syrians do not resettle in Scotland or Northern Ireland – most reside in England (with a majority in London) and to some extent Wales. Of the 14,000 estimate for Syrian-born residents in the UK, the ONS estimates that around 12,000 (CI +/- 5,000) live in England, and 2,000 (CI +/- 1,000) in Wales. Around 7,000 are estimated to live in London (CI +/- 4,000).

The ONS estimates that Syrian male nationals in the UK outnumber females: of the 12,000 Syrian nationals estimated to reside in the UK it is estimated that 7,000 are male (CI +/- 4,000) and 5,000 are female (CI +/- 3,000). APS data indicates that the Syrian population in the UK is very young, with a large proportion aged under 16.

There is limited demographic data on the Syrian diaspora. However, the 216 refugees resettled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme are predominantly Sunni Muslim (90%)<sup>2</sup>. This proportion is slightly higher than those in Syria where, though 87% are Muslim only 74% are Sunni.

## 2. How long has there been a Syrian diaspora in the UK and how does this compare to other countries?

Figure 1 – Syrian Diaspora population in selected EU countries (1990-2013)<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Norfolk County Council Briefing Paper: [http://norfoldcan.org.uk/media/docs/Briefing\\_note\\_-\\_Syrian\\_Relocation\\_Scheme.pdf](http://norfoldcan.org.uk/media/docs/Briefing_note_-_Syrian_Relocation_Scheme.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Note that for purposes of European comparability, UK figures in the graph may be from different data sets than the ONS and APS data

The UK's Syrian diaspora has grown substantially since 1990 (from 252 in 1990 to 10,035 in 2013). As shown in Figure 1, the UK had the fourth largest Syrian diaspora in the EU in 2013. Since 1990 the Syrian diaspora has continued to grow in most EU countries with large Syrian populations. The main exception is the UK where, after factoring in the potentially large confidence interval, numbers were relatively flat between 2010 and 2013 from (10,815 in 2010 and 10,035 in 2013). Considering the large difference in Syrian asylum grants between the UK and the Netherlands (7,580 compared to 1,560 in 2014) it is possible that the Netherlands now has a larger Syrian population than the UK.

### 3. What do we know about the impact of existing resettlement schemes and what works well?

The Gateway Protection Programme is the most substantial resettlement programme the UK currently runs. It resettles refugees identified as highly vulnerable, providing them with housing and dedicated caseworker support for 12 months after arrival. Since 2008/2009 the number of refugees resettled has risen from 500 to 750. Migration and Border Analysis, as well as academic institutions such as the University of West Scotland, have conducted evaluations of the Gateway Programme. Below, we have synthesized the evidence from these evaluations listing the main areas and sites of impact, and supplemented this with information for the recent Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation scheme, which has resettled around 200 refugees thus far.

#### 3.1 ESOL is critical to integration

English language skills are an important outcome in themselves, but also as a key to coping with everyday life, finding employment or volunteering and facilitating refugees' feelings of belonging to their local area. Overall, Gateway refugees' language ability showed improvement over time (e.g. in the 2007-2010 Home Office evaluation<sup>4</sup> 34% (of 146) said they could speak English fairly well/fluent 6 months after arrival, rising to 49% of 89 after 18 months). However, a pronounced gender divide in English language acquisition is apparent: in the 2011-2013 Home Office report only 26% of men spoke very limited English after 18 months, compared to 72% of women. Childcare was consistently a major barrier towards women attending classes and progressing.

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<sup>4</sup> An Evaluation of the Gateway Protection Programme: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/eval-gateway-protection-programme.pdf>

Improving ESOL outcomes is largely dependent on provision, with many Gateway providers and Job Centre staff stating that demand vastly outstrips supply. Other European countries offer more language tuition: for example, the Danish resettlement programme offers three years of Danish language training post-arrival<sup>5</sup>.

*“... the complete lack of ESOL provision in the UK fundamentally undermines any attempts to ensure that refugees are employable... it almost undermines the purpose of doing the programme... there needs to be a more formal structured approach to how we resettle and integrate refugees, which all centres around the provision of ESOL which is almost non-existent.” (North West, Gateway Provider)*

However, there is also a need for more ESOL classes which integrate practical lessons about everyday life, avoid having a large range of differing abilities in each class, ensure that ESOL provision starts immediately upon arrival or even prior to resettlement, and structure classes so that refugees can move on to higher ESOL levels. A solution to the gender divide may be to replicate projects funded by the European Integration Fund (EIF). Many of these provided women, in particular mothers and pregnant women, ESOL provision alongside information around pregnancy, nursery courses and childcare.

Pre-departure orientation is an important part of accelerating the ESOL learning process. Pre-departure training can be particularly effective when delivery staff are from the same ethnic background as the beneficiaries. An EIF project, teaching ESOL to women in Pakistan who planned to join their spouses, argued that this meant they better understood the needs and mindset of beneficiaries, positively influencing the success of the project.

### 3.2 Employment outcomes are poor

Employment can provide a stable source of income and is crucial to self-sufficiency. However, in the 2011-2013 Home Office evaluation<sup>6</sup> only 5 out of 75 refugees had achieved paid employment after 18 months. Similarly, in the 2007-2010 Home Office evaluation only 3 of 89 refugees had experienced paid work in the UK after 18 months (all three being skilled Iraqi men). This means that after a year, once the Government funding has finished, refugees are likely to need local authority support in a range of areas such as housing. Norfolk County Council is one local authority that has raised concerns over the potential financial risk involved in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Comparative study on the best practices for integration of resettle refugees in EU member states, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2013.*

<sup>6</sup> *Evaluation of the EU Gateway Protection Programme 2011-13: Unpublished*

<sup>7</sup> *Norfolk County Council Briefing Paper: [http://norfoldcan.org.uk/media/docs/Briefing\\_note\\_-\\_Syrian\\_Relocation\\_Scheme.pdf](http://norfoldcan.org.uk/media/docs/Briefing_note_-_Syrian_Relocation_Scheme.pdf)*

Moreover, even once refugees gained employment this was often in menial jobs, or jobs for which they were overqualified (for instance, in the 2007-2010 Home Office evaluation all three who had found employment after 18 months reported that their work was not commensurate with their skills). This is likely to result, over time, in negative effects both for refugees, who may become deskilled, and the UK economy which fails to take advantage of the skills in its workforce.

Alongside inadequate English language skills, barriers to appropriate employment include a lack of relevant work experience, qualifications and IT skills – particularly crucial as applications are often online, with IT proficiency a requirement for many jobs.

Jobcentre Plus practices can also act as a barrier. Of the five refugees who found employment in the 2011-13 Home Office evaluation after 18 months, none reported doing so through Jobcentre Plus. Refugees reported a lack of translated written communications and inconsistencies in the way that Jobseeker's Allowance was administered (including whether or not English classes counted towards refugees' job searches). Some reported poor experiences of the Jobcentre more generally:

*“Jobcentre not a nice place to go so, I put up with my job, so I don't have to go back there.”* (Female refugee, North West, 18 months after arrival)

There are several ways in which barriers to employment can be addressed. Guidelines and easements around the conditionality attached to JSA for Gateway refugees could help mitigate some of the difficulties experienced by refugees both in Jobcentres and throughout the process of seeking work. Opportunities for work experience and volunteering could help refugees address issues related to skills and qualifications, and there is some evidence to suggest appetite for this among prospective employers of refugees. A survey of 201 businesses local to the 2011-13 Gateway programme<sup>8</sup> found that 51% said they would consider providing Gateway refugees with a work placement, 46% a volunteer placement, and 46% employment mentoring. An operational example is seen in the Portuguese resettlement programme, which benefits from a project funded under the European Return Fund to target potential refugee employers<sup>9</sup>. Here, businesses are offered workshops for staff on resettlement issues and promoting opportunities for refugees.

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<sup>8</sup> *Migration & Border Analysis, 2013*

<sup>9</sup> *Comparative study on the best practices for integration of resettled refugees in EU member states. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2013*



These opportunities can be supported by tailored employment support, offered through an employment advisor or mentor as well as ‘work clubs’ focusing on interview practice and applications.

### 3.4 Reducing mental health issues in a population at risk

Refugees are at risk of developing emotional difficulties and Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder (PTSD). For instance, Jaranson et al. (2004) surveyed 512 Oromos (from Ethiopia) and 622 Somalis who had resettled in the US. These are both populations which the UK has also resettled in large numbers. He found that 44% of the refugees were exposed to torture, a quarter of which displayed PTSD. In a UK example, Fazel and Stein (2003) conducted a study in a school in Oxford finding that children of refugees were more likely than both ethnic minority and white children to experience issues including emotional problems and conduct disorder.

Those who interact with and support resettled refugees should have an understanding of mental health issues. For example, following interviews with 34 practitioners, national experts, parents of war-affected youth and foster parents for unaccompanied minors in Norway, a Norwegian (2015) report on asylum seeking children recommended training on the impact of war for caseworkers, foster-parents and teachers.

Poor mental health affects the ability to learn English and find a job. Susan Allander, who managed Australia’s Adult Multicultural Education Services described her country’s experiences<sup>10</sup> noting that traumas experienced by refugees affected “confidence and self-esteem as learners, their motivation to learn, and their attitudes towards the target language”.

The UK recognizes this and, prior to arrival in the UK, refugees are given counselling sessions by the International Organisation for Migration. On arrival, the UK also offers an initial counselling session which can be followed up with further sessions.

### 3.5 Refugee networks can reduce isolation

The distance between refugee housing differs depending on the resettlement area; large distances can lead to isolation. For instance, in the 2007-2010 Home Office evaluation, Iraqi women in Sheffield commented that being housed far away from friends and family made it difficult to interact with fellow refugees. In contrast, the 2004-2006 Home Office evaluation noted that in Rochdale all refugees were housed in local authority flats in one of two ethnically diverse estates. Housing arrangements should encourage refugee networks while discouraging

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<sup>10</sup> *Adult ESL Learners with Special Needs: Learning from the Australia Perspective, 1998*

ghettoization. This could be achieved by dispersing refugees across town with some clustering, as was the case in the 2004-2006 programme in Sheffield, Bolton and Hull.

Weekly gatherings or the creation of a refugee organization may also help address isolation reported by some Gateway refugees. UK Gateway providers are already helping refugees form these organisations and the 2011-2013 Home Office evaluation found that half of refugees interviewed (31-71) were aware of a local refugee community organization, with most of these (27 or 31) involved in some way with such a group. A more formalized system could facilitate the creation of further refugee organisations. For instance, the Finnish Refugee Council encourages the formation of groups as well as their participation in civil society through the “Organisation Incubator”<sup>8</sup>; this helps refugees with the logistics and communications needed to start an organization. However, care should be taken not to exclude refugees from the organization on ethnic lines. For instance, a 2006-2007 evaluation of a resettlement programme in Brighton and Hove<sup>11</sup> found that 65 Ethiopian refugees who identified as Oromo came together, to form the Brighton Oromo community. This group came out of weekly meetings between refugees organized by the Gateway provider. However, there were 14 non-Oromo Ethiopian refugees resettled in Brighton and Hove, a small number of who felt excluded because the organization focused on a different cultural group.

Support networks can be encouraged remotely. For instance, the 2007-2010 Home Office evaluation found that Iraqis living across the UK maintained strong links through email and telephone.

Facilitating refugee networks may also help maintain refugees first language and hence connections with the country of origin. The 2014 Motherwell and North Lanarkshire report<sup>12</sup> found that resettled families were concerned that their children were finding it difficult to retain aspects of their culture of origin, in particular the ability to speak their mother tongue. This threatened maintenance of connections and communications with family still in the Congo.

*“I speak to them in English and Swahili. They don’t speak Swahili much, but I would like them to speak in Swahili and French. [The] eldest child can, but the little ones can’t – but they can understand. I would like there to be classes in Swahili.” (Congolese refugee)*

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<sup>11</sup> Collyer and Guerre, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, 2007: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=-gpreport-web.pdf&site=252>

<sup>12</sup> Sim and Laughlin, University of the West of Scotland, 2014: <http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/the-Long-Term-Integration-of-Gateway-Protection-Programme-Refugees-in-Motherwell-North-Lanarkshire.pdf>

### 3.4 Impact differs based on demographic characteristics, life history and programme structure

Ability to cope differed according to demographic characteristics such as gender. Age was also important, with children integrating more readily due to involvement in the schooling system and the English language preparation provided prior to entering primary and secondary schools. Previous levels of education impacted on integration too: for instance, in the 2011-13 Home Office evaluation, ability to speak English “well” was distinctly higher among those with higher levels of education (22 per cent of those with no formal education and 65 per cent of those with Further Education). Urban versus rural background also appeared important: 98% of refugees from urban areas felt they were coping with their life in the UK as compared to 83% of those from rural areas. However, there are interrelationships between the urban/rural background and other factors (e.g. starting levels of English, educational background). Moreover, as most refugees are resettled in urban areas, those from an urban refugee camp may be able to cope with life in the UK better than those from rural refugee camps.

The ability to cope was promoted to a different degree by the delivery models of the different Gateway providers. For instance, the 2011-13 evaluation found that Bradford offered the most extensive ESOL provision and recorded faster English language progress between 6 and 12 months compared to the other providers.

## 4. Where should we resettle Syrian refugees?

In choosing an area for resettlement several factors need to be balanced against each other; these include employment, housing availability and quality, and local refugee networks. Overall, areas with low unemployment, social housing and an existing migrant population are most suitable.

### 4.1 Refugees find it harder to integrate in deprived areas

In the 2011-2013 Home Office evaluation, the lack of jobs in the local area was identified as a key barrier to finding employment for 20% of those looking for (out of 71). Resettling refugees in areas of high unemployment means refugees enter an extremely competitive labour market, competing with a native labour force that may be more familiar with UK employer requirements and with greater English language skills.

Moreover, community tensions may be exacerbated in areas with a lack of jobs and social housing. For instance, an Open Society Foundation report on the white working class found that in Higher Blackley, an area of high deprivation in Manchester, job insecurity,

disconnection to institutions and cultural anxieties were combining to produce a negative attitude towards immigrants.

*“If there was work, and there was houses, and there was everything what’s needed. I wouldn’t have a problem with [immigration]. The problem is that there’s too much looking for too little, and you’re bound to get trouble when that happens.”<sup>13</sup> (73-year-old male in Higher Blackley)*

Even within the Higher Blackley ward, there are pockets of more extreme deprivation. Therefore, when considering resettlement, deprivation and social cohesion, decisions should consider very local factors.

## 4.2 Improving refugee employment prospects isn’t simply about resettling refugees in prosperous areas

Simply resettling refugees in areas of high employment is not sufficient. For instance, refugees resettled in Brighton and Hove between 2006 and 2007, which at that time had low unemployment levels, still struggled to find work. Research by the local council found that the low-skilled labour market was particularly competitive with competition from graduates from the city’s two universities. In contrast, high-skilled labour occupations were overrepresented but largely inaccessible to refugees who had difficulty having their qualifications recognised.

Those managing resettlement should ensure that educated refugees have their qualifications converted and are supported in finding high skilled employment. Recommendations from a US Gateway resettlement provider that funding be set aside for converting and recertifying qualifications have applicability in a UK context. However, such provision needs to be well-targeted; for instance, a European Integration Fund project in Nottingham offered qualification conversion to recent Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrant women and found no demand from participants.

## 4.3 Resettlement areas with social housing will help refugees integrate better

Similarly, the 2014 Motherwell and North Lanarkshire evaluation noted that while in North Lanarkshire all refugees were given social housing, in Brighton, Norwich, Rochdale and County Monaghan all refugees were in the private rented sector, while in Sheffield and Bolton

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<sup>13</sup> Europe’s White Working Class Communities: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/white-working-class-communities-manchester-20140616.pdf>

refugees were given a mix of social housing and private rented housing. A 2007 study of housing pathways for different migrants by Sheffield Hallam University interviewed 39 immigrants. They found that the 10 immigrants resettled through the Gateway programme particularly valued the security of tenure provided by social housing as it helped them integrate into the local community.

#### 4.4 The physical qualities of housing can affect mental health

The physical space is important for refugee mental health. For instance, a former prisoner and torture survivor might risk re-traumatization if they are placed in accommodation with bars on the windows. A 2006 study in Scotland<sup>14</sup> conducted three focus groups with asylum seekers and refugees finding that “by far, high rise flats were the most unpopular type of accommodation”. This was because these buildings did not always exist in the country of origin and refugees felt anxious about the stability of the building.

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<sup>14</sup> *Housing Support Services to Refugees: a Service Specification, 2006:* <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/128135/0030620.pdf>